

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE TO THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

August 2001

*Produced with the support of the Matra Programme of the  
Dutch Foreign Ministry and UNHCR*

**ECRE**







# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE TO THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

## Preface to the Guide

This Guide is a complement to the Good Practice Guide on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union, produced in October 1999 by the ECRE Task Force on Integration, a partnership of seven refugee assisting organisations working under the auspices of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE).

Like the Good Practice Guide on Integration in the EU, this Guide aims at identifying and promoting methods, practices and projects which can carry out "the establishment of a mutual and responsible relationship between refugees and their communities, civil society and host states"<sup>1</sup> in Central and Eastern European countries.

The chosen projects have been run by NGOs which operate in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and provide social, legal and/or psychological assistance for asylum seekers and refugees. Many organisations also offer access to the healthcare system, education, housing and job market of the host country. Refugee employees or volunteers are involved with many of the projects.

The methodology used by ECRE in gathering information and identifying the projects has followed broadly similar lines to the Good Practice Guide on Integration in the EU: initially making first contacts with organisations working in the field; then, sending them a questionnaire. This questionnaire asked each organisation to describe a project or projects which they considered to be particularly successful, even if only on a small scale. Issues such as the number and type of beneficiaries, duration of the project, sponsors and problems faced when implementing the project were addressed by those organisations which responded to the questionnaire.

This research was not intended to be representative of the views and experiences of all refugees and all NGOs working with refugee issues throughout the Central and Eastern European countries. However, by identifying particularly successful projects we have been able to stress positive as well as negative elements of the projects themselves and to express recommendations on the integration of refugees in these countries in the future. ECRE is grateful to the Matra Programme of the Dutch Foreign Ministry and UNHCR for their generous financial support of this project.

ECRE Secretariat  
London  
August 2001

NB The front cover shows the performance of the Afghan childrens' theatre troupe performing the Russian play "Snegurochka" written by Ostrovski. The costumes were handmade by women refugees and the performances were held in all the community centres of the organization, local schools and local orphanages, as a charity event.

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<sup>1</sup> Point 2 of Key Recommendations from ECRE position on Integration; see p.7.



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Council on Refugees & Exiles (ECRE) is an umbrella organisation established in 1974 to facilitate cooperation between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned with refugee issues. The main objective of ECRE's work is to promote a humane and generous asylum and refugee policy in Europe. ECRE has currently more than 60 member agencies throughout Europe. The member agencies are serviced and represented by the ECRE Secretariat, which has offices in London and Brussels. ECRE's principal activities include policy development, legal analysis, advocacy, networking, training and information exchange.

The purpose of the Good Practice Guides is to identify and promote methods, practices, projects and policies, which are helping refugees to integrate into the host society. These could be projects run by refugee assisting NGOs, actions by refugee community organisations, by local authorities, or initiatives by Trade Unions etc. In brief, integration is a subject, which involves several key players involved in combating the social exclusion of marginalised groups in society. Many initiatives are ongoing activities of organisations, which receive funding from a variety of sources: central and local government, churches, charitable foundations and private donations. Not all of the projects and initiatives included specifically target refugees, some are more mainstream activities whose client group includes asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and/or other socially excluded groups.

## What is Good Practice ?

The projects described have been chosen because they are considered to be examples of innovative, interesting and inspiring practice; and because they have the potential to be transferred in whole or in part to other national contexts. The Good Practice Guides are not intended to be a comprehensive or definitive survey of the best initiatives on refugee integration in Central and Eastern European countries, and there are undoubtedly many good projects and practices which may not have been included – any omission should not be interpreted as a negative judgment or criticism of the projects which do not feature.

## Who are the Good Practice Guides for?

The Guide is aimed primarily at practitioners as it describes practices, which we hope will be replicated in different national or local contexts to help refugees learn the language, find work, become active participants in the host society etc. The Guides also inevitably include some policy recommendations, which are aimed at policy makers at the local, national and international level.

## Content and structure

Each of the five Guides begins with an introduction describing the background to the integration theme. Different issues connected to the integration theme are addressed in the sections that follow. Projects, which illustrate "Good Practice", are described in detail, headed by the project name, organisation and country. Full contact details can be found for all projects and organisations mentioned in the Guides in the *List of Contributing Organizations* (see below). After each project description comments have been added to highlight elements which the reader should take note of when considering the replication of the project in whole or in part:

- a ☺ indicates the key positive element(s) which have recommended the practice to us;
- a ☹ does not indicate a negative criticism of the project's intrinsic value, but highlights the limitations of a project in term of its potential for transferability. It also indicate sometimes the elements which represented an obstacle to the implementation of the project itself;
- a ✓ indicates suggestions and recommendations



## The asylum situation in Central and Eastern Europe

### Belarus

#### *Asylum legislation and statistics*

Belarus ratified the Refugee Convention on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2001. The recognition rate of the decisions made by the Committee on Migration on refugee applications in 2000 was 82%, and the number of recognised refugees reached 458 by the end of 2000 (an increase by 76% as compared to the end of 1999). It should be noted, however, that about 60% of applicants were denied registration for the RSD procedure by the Migration Services, even after many of the cases were considered on their merits. In rejecting registration of cases, formal admissibility grounds, in particular the "safe third country" and time limits are invoked. No readmission agreements exist with transit countries (mainly, Russia).

The considerable improvement of the situation is reflected in the sharp decrease of unofficial (oral) rejections at the level of migration services. In exceptional cases reported during 2000 (ethnic Chechens from Russia) the migration services, after initial refusals, processed the applications, but did not register them. They invoked the Union Treaty between Belarus and Russia which declares equal rights and the possibility of obtaining a residence permit for citizens of Russia in Belarus, and Belarusians in Russia.

#### *Integration of refugees*

Refugees are given a one-off allowance from the state, but there is no assistance with accommodation, which is often made more difficult because of the existence of the residence registration ('propiska') system. Recognised refugees have certain basic rights, including the right to work, to education and to healthcare. In practice, many recognised refugees have already been resident in Belarus for a number of years and so do not face serious integration problems.

Source: Refugee Counselling Service, Minsk/Danish Refugee Council

### Czech Republic

#### *Asylum legislation and statistics*

By the end of 1998 there were 1 482 recognised refugees in the Czech Republic, and 4 086 applications were submitted that year. This number had grown steadily during the 1990s from 2 207 in 1993. Most applications come from Afghanis, residents of former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Iraq and India. Responsibility for assessing an asylum application lies with the Department for Refugees and the Integration of Foreigners of the Ministry of the Interior. According to this Department, the trend in the Czech Republic is for a high number of illegal border crossing but a low number of applications for asylum.

#### *Integration of refugees*

Since 1994 a government programme aimed at integration of recognised refugees was created in the Czech Republic, focusing on provision of accommodation and employment. Sixty-five persons benefited from this programme in 1998. In addition, a wide range of integration services are provided by the non-governmental sector which go far wider than the government's own programme, including tolerance-building, improving access to education, healthcare and welfare services.

Source: Czech Ministry of the Interior/ECRE

### Hungary

#### *Asylum legislation and statistics*

The status determination procedure in Hungary offers two forms of status: Convention refugee status or 'exceptional leave to remain'. The present Asylum Act, which came into force in March 1998, makes possible the introduction of the 'temporarily protected' category, but in practice, it has not been used yet. In the year 2000 there were 7 801 asylum-seekers in Hungary, 197 of them were recognised as refugees and 680 were granted exceptional leave to remain. This number has been growing year on year since Hungary signed the Refugee Convention in 1989. Between 1989 and 2000 there were 32 487 asylum applications submitted, out of which 5 183 were granted refugee status, and (since March 1998) 2 688

were granted exceptional leave to remain. However, the actual number of refugees remaining in the country can only be estimated at around 500 – 600, as the rest have left the country or received Hungarian citizenship. The asylum procedure can take one to two years.

### ***Integration of refugees***

For recognised refugees, there is a lack of a supportive environment through which refugees can be integrated. There is a Government Decree regulating the care and maintenance and benefits of foreigners coming under the force of the Asylum Act, and in addition recognised refugees are eligible for all social services and benefits enjoyed by Hungarian citizens. Despite this there is a general lack of access to local communities and few initiatives are supported by the government. Almost all integration activities are provided by NGOs, with the financial support of the UNHCR Branch Office in Hungary.

Source: Menedek – Hungarian Association for Migrants

## **Moldova**

### ***Asylum legislation and statistics***

UNHCR estimates that there are several hundred *de facto* refugees residing in Moldova, originating from Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Russia (mainly Chechnya) and Iran. Added to this number are around 20 000 displaced persons originating from former Soviet republics, as well as several thousand of the 51 000 who fled Transnistria during the conflict in the early 1990s (1,000 IDPs still have not found durable solutions). Although Moldova has not yet adopted legislation on refugees nor ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, the right to seek asylum is granted by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by Article 19 of the Constitution. Pending the creation of Government structures, UNHCR extends international protection to the persons of its concern, registers asylum seekers and conducts refugee status determination procedure under its UNHCR mandate. Asylum seekers are required to address their asylum request to UNHCR's implementing partner NGO "Society for Refugees of the Republic of Moldova" (SR), which registers asylum seekers and conducts initial interviews. Upon registration, asylum seekers are advised and assisted to petition the Presidential Commission invoking the Constitutional provision on asylum (in practice *proforma*, but confirming thus their intention to respect Moldovan legislation in force). During the refugee status determination procedure, a protection letter is issued for a 3-month term, which can be extended while the case is being analysed. The protection letter is a basis for registering with the authorities and to receive various forms of UNHCR assistance. After examining the case on its merits, UNHCR formulates a final decision or requests additional information. The asylum seekers are informed in writing about the final decision. An appeal can be submitted against the decision within 10 days. An interview report/recommendation is reviewed and another interview will be conducted by a UNHCR staff member.

Due to lack of legislation on refugees in Moldova, the status of asylum seekers is regulated by the *Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons*. It does not contain however a reference to refugees/asylum-seekers or asylum itself. In December 1999, the Aliens Law was modified and its Art. 29 now provides for "*non-refoulement*". According to the legislation, foreigners/stateless persons and Moldovan citizens have the same rights and duties in Moldova except those provided by the laws (e.g. the right to vote and to be elected). However, asylum seekers who cannot legalise their status under the current migration law after expiry of the valid visa are forced to stay in the country illegally. They are denied access to the labour market, and other social benefits. UNHCR Protection Letter holders are in most cases protected against expulsion and *refoulement*, and as a rule are excluded fines on the basis of lack of identity documents. From that point on their rights are regulated by legislation on foreigners and stateless persons, and include: freedom of movement, non-refoulement, legal aid from SRRM counsellors, and social assistance according to need.

### ***Integration of refugees***

In the absence of a Refugee Law, integration of refugees in Moldova is extremely problematic. Many *sur place* refugees, mainly from Afghanistan, were former students in Moldova who are unable to return to Afghanistan. If they wish to adopt Moldovan citizenship then they have to pass a Romanian language test. Asylum seekers generally cannot legalise their status in Moldova under the existing laws in force. Several developments including favourable court decisions and the amendment of Art 29 of the Aliens Law have resulted in improved

protection against refoulement/expulsion of UNHCR issued Protection Letter holders. However, other human rights are not guaranteed to asylum seekers and refugees, *e.g.* they cannot earn a living and become self-sustainable. UNHCR's repeated request to the Government to ground asylum seekers limited and temporary access to the labour market were turned down. Other asylum-seekers with the UNHCR Protection Letter are offered social support including the payment of allowances and support for small income generation projects. UNHCR and Save the Children also facilitates access to social services and education for refugee children; all children in Moldova including those of asylum seekers have access to the primary education in accordance with the Convention on Rights of the Child. The refugee community organised a committee to develop self-reliance and to solve their problems for themselves, including the submission of an income generation project proposal to UNHCR's implementing partner NGOs, Charity Centre for Refugees (CCR) and "Italian Consortium of Solidarity (ICS). However, the chances of local integration remain slim.

Source: UNHCR Chisinau/Society for Refugees of the Republic of Moldova/Danish Refugee Council

## **Poland**

### ***Asylum legislation and statistics***

Refugees have been arriving in Poland since 1989, first from developing countries, then, since 1992, from former Yugoslavia. Around the mid-1990s there were around 1000 asylum applications per year, rising to 4 500 applications in 2000, of whom 78 were granted asylum. Poland ratified the Refugee Convention and Protocol in 1991, and in 1997 passed a new Alien's Act which for the first time included refugee status determination into the national legal system. The only status offered under this Law is full Convention refugee status, with no provision for temporary or humanitarian status. Applications are normally made at the border, from which applicants are taken to the Central Reception Centre in Debak, where they receive an allowance, accommodation, healthcare and language training. There is no right to work for asylum-seekers. Exceptions to this procedure are made for potential sur place refugees, or asylum-seekers who are able to prove that they were physically unable to apply for asylum when crossing the border. A decision on status should be given within three months, although in practice first instance decisions are usually only taken after 6-12 months.

### ***Integration of refugees***

A recognised refugee receives temporary residence for two years and a Travel Document. After these two years the refugee receives permanent residence, and after five years can apply for citizenship. The first organised attempt at integration by the government was the Individual Adaptation Programme, set up in 1996, which gave the refugee an allowance in return for keeping the authorities informed of his whereabouts and registering in order to find employment. This caused problems with landlords, who were often reluctant to register their tenants as they would have to pay higher income tax, and the amount paid to refugees was insufficient to meet their needs, so the programme was abandoned at the end of 1997 and responsibility handed to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. However, NGOs report that this department is still unable to implement an effective integration programme, and so most integration activities are implemented by the non-governmental sector.

Source: Caritas Polska/Polish Humanitarian Organisation

## **Romania**

### ***Asylum legislation and statistics***

Since it signed the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1991, Romania has become an asylum country for refugees mainly from the Middle East, Africa and Asia. More than 10 000 asylum applications have been registered in this period, and around 1 700 asylum seekers were recognised as refugees. UNHCR estimates that around 2 000 asylum seekers and refugees are currently in Romania. The remaining asylum seekers either left for other countries or returned home voluntarily.

Romania adopted national refugee legislation in 1996. However, some provisions were incompatible with the 1951 Convention, and as a result new legislation was adopted through a Government Ordinance in 2000 and passed as a new Refugee Law in 2001 which eliminated some of the shortcomings. Romania offered to receive 6,000 Kosovar refugees

from FYR of Macedonia, under the joint UNHCR/IOM Humanitarian Evacuation programme, and actually hosted close to 100, until the end of July 1999, when all but one returned to Kosovo.

### ***Integration of refugees***

For recognised refugees, a comprehensive Government integration programme has yet to be finalised. The major obstacle for effective integration seems to be limited financial resources, with a subsequent impact on housing facilities and employment opportunities. Refugees are entitled to receive a special minimum salary for six months from receiving a positive decision, and for a further three months in exceptional circumstances. Refugees also have access to the Romanian welfare system under the same conditions as nationals, although this does not include income support during the period when they are receiving the special amount mentioned above. No housing is provided to recognised refugees, but refugees do have the right to work on the same basis as nationals. Training courses and language courses are offered in Bucharest city. Refugee children are entitled to free primary education, but secondary and higher education is only available after payment of a school tax for foreigners, while Romanian nationals can attend free of charge. The same situation often applies to healthcare, with more suitable provision often only offered after the intervention of UNHCR or NGOs.

Source: UNHCR/Danish Refugee Council

## **Russian Federation**

### ***Asylum legislation and statistics***

Russia signed the Refugee Convention in 1996 and that year passed laws "On Refugees" and "On Forced Migrants". Since then, 595 persons originating from outside the Commonwealth of Independent States have been granted refugee status, and nearly 42 000 persons from CIS states. In 2000 238 non-CIS refugees were recognised, of whom over 90% were from Afghanistan, while only 97 persons from CIS states were given refugee status. In addition to Convention refugee status, since early 2001 provisions have existed for granting 'temporary asylum', although the exact system for implementing this is yet to be put in place.

### ***Integration of refugees***

The Law on Refugees guarantees certain basic rights to Convention refugees, such as the right to temporary housing, healthcare, vocational training, welfare benefits and the right to education for refugee children. This has been complemented by additional Government decrees on issues such as psychological rehabilitation and development of medical and educational institutions. Most integration projects implemented by the government have focused on 'forced migrants' (most of whom were Russian citizens fleeing former Soviet republics) rather than refugees from non-CIS countries, although there have been initiatives intended to improve educational facilities and access to information for recognised refugees. However, despite the legislative provisions, in practice the proper documentation is often not given to recognised refugees and this makes it difficult for them to obtain residence registration; without such registration they are unable to benefit from integration activities offered by the government, notably employment, access to education and stable housing. Despite this, many NGOs, particularly in Moscow, implement integration activities with funding from UNHCR and other independent sources.

Source: UNHCR/ECRE

## **Ukraine**

### ***Asylum legislation and statistics***

There are around 5 000 asylum-seekers in Ukraine, and around 3 000 recognised refugees. Most of these are from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Angola, Ethiopia and Somalia. Ukraine has had a functioning asylum system since 1993 when it passed a law "On Refugees". However, Ukraine has not yet ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. There is no humanitarian or temporary form of protection in Ukraine.

### ***Integration of refugees***

According to the Law on Refugees, recognised refugees have certain rights, including the right to Ukrainian citizenship, the right to choose a place of residence, the right to own

property, the right to work and various welfare rights including the right to education and healthcare. However, in practice these rights are often not observed, although most refugee children are able to attend schools. A basic hindrance to effective integration is the fact that refugee status has to be renewed every three months, yet according to Ukrainian legislation foreigners are only entitled to work if they have been legally registered as resident in Ukraine for a continuous period of six months or more; therefore, the refugees are often denied the right to work. There are also no housing provisions made for recognised refugees.

Source: Charitable Foundation "Edelweiss"

## List of contributing organizations

|  |   |
|--|---|
| ADRA Ukraine   | <b>Address:</b> 254107 Kyiv, Ul Lukyanovskaya 9b, apt.15<br><b>Tel:</b> +380 44 467 5048<br><b>Fax:</b> +380 44 416 1347<br><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:adra@gu.kiev.ua">adra@gu.kiev.ua</a><br><br><b>Refugee Family Support Centre:</b><br><b>Address:</b> Pr Mayakovskogo 10a, Kindergarten No.758<br><b>Tel:</b> +380 44 545 0800<br><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:troyesch@carrier.kiev.ua">troyesch@carrier.kiev.ua</a> |
| Afghan Refugees  | <b>Address:</b> 79000 L'vov, ul. Doroshenka 14/3 UKRAINE<br><b>Tel.</b> 74-66-40.   |
| Bjornson Society   | <b>Address:</b> Námestie Slobody 10 034 01 Ružomberok SLOVAKIA<br><b>Tel/Fax:</b> 421/848/4326 786<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:bjs@spsrk.sk">bjs@spsrk.sk</a>   |
| CARITAS Lublin<br>Biuro Informacji dla<br>Migrantów i Uchodźców<br>Caritas Archidiecezji<br>Lubelskiej | <b>Address:</b> ul. Prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego 2 20-950 Lublin POLAND<br><b>Telefax:</b> 00 48 81 743-71-86<br><b>Mobile:</b> 48 602 114 136<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:migranci@kuria.lublin.pl">migranci@kuria.lublin.pl</a>   |
| CARITAS Moscow   | <b>Address:</b> Dmitrovskoe Shosse 5/1 Kv 135 127434 Moscow RUSSIA<br><b>Tel.:</b> (007) 095 967 0863<br><b>Fax. :</b> (007) 095 956 0584<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:migrant.caritmsk@caritas.ru">migrant.caritmsk@caritas.ru</a>  |
| Centre of Social Innovation  | <b>Address:</b> Minsk, 220123, V.Koruzhei, 13, 510<br>Posting: 220086, Minsk, c/o 112 BELARUS<br><b>Tel/Fax:</b> +375 (17)210-17-74<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:csi@user.unibel.by">csi@user.unibel.by</a>  |
| Committee of Hope<br>The Volgograd provincial<br>public organization of the<br>forced migrants         | <b>Address:</b> 400074, Volgograd, ul. Barrikadnaya, 19 RUSSIA<br><b>Tel.</b> (8442)97-33-75, <b>Tel/Fax</b> (8442) 33-93-62<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:nadezhda@advent.avtlg.ru">nadezhda@advent.avtlg.ru</a>   |
| Counseling Centre for<br>Integration (CCI)   | <b>Address:</b> Senovážná 2 110 00 Prague 1 CZECH Republic<br><b>Tel.:</b> 0042-02-24 23 30 34<br><b>Fax:</b> 0042-02-24 21 34 26<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:ppi@ini.cz">ppi@ini.cz</a>  |
| Charitable Foundation<br>Edelweiss   | <b>Address:</b> Pobedy Ave, 61/2 252113 Kyiv UKRAINE<br><b>Tel/fax:</b> (380) 44 449 1271<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:sasha@edelw.kiev.ua">sasha@edelw.kiev.ua</a>  |
| Equilibre-Solidarity   | <b>Address:</b> Izmailovski blv. 39, 105264 Moscow, RUSSIA<br><b>Tel.:</b> (007) (095) 465 71 26, 965 74 01, 965 61 57<br><b>Fax.:</b> (007) (095) 965 7410<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:eklsol@online.ru">eklsol@online.ru</a>  |
| Human Rights without<br>Borders (HRWB)   | <b>Address:</b> 79058, L'vov, ul. Sorocinskaya, 8/19 UKRAINE<br><b>Tel/Fax:</b> (030 322) 33-79-34, 72-55-83,   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Legal consultation Centre of the trade union "Solidarity"   | <b>E mail:</b> <a href="mailto:ngo@bc.lviv.ua">ngo@bc.lviv.ua</a> , <a href="mailto:marints2000@yahoo.com">marints2000@yahoo.com</a>  |
| Independent Social Support                                  | <b>Address:</b> 220115, Minsk, Kizhevatova st, 66 BELARUS<br><b>Tel (fax) :</b> 2787547<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:iss@un.minsk.by">iss@un.minsk.by</a>  |
| Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organisation                    | <b>Address:</b> 1066 Budapest O utca 5. P. Box. 1590 Budapest Pf 186. HUNGARY<br><b>Tel/Fax:</b> + 361 331 94 74.<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:budgandhim@yahoo.com">budgandhim@yahoo.com</a>  |
| Menedék Hungarian Association for Migrants                  | <b>Address:</b> H-1075 Budapest, Rákóczi út 80. II./9. HUNGARY<br><b>Tel:</b> (361) 322 1502, (361) 344 6224<br><b>Fax:</b> (361) 479 0272<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:menedek@menedek.hu">menedek@menedek.hu</a><br><b>Web-site:</b> <a href="http://www.menedek.hu">www.menedek.hu</a>  |
| Nadezhda Centre of aid to refugees and forced migrants      | <b>Address:</b> 617140, Permskaya obl., Ocer, ul. Kalinina 23 RUSSIA<br><b>Address for the correspondence:</b> 617140, Permskaya obl., Ocer, ul. Borovaya 4-11 RUSSIA<br><b>Tel/Fax:</b> +7 (34278) 215-46, + (34278) 228-44<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:bivp@mail.ru">bivp@mail.ru</a> , <a href="mailto:olgn@mail.ru">olgn@mail.ru</a><br><b>Web-site:</b> <a href="http://www.bivp.narod.ru">www.bivp.narod.ru</a>   |
| Polish Humanitarian Organisation Refugee Counselling Centre | <b>Address:</b> 5, Szpitalna St., Appt. 3 00-031 Warsaw POLAND<br><b>Tel.:</b> ++48 22 828 90 86, 828 88 82<br><b>Fax:</b> ++48 22 831 99 38<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:ucho@pah.ngo.pl">ucho@pah.ngo.pl</a><br><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.pah.ngo.pl/english/index.htm">www.pah.ngo.pl/english/index.htm</a>   |
| POST Educational Centre                                     | <b>Address:</b> 220028, Belarus', Minsk, a/ya 63<br><b>Tel:</b> (37517) 2860366<br><b>Fax:</b> (37517) 2860366<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:center_post@tut.by">center_post@tut.by</a>   |
| Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR)               | <b>Address:</b> 42 Anton Pann Street, Sector 3, Bucharest ROMANIA<br><b>Tel/Fax:</b> +(40) 01 322 52 81; +(40) 01 320 20 45; +(40) 01 322 27 86<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:cnrr@pcnet.ro">cnrr@pcnet.ro</a>  |
| Russian Red Cross/ Federation Russia Delegation             | <b>Address:</b> Tcheryomushkinski Proezd 5 117036 Moscow RUSSIA<br><b>Tel . RRC:</b> (7) (095) 1265731 Tel. Federation Delegation: (7) (095) 1261566<br><b>Fax:</b> (7) (095) 3107048 Fax Federation Delegation: (7) (095) 9375263<br><b>Telex:</b> 411400 IKPOL SU<br><b>Email Federation Delegation:</b> <a href="mailto:moscow@ifrc.org">moscow@ifrc.org</a><br><b>Telegram:</b> IKRESTPOL MOSKWA<br><b>Web-site:</b> <a href="http://www.redcross.ru/">http://www.redcross.ru/</a><br>And,<br><a href="http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/cn6.asp?countryid=142">http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/cn6.asp?countryid=142</a> |
| Society for Refugees of the Republic of Moldova             | <b>Address:</b> Ul. Bucharest 14,   |
| Vozvrashchenie (Saratov-Russia)                             | <b>Address:</b> 410004 Saratov, Cernishevskogo ul., 88 RUSSIA<br><b>Tel/Fax:</b> (8452) 25-98-05<br><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:return_s@mail.ru">return_s@mail.ru</a>   |

## Contributing organizations

### **ADRA Ukraine**

ADRA is an international organisation based in Ukraine, related to the Christian Church of the Adventist of the Seventh Day. It was created to encourage individual and social development and help those who have suffered in natural and other disasters. It became a registered charity in 1993. It helps large families, pensioners in need, children, victims of the Chernobyl disaster, and refugees and asylum-seekers, and since 1996 has been a partner to UNHCR Kyiv in implementing short and long-term projects offering social assistance, education and integration activities. In March 1999 it opened the first Refugee Family Support Centre for refugees and asylum-seekers on the territory of the CIS.

### **Afghan Refugees, Ukraine**

The L'viv regional organization "Afghan refugees" was founded in 1998 and consists of 48 members, all of whom have refugee status. A president, chosen by a general assembly, leads the organization. The members of the organization have contacts with refugees and asylum seekers in the territory of Ukraine and beyond its borders. In 1999 "Afghan refugees" participated in the UNHCR project "New homeland", intended to help refugees in Ukraine integrate into the host society by giving them social consultations and instruction in Sunday school.

### **Bjornson Society, Slovakia**

The main focus of Bjornson Society since its origin (October 1994) has been providing assistance whilst at the same time developing the values of democracy and solidarity. The Bjornson Society co-operates with UNHCR Bratislava in implementing an integration project for refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons.

### **CARITAS Lublin, Poland**

#### **Biuro Informacji dla Migrantów i Uchodźców**

In the field of migration Caritas Polska implements 2 major projects: UNHCR social/legal and psychological assistance for asylum seekers and recognized refugees and, until the end of 2000, a counseling project for refugees and migrants funded by Raphaels-Werk. The objective of the project is to provide all migrants, irrespective of their legal status or religion, with social/legal/administrative counseling and information, as well as to facilitate access to Polish healthcare system, education and the job market. The counselors inform clients about refugee procedure and assist them throughout all the stages. They facilitate writing official letters, translate documents, and contact authorities. Financial assistance is very rare, because of lack of funds. The project constantly battles against serious financial problems in the medium and short-term.

### **CARITAS Moscow, Russia**

Caritas Moscow is the Russian filial of the international Caritas organisation, and has been operating in Russia since 1992. Since then Caritas has been running a project to provide legal and social support to all categories of migrants. This project employs a project co-ordinator, a lawyer and a social worker and has recently been expanded to include an 'Outreach' project to help those working with migrants outside Moscow.

### **Centre of Social Innovation, Belarus**

The "Centre of Social Innovation" is a public association created on 22 November 1996 and registered on 22 January 1997. The mission of the organization is to offer conditions for personal intellectual and creative development. The basic activities of the organisation are to: carry out educational programs; conduct consultation in job placement; and to offer publications and information.

### **Committee of Hope, Russia**

The Volgograd provincial public organization of forced migrants "Committee of Hope" was created in March 1997. Its basic purposes include: legal protection of forced migrants; representation in court; help with employment and training; and humanitarian aid. The vast majority of clients are from Afghanistan. It has experience in realizing projects in the field of education, employment and residence for refugees and has implemented four projects

offering refugees aid in job placement, instruction in the protection of their rights and assistance with psychological adaptation.

#### **Counseling Centre for Integration (CCI), Czech Republic**

The Counselling Centre for Integration (CCI) offers help to individuals granted asylum with their adaptation and integration into the host society. CCI is the only one organization in the Czech Republic focused on this issue. CCI focuses on all aspects of integration, working with individual clients as well as targeting the public and policy-makers. In 1999 CCI opened community centres in Brno, Ústí nad Labem and Prague, where there are high concentrations of refugees. The main activities of these centres are to offer social assistance, legal counselling, and courses and classes for refugees and the local population.

#### **Charitable Fund "Edelweiss", Ukraine**

The charitable Fund "Edelweiss" was created in 1998. Its basic activities include: consultations to refugees and asylum seekers on issues such as status determination, access of children to education, and healthcare. Edelweiss also offers advice on voluntary repatriation, assistance with employment, financial support and assistance with accessing medical services including vaccinations and help for pregnant women.

#### **Equilibre-Solidarity, Russia**

Equilibre-Solidarity is the main NGO in Moscow offering assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers from 'Far Abroad' countries. Since 1998 the organisation has been implementing a project funded by UNHCR on "Care and maintenance program for urban asylum-seekers in Moscow and Moscow region". The main objective of the program is the integration of asylum-seekers and refugees into Russian society. The main activities include: social counselling, financial assistance for the most vulnerable clients, education programmes, community services, creation of community centres, and job-skills training.

#### **Human Rights without Borders (HRWB), Ukraine**

The legal consultation centre "Human rights without borders" was created in 1997 with the support of Amnesty International and other human rights organizations for the protection of refugees with the trade union "Solidarity" in order to render aid to refugees and asylum seekers in the territory of L'vov in Ukraine. The main activities of the centre are: analysis of Ukrainian legislation concerning refugees; tolerance-building activities; seminars and training courses on international law; and free legal consultation aid to refugees and asylum seekers. Information is provided on organisations in L'vov, L'vov region and Ukraine which give material, humanitarian and medical aid to refugees and asylum seekers. A priority for the centre is rendering aid to women and children, who received the status of refugee or who expect to obtain it.

#### **Independent Social Support, Belarus**

The main goal of the NGO "Independent Social Support" is to offer advice on problems of social protection of the citizens of Belarus and Russia, the protection of foreign citizens and stateless persons. The basic tasks include: help with realization of civil, economic and social rights of these citizens; implementation of social, humanitarian and other aid to unprotected sections of the population, and also to victims of catastrophes and economic crises.

#### **Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organisation, Hungary**

The "Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organisation" was founded in 1992, with the overall objective to protect and support non-Europeans arriving to or living in Hungary. Since 1992, every year some 250-300 people have been provided legal or administrative aid, lawyer aid. The organisation also launches African cultural programs to build a bridge of communication between local and non-European people. Main activities include: help with settlement of the non-European refugees in Hungary; offering free legal advice to foreigners living in Hungary; help for refugees in need, in particular for those in refugee camps and prisons; cultural events, displaying different Asian and African cultures; and fighting against racial discrimination.



### **Menedék Hungarian Association for Migrants, Hungary**

'Menedék' Hungarian Association for Migrants was established in January 1995 as a civil initiative. Its main objectives include: representing migrants, including asylum seekers, refugees, temporarily protected persons, foreign employees, immigrants, and other foreigners in Hungary towards the host society; promoting the legal, social, and cultural integration of refugees and migrants; advocating for the interests and rights of migrants towards governmental bodies and the media; and partnership with other NGOs pursuing similar goals. Since its foundation Menedek has organised a number of integration activities, produced information brochures and a monthly newsletter, managed a project on legal consultation with NGOs in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia, provided legal aid to refugees and migrants, and implemented various training programmes for government officials working in the field of migration.

### **Hope Assistance Centre of Aid for Refugees and Forced Migrants, Russia**

The organization is involved with human rights activity in the protection of migrants and runs an educational centre for refugee children from Afghanistan. A legal clinic operates within the centre, where students of the Law faculties of higher educational institutions receive legal training and give aid to the organization. The Organization does collaborate with the Moscow NGO "Memorial" and it is part of the legal network for consultations to migrants "Migrants' Rights".

### **Polish Humanitarian Organisation Refugee Counselling Centre, Poland**

Refugee Counselling Centre of the Polish Humanitarian Organisation offers various forms of assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers, including: socio-legal counselling, medical and in-kind assistance; assistance to recognised refugees wishing to stay in Poland (involving language classes, help with accommodation, job training and programmes for women and children). In addition the Centre operates the only 'Refugee House', the only non-governmental refugee centre in Poland, where about 600 aliens have so far been given shelter, and has produced a handbook for refugees, "Poland For You", published in 2000, which is the first of its kind produced in Poland.

### **POST Educational Centre, Belarus**

Educational Centre POST is involved with the development of civil society in Belarus'. It provides assistance to the realization of various educational projects and programmes.

The general aspects of work of POST are: educational programmes for adolescents on themes like freedom, violence, human rights, relations between women and men, etc; interactive programmes for young people about problems in inter-personal relations in a group (conflicts, structure, leadership, stereotypes, etc); educational seminars for teachers on different aspects of the pedagogical process (active methods of teaching, finance support, forms of civil education, intercultural formation, etc); training courses for representatives of NGOs (management, effective communication with civil society, leadership, planning of activities, etc); international programmes for young people on intercultural education. Since its foundation (April 1997) POST has realized about 70 educational programmes of different type, where about 1000 participants have taken part.

### **Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR), Romania**

The foundation "Romanian National Council for Refugees" (CNRR) is a legal entity established in 1998, based on the structure of the Refugee Advice and Support Centre (RASC) which had been functioning since 1994. Over 2 000 asylum-seekers and refugees were assisted in the year 2000 and over 1 300 in the first six months of 2001. The aim of CNRR is to protect and promote through all legal means human rights and the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers in particular. At present, CNRR is the main implementing partner for UNHCR in Romania. In 1999 around 1900 asylum-seekers benefited from direct and indirect assistance provided by the organisation, the majority of whom came from Bangladesh, Iraq, Afghanistan, Congo, Pakistan and Ex-Yugoslavia. Assistance was provided also to approx. 600 recognised refugees, mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Congo and Somalia. Activities of CNRR include: social, legal and medical counselling; advocacy work; and provision of public information.

### **Russian Red Cross, Russia**

The RRC has 100 regional and 1,321 district committees or branches. A total of 1,293 people are employed by the RRCS throughout the country, excluding a great number of volunteers. Main activities include: disaster response programmes; support for adaptation of refugees, asylum seekers, forced migrants and internally displaced persons into Russian society; increasing public awareness; healthcare programmes; and institutional development.

### **Vozvrashchenie, Russia**

The charitable fund "Vozvrashchenie" ('Return') offers protection of human rights of all categories of refugees and migrants. Material aid is given especially vulnerable refugees and forced migrants (especially families with many children, single-mothers and invalids). The fund interacts with many public organizations in Saratov, including the provincial Duma, the urban administration, the Migration Service and the Passport-Visa regional service.

## **Key recommendations from ECRE position on integration**

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles' Position on the Integration of Refugees in Europe was produced in September 1999 after an extensive survey of ECRE member agencies, consisting of over sixty-five-refugee-assisting non-governmental organisations in Europe. It also draws extensively upon discussions which took place at experts' meetings of the ECRE Task Force on Integration. The Position refers to how the integration of refugees in European societies should be organized and, although some recommendations are specifically targeted at European Union member states, the majority of the recommendations are designed to be applicable in all European states.

### ***A Definition of Integration***

1. ECRE considers integration to be a process of change that is:
  - a) *dynamic and two-way*: it places demands on both receiving societies and the individuals and/or the communities concerned. From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness to adapt public institutions to changes in the population profile, accept refugees as part of the national community, and take action to facilitate access to resources and decision-making processes.
  - b) *long term*: from a psychological perspective, it often starts at the time of arrival in the country of final destination and is concluded when a refugee becomes an *active* member of that society from a legal, social, economic, educational and cultural perspective.
  - c) *multi-dimensional*: it relates both to the conditions for and actual participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of durable asylum as well as to refugees' own perception of acceptance by and membership in the host society.
2. ECRE recommends that the objective of integration programmes and policies is the establishment of a mutual and responsible relationship between refugees and their communities, civil society and host states. This should encourage self-determination and sustainable self-sufficiency for refugees while at the same time promoting positive action in the public and government domain.
3. ECRE acknowledges that refugee integration is closely related to the phase of reception and the quality and length of the asylum determination procedure. It recommends that the phase of reception be recognised as an integral part of the integration process of refugees, given the potential impact of the reception phase on the process of integration of those eventually granted leave to settle in a European country.

### ***The Legal Context***

4. ECRE proposes that European states should adopt a *correct* interpretation of the refugee definition in the 1951 Convention and its Protocol, and refrain from granting a lesser status to persons fulfilling the criteria of the Convention.
5. It recommends that any socio-economic rights accruing to people with full refugee status should be granted to all persons afforded complementary protection. Within the context of the Amsterdam Treaty, it proposes that the European Union agrees upon measures setting out the rights of persons with complementary forms of protection on the basis of international and Council of Europe legal instruments, human rights law standards and best practice.

### ***Citizenship and Freedom of Movement***

6. ECRE considers citizenship to be a key policy instrument for facilitating integration and acknowledging full refugee membership in the society of durable asylum. It proposes that European governments give consideration to Article 34 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Council of Europe's Recommendation 564 (1969) on the Acquisition by Refugees of the Nationality of Their Country of Residence and facilitate refugee naturalisation.
7. ECRE recommends that the European Union undertakes to guarantee freedom of movement and equality of treatment in parity with nationals of EU countries to persons whose Convention or complementary protection status has been recognised by an EU Member State. Throughout Europe, individual states should ensure that they adopt measures to facilitate travel for refugees residing in their territory.

### ***Key Principles of Refugee Integration***

8. The development of a tolerant inclusive society is a key prerequisite to the successful integration of refugees. Governments and decision-makers should provide political leadership and set the tone in public debate on tolerance and non-discrimination.
9. ECRE emphasises the importance of close links and multi-sector alliances of social actors involved in refugee issues. Such alliances should seek the involvement of representatives of the media, political parties, local municipalities and businesses, the police, local/national non-governmental organisations and other associations.
10. A key priority for the non-governmental sector across Europe should be the participation of refugees as service users and providers in the conception, development, organisation and evaluation of integration services and policies. ECRE proposes that providers of integration services, in close consultation with refugees and/or their community representatives, undertake to develop commonly agreed criteria for assessing the quality and effectiveness of integration interventions at national and European level.
11. In order to promote the active participation of refugees in European host societies, ECRE emphasises the importance of enabling refugees to use their own resources and skills to help each other, in particular newcomers, and represent their interests and those of their family and community to service providers and decision makers. National funding should be made available to facilitate the development of refugee organisations and self-help groups as well as the co-ordination of refugee organisations' activities at regional and national level.
12. ECRE proposes that within the spirit of the 1951 Convention, European governments recognise refugees as "individuals with special needs" and therefore distinct service requirements during the initial phase of their integration in a host

society. Interventions should be needs-led and based upon a recognition of the diversity of refugee populations. In some cases, it should be acknowledged that interventions might be necessary at a later stage of the integration process.

13. Policy makers and service providers, particularly in the areas of health, education and employment advice, should be trained in the consequences of language difficulties, physical and psychological trauma and cultural/religious differences on the integration process of refugees.
14. Government policies and resource allocations for refugee integration need to be compatible with social protection arrangements specific to individual European countries. Countries with extensive systems of social protection for a range of vulnerable groups should develop time-limited refugee-specific policies/programmes. Such initiatives could either address refugee-specific needs or act as "bridges" to mainstream provision.
15. In countries with less regulated/non group-specific social policy traditions, mainstream social policy should make provisions for special interventions - rather than separate treatment - to address the potential disadvantages faced by refugees and cater for specific needs in the areas of mental health or legal aid.
16. Interventions need to incorporate a gender perspective and involve refugee women in the design, implementation and evaluation of integration programmes.

### ***Employment, Education and Vocational Training***

17. Employment is a key factor to the integration process. ECRE affirms that lack of access to the labour market during the reception phase seriously hinders integration in the long-term. It recommends that any restrictions on employment be lifted at the earliest possible stage and not later than six months from the time of the asylum application.
18. ECRE urges national governments to grant refugees and people with a complementary protection status unconditional rights to employment and automatic access to work permits. It recommends that vocational training and other programmes promoting refugee labour participation should be individually tailored with interventions being built upon a thorough understanding of the state of the labour market and linked to general economic regeneration/development strategies.
19. ECRE recommends that a system of recognition of previous experience and qualifications should be set up at EU level. This should establish EU-wide verification and assessment criteria and a set of recommended practice for bridging gaps between refugee qualifications' levels and industry or education standards in countries of durable asylum.
20. It recommends that provision should be made for special education or language programmes for refugees during the initial phase of integration. Financial support on a parity with nationals of the host country should also be available for general educational purposes and for bridging the gap between refugees' original qualifications and entry requirements for further mainstream education in the host country.
21. All refugees granted leave to stay in a European country should be entitled to a minimum number of hours of free language tuition. Special arrangements should be made for carers in terms of assistance with child care. Arrangements should also be in place for asylum seekers to acquire basic skills in the language of the host country.

### ***Housing***

22. ECRE recommends that European states guarantee the basic human right of "shelter" to all persons in need of international protection independently of their status.
23. It recommends that Convention refugees and people with a complementary protection status be given choice as to where to settle and enjoy full access to housing rights. Upon receiving a permission to stay, people accommodated in reception centres should be given all necessary information to make an "informed decision" following full consideration of the type and location of housing which might be available to them.

### ***Health***

24. ECRE considers that limited or no access to health provision together with lack of adequate and healthy reception conditions during the initial phase of arrival can seriously undermine refugee long-term health and integration prospects. It proposes that physical and mental health services should be made available to asylum seekers upon arrival in European countries of asylum.
25. ECRE suggests that specialised refugee services should form a permanent part of mainstream health provision and benefit from long-term public support. They should act as "bridges" to mainstream provision and focus on specific care and treatment needs resulting from experiences in the country of origin and during a refugee's flight to safety and reception in host country.
26. In order to overcome barriers to health access, key priority should also be given to the establishment of interpreting and mediation services as well as the promotion of health education and prevention programmes.

### ***Family Reunion***

27. ECRE recommends that family reunion should not be limited to people meeting the criteria of the 1951 Convention but also be extended to people granted a complementary protection status.
28. European governments should not impose restrictions on the right to family reunification of refugees and people with complementary protection status relating to length of residence, employment status, access to housing and earning capacity, or availability of documentation proving family links. Attempts should be made to ensure that refugee families reunite with the least possible delay and at a minimum within the first six months from status determination.

### ***Investment in Integration***

29. ECRE considers refugee integration to be the primary responsibility of national governments. When calculating the cost of refugee integration programmes, European governments should take into consideration the long-term economic and social costs associated with risks of refugee marginalisation in the case of public non-intervention at an early stage. Given the European dimension of refugee integration and on the basis of solidarity across Europe, structural and special funding need to continue being available to realise EU-wide targets of refugee integration.
30. Considerable investment needs to be made in services during the reception phase in order to enable people to develop the necessary skills and knowledge, which facilitate integration in the host country in the case of a positive asylum decision.

31. Investment should also be made in educational measures to enable people to gain qualifications useful for rebuilding their home country in case of return.

September 1999

### **NB A note about terminology**

The reader should be aware of the complex issues surrounding the use of certain terminology in the Good Practice Guide. Below is an attempt to clarify the usage of the most common terminology:

#### **Refugee**

The Good Practice Guides are concerned specifically with refugees who have settled or who intend to settle in the Central and Eastern European countries. This includes all persons who have been granted some form of recognized status, including refugee status under the 1951 UN Convention or relevant national legislation, as well as all persons receiving some form of complementary protection in countries where such protection exists. These Guides begin from the premise that all refugees who have received permission to stay and who have settled or intend to settle in a country whether this is with the full rights as guaranteed by the Convention or with lesser rights, for a definite or an indefinite period, need to integrate. Only when it is relevant to the practices described and has a bearing on the possibilities for integration is a distinction made between the holders of different forms of refugee status and the accompanying rights.

#### **Asylum seeker**

The term means all those who are seeking asylum and are still in the asylum procedure. The use of the term in connection with integration reflects ECRE's belief that, given the duration of asylum procedures in these countries, asylum seekers need to begin the process of integration before they are recognised. This is considered to be essential to the well being of the individual and to their achievement of integration in the longer term; this will therefore be of benefit to the host society.

#### **Migrant, immigrant, newcomer and ethnic minority**

Depending on the context in which these terms are used they should be read as either a general term including all non-indigenous members of the population regardless of legal status; or as groups who are legally distinct from refugees, but may be beneficiaries of the same integration programme/activity.

Immigrants and newcomers are generally understood to be relatively recent arrivals. The term ethnic minority is an accepted term of reference in English to describe communities and groups of people with ethnic minority backgrounds that differ in a systematic way from the majority community. Differences may be due to colour, nationality, geographical origin of individual or family, culture or religion. They are not necessarily newcomers, although they may be.

#### **Discrimination, Positive Action**

Discrimination is used in a general sense to describe disadvantage that refugees suffer as a result either of their identity as 'foreigners' in a country or specifically as 'refugees'. Depending on the legislation in place in different countries discrimination may be direct or indirect. In the context of integration, refugees experience discrimination in a variety of situations, e.g. in accessing services, in the housing or labour market. Positive Action is used particularly in the context of training and employment to describe attempts to remedy discrimination and to effect changes in practice to allow all members of the community to have similar opportunity to achieve their potential.



## 2. COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

### Introduction

This Guide deals with the specific issues involved in cultural and community integration. Aspects of national history such as trade and foreign policy, the historical relationship to minorities and migrants, exploitation or equality, dominant political and ideological beliefs all contribute to an ideological stance towards refugee integration whether this is manifested at the individual or institutional level. Culture, defined in terms of the ways of life of a people, including their language, beliefs, values, social behaviour and organisation, is a term also used to delineate peoples from one another.

However, even within a society there co-exist very different groups and sub-cultures. The complexities of modern societies mean that cultural boundaries overlap and individuals may have more than one cultural and social reference group. Additionally cultural and social change makes it difficult for anyone to define at a specific moment the constituents of a common culture. Some countries still identify their members in terms of people sharing common origins, a common culture and history while other countries and individuals perceive membership as revolving around language, citizenship and shared common values.

Countries have very different traditions in terms of assimilation and tolerance or acceptance of minority cultures. Traditional communities sharing much of the same culture are becoming increasingly rare in modern Europe while there is an increase in the cultural variations within communities.

Communities may exist in a geographical sense (i.e. the neighbourhood), or in the associational sense (i.e. the groups to which individuals belong varying from the family to clubs and friendship groups). European societies are highly complex and composed of multitudinous social and interest groups, communities and associations representing different ideological positions with respect to refugee integration. Amongst these are individuals and public and private bodies that are and can become active agents for the acceptance and integration of refugees.

Refugees are drawn from widely varied cultural backgrounds; even those from the same country of origin may come with very different experiences, expectations, education and abilities. Individual refugees and the society from which they originate have expectations about the nature of social relations and family life, have certain political and religious beliefs, share a common language, history and codes of behaviour; in other words they share the same culture or significant elements of it. Arrival in a new society inevitably means that refugees have to adapt to the ways of the host society in some respects and few refugees are unaware of this. However, the degree to which the presence of refugees and specifically the way in which refugees' cultural differences are tolerated, embraced or rejected is a matter for the host communities in which they go to live.

This guide has two sections. The first part focuses on initial adjustment, while the second is on community relations, development and enrichment.



## Section 1: Initial Adjustment

Refugees arriving to live in a new society need great assistance during the initial process of adjustment. They may well need to learn new forms of public behaviour, strange local and cultural celebrations, foods, laws and customs, language or world view. Survival and the avoidance of conflict with neighbours, the achievement of new goals by refugees, and the creation of some basic mechanisms for interaction are the initial goals of activities focusing on adjustment. Organisations responsible for the initial settlement of asylum seekers and refugees in their new country have to provide creative and appropriate methods of helping people from many different cultures and backgrounds during this process of initial adjustment.

Refugees from the same society do not form a homogenous, socially coherent group; there are important class, educational and gender differences that affect individuals' perspectives and interests as well as their ease of adjustment. The capacity to learn the new language and to adjust to new forms of behaviour may vary, while the traumas and problems in the home country which led to someone becoming a refugee often continue to have serious repercussions on the lives of refugees after settlement.

Other factors influencing the speed and quality of initial adjustment include: the length of time that passes before the granting of refugee status; the conditions under which they live as asylum seekers; the dimensions of economic or practical support available to them; and their own social, psychological and practical resources within their first period of adjustment. The limited financial and practical support for asylum seekers as well as refugees in the Central and Eastern European Countries has the consequence that many seek to resettle in other countries, and this may also limit their willingness to adapt.

### Russian Red Cross, Russia Project: "The Population Movement programme"

This programme focuses on the orientation of refugees and forced migrants. The main activity of this project has been to create a series of reception points within Red Cross regional committees, responsible for providing food and medical supplies. Social workers assess the situation of the refugee and may consult with a Red Cross lawyer on the most effective form of support. Red Cross staff also travel out to rural areas to give advice.

- ☺ Good distribution of information to refugees arriving to live in a new society
- ☺ Consultation of the refugees themselves in planning the project
- ☺ Involvement of forced migrants and refugees as active staff members or volunteers as translators, psychologists or social workers
- ☺ Strong co-operation with local authorities and letters of thanks from refugees themselves
- ☹ Difficult to get local funds
- ☹ Low or negative awareness of refugees led to the need to take time to provide the local public with information through local news agencies, to encourage better understanding of refugee issues
- ✓ *"Cooperation with local government is vital."* (from a comment on the programme)

**Counselling Centre for Integration (CCI), Czech Republic**  
**Project: "Community Centres"**

CCI had intended to create three regional Community Centres in the Czech Republic – in Usti nad Labem, Brno and Ostrava, with the intention of offering help to a specific group of people, but also to influence positively public attitudes towards foreigners. However, due to lack of resources, a decision was taken to open the third centre not in Ostrava (the most distant town from Prague and therefore the most difficult to work in), but in Prague itself. The Community Centres' program includes education activities (lectures, workshops, seminars) prepared for refugees as well as for Czech citizens. The Centres offer cultural evenings organised by individual communities and lectures on countries of origin. Assistance is also included in finding employment, which is often difficult in the regions chosen, which all have high levels of unemployment. Over the next two years further Centres are planned in Plzen and Ostrava.

- ☺ No such Centres had existed before
- ☺ All activities were/are implemented according to refugee's needs or interests
- ☺ The project idea was to enable refugee communities to build own network of independent assistance
- ☺ Volunteers, local partner organizations, city councils, other foreigners living in regions where the centers are were involved in the project
- ☹ Problems with financial provision, which has led to delays in increasing the number of Community Centers and decision to open a third centre in Prague rather than Ostrava.
- ✓ *"Our project was a first attempt to build Community Centers in the Czech Republic with minimal possibilities to estimate results. We were pleased with the extremely positive reaction from refugees themselves, which was a stimulus for us to develop our activity and to extend these centers in other towns in the Czech Republic".*

**Committee of Hope, Volgograd, Russia**  
**Project: "Improvement of information security of refugees and asylum seekers"**

The project was designed to publish a monthly information bulletin entitled "Protection of the rights of forced migrants in Volgograd region" with a print run of 1000. It includes training materials produced as a series of leaflets with information on obtaining social, medical and other aids in Volgograd. Regular radio programmes take place on local radio and a series of meetings have been held with migrants involving local government officials. Over 1500 migrants have benefited, including 750 women.

- ☺ Positive opinions of migrants themselves and local government official
- ☺ Refugees and forced migrants are taking part in all the stages of the project.
- ☹ Lack of knowledge of how to resolve their problems can lead to apathy on the part of the refugees themselves
- ☹ Unwillingness of local officials to solve the problems of the refugees
- ☹ Local population sometimes has a negative approach towards "outsiders"



Photo 1: Project "Community Centres", Counselling Centre for Integration, Czech Republic

## Initial adjustment tailored to the needs of the individual refugee

The initial adjustment period for refugee integration begins upon their arrival as asylum seekers in the country of asylum; there is no clear limit when this period ends since, as suggested above, the factors influencing the opportunity, ability and willingness to adjust varies with individual countries and cases. The responsibilities for initial adjustment vary between states.

NGOs, often with limited resources, have to develop efficient and economic methods of teaching both the language and the culture and customs of the host society. Interesting materials and methods for teaching exist everywhere and what makes them distinctive is their acknowledgement of the necessity to adjust. Teaching materials correspond to the needs, knowledge and abilities of their audience.

Organisations for and of refugees in different states nearly always offer opportunities for personal counseling and advice to refugees and asylum seekers; this takes into account the very different personal and social situations in which refugees find themselves and the need for responsible, skilled professional support. A major problem lies in funding an effective professional service.

## Volunteers and initial social networks to support refugees

Language and cultural differences, dependency on financial support, and residence in problematic accommodation or areas, may lead to difficulties for refugees in meeting people in the host society on an equal footing. Most refugees have lost their professions and cannot easily develop their personal networks in a work related context. The majority have lost their kin, family and personal networks from their home country. Some organisations have recognised this and are designing projects that encourage the formation of social networks that link refugees to people in the host society. Initially, with the arrival of refugees in local communities it is important that there are local people who help them overcome the initial problems they face and who act as mediators between refugees and the host society. A key force aiding integration is the development of volunteerism; while some volunteers may work at the central level with NGOs their most important contribution is at the local community level. They can intervene with the local bureaucracies, explain the ways that the administrative and political system operates, act as intermediaries with local people to explain about the arrival and problems of new refugees and provide information about the local area

and services. Additionally, at simply the very human level they become friendly neighbours who make the community less strange and more welcoming.

**Menedek, Hungary**

**Project: "Social Services for Refugees – Social work"**

In March 1998 Menedék Association launched a new programme called "Social Services for Refugees". The objective of the programme is to improve the mental-health and social situation of migrants (with different status) while promoting their integration. At the offices in Budapest and Debrecen, social workers work with refugees who come to the Association for help. The social workers assist them in establishing and maintaining relationships with the local municipalities and the refugee authority and in finding accommodation, employment and education. The social workers liaise with each other and, if needed, work closely on cases with representatives of other NGOs and municipal organisations. The Association continuously organises club and group sessions for refugees (especially children), where volunteers assist social workers. In addition, there are major community programmes organised occasionally: summer children camps, cultural and sports events. The aim of the summer camps is to promote integration of refugee children by building relationships between those living in private accommodation, and those living in shelters provided by the Red Cross. The children take part in handicraft activities, group games and sports. In 2000 the total number of participants in all the group activities including the summer camp was over 300 people.

- ☺ Large numbers of beneficiaries
- ☺ Cultural events held for refugee children as well as the local community

**Caritas Moscow, Russia**

**Project: "Assistance to the Adaptation of Migrants at their new place of Residence"**

The project was set up in March 2001 to offer a series of training events on social adaptation for migrants. It consists of a series of "outreach visits" to four cities with high concentrations of migrants: Nizhny Novogorod, Kursk, Yaroslavl and Vladimir. In each city a seminar is planned on different integration activities for Caritas staff and local refugees. Topics will include fundraising and preparing project proposals, organizing collections, social reception and joint planning. It will conclude in March 2002 with a mini-seminar on the results of the project.

- ☺ Strengthens contacts between local NGOs and State structures through the organization of joint seminars
- ☺ Large quantity of material distributed to areas with little access to information
- ☺ Improves skills base of staff, volunteers and refugees themselves

## Mechanisms aiding mutual understanding

The recognition that there are problems about communication between refugees and the host society has led to projects developing cultural mediators. These are people who help not only as translators, where inadequate knowledge of the others' language leads to misunderstandings, frustration and incomprehension, but who also explain the social context for both asylum seekers and those in authority who are concerned with refugees. In some situations the work of mediation is often best undertaken by those who are professionally trained, preferably drawn from refugee communities themselves. However, mediation may also be undertaken by members of refugee communities without specific training, in order to promote general knowledge about themselves in local communities, schools and media.

### Equilibre – Solidarity (SOL), Russia Project: "Afghan outreach network"

This project was set up in January 2000 in order to assist SOL in implementing social programmes for asylum-seekers from Afghanistan and to motivate people for self-help activities. The group of outreach workers consists of 11 persons one of whom is a doctor volunteering in the Magee clinic (a clinic concerned with promoting women's' health). All the workers are active members of the Afghani community, who speak good Russian and live in Moscow districts and suburbs. They provide Afghani refugees with information on activities offered and gather information from refugees which is necessary for SOL's work. Such information includes: identification of particular problems which asylum seekers are experiencing; notification of change of personal details; liaison with local schools; support for asylum-seekers needing medical services; and information on cultural and sports programmes.

- ☺ The outreach group totally consists of asylum-seekers
- ☺ Basis for recruiting volunteers amongst the refugees
- ☺ Creates sense of solidarity amongst the outreach network group to help them plan activities
- ☹ In some cases the outreach workers have ethnic/political conflicts with the community members
- ☹ Uncertainty and distrust of the outreach workers by some refugees. This has been overcome slowly
- ✓ *"At first the community was cautious about members of their community trying to offer assistance and even asked the social workers not to give their telephone numbers and addresses. Their comments were very negative at first, as they did not want anybody to interfere in their lives. After the outreach group has successfully demonstrated their assistance abilities, many people have started to trust the group members"*

## General signposts to good practice

- ✓ The development of non traditional and varied ways of teaching about the host society's culture and language should be considered as a more efficient and joyful way of giving an insight into the host society's culture
- ✓ Opportunities for personal counseling and advice should be offered to facilitate refugee adjustment
- ✓ Up to date information should be provided and widely distributed in order to reduce refugee's anxiety about "what to do next" and save time and effort spent in finding information
- ✓ Local volunteers from the host society should be recruited as they can act as mediators and friends to refugees, creating and strengthening social networks between locals and refugees
- ✓ Local and refugee volunteers should be trained to ensure a higher level of expertise in order to fulfill refugees' interests and the creation of more powerful network
- ✓ Refugees should be encouraged to become volunteers and cultural mediators as a way of being active agents for their own integration, increasing their self-esteem and empowering themselves

## Section 2: Community relations, development and enrichment

Refugees settle or are settled into local communities and neighborhoods in the host society. Tolerance of foreigners varies and has to be supported in many ways by organisations for and of refugees. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the host societies and communities are culturally and socially homogenous.

Given their economic situation and the economic environment of many countries of Central and Eastern Europe, many refugees have to live in communities which have social and economic problems of their own. Recognition of this is essential since it means that programmes have to focus on actions supporting those in the local community or neighbourhood, enabling the objective conditions and social life of both the host society members and the refugees to improve.

The integration of refugees does not imply the loss of their own cultural heritage. Activities which place value on this and support traditional forms of self expression may be important in providing psychological reassurance and social support to refugees living in a new and strange society.

Yet at the same time refugee lives are not static; new forms of cultural expression within cultural traditions evolve, whether in the home country or amongst minority communities abroad. Some refugees may have their first opportunity in the host society to extend their cultural perspectives, to learn new forms of self-expression and skills and to take up alternative roles. These may have considerable psychological, social and even economic importance for refugees, their community and the host community. For some refugee women the educational and social opportunities offered by European societies to women represents a liberating experience opening their horizons and life choices. An additional aspect of enrichment arises where refugees are able to contribute culturally to the new communities in which they live.

## Actions to reduce racial harassment and tensions

Tensions within host societies often exist long before the arrival of any specific group of refugees. Some host communities and neighbourhoods are often loci of social and economic problems and conflict. Refugees and asylum seekers may, in some situations, be used as scapegoats for a range of other problems such as unemployment, poverty, bad housing and social exclusion. Less enlightened politicians in government and local authorities may not exhibit much interest in supporting refugees and solving their problems since they fear negative reactions from the general public. An important strategy for promoting refugee integration concerns the making of alliances with a wide range of appropriate persons in the host society.

### **Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR), Romania** **Project: "Only an informed society can be supportive too"**

*"I didn't know there are refugees in Romania"* (a comment on the project)

The project has been implemented since early 1999, and has involved the following components: a "United Against Racism" campaign; organising an event entitled "The festival of your chances"; participation in "Fair of Romanian Foundations and Associations – FAR 2000"; and co-operation with mass media representatives in order to promote a realistic representation of refugees.

- ☺ Large participation of Romanians in the events
- ☺ Increasing number of partners in running either informative campaigns or cultural events specific for the main countries of origin of the refugees
- ☺ Good impact on Bucharest population, assessed through articles in local newspapers and through direct recommendations
- ☺ Promoting refugee issues in a broader context (such as: antiracism, access to education of the disadvantaged groups etc.) is more effective at reaching a wide audience
- ☹ Too difficult and costly to reach the national audience, so project focused more specifically on Bucharest

## Actions to reduce racism amongst young people

Parent-teacher associations are often important not only in the local community but also for the educational progress of children. Support and the encouragement of refugee parents to participate in these parents' associations are important. Participation enables them to identify and work together with host society parents on common problems faced by all the children, helping also to initiate positive and personal links to other parents in the local community.

Work with the head teachers and leaders of such parent associations is one way of ensuring that there is real support for refugee parent participation.

Given the difficulties faced by refugee children, the provision of supporters and mediators within the school helps aid their integration e.g. other children who help them in their studies, explain the organisation of the school and what is expected of them, mediate when there are difficulties and act, if necessary as their champions.

**Vozvrashchenie, Saratov, Russia**

**Project: "Humanitarian education of the young people's consciousness through non formal means in educational institutions in Saratov"**

This project lasted from September 2000 to March 2001. Sixty people have been involved in the first stage. A further participation in the project comprises a total amount of 120 people (schools, lyceums and secondary schools). Courses were held in schools, lyceums and secondary schools on "human rights", "the rights of refugees", and international and Russian legislation on migration. As a continuation of this project, Vozvrashchenie held a training seminar in April 2001 entitled "Relating to yourself and to people like you". This seminar was led by the theatre group "Podval" ('Basement') from Moscow and involved local and refugee children from the region. The purpose of the event was to encourage the children to think about how to work in a team, how to develop leadership skills, to help them address their anxieties about working with others, and to encourage them to think about the rights, views and feelings of others. This was done through a variety of interactive exercises and discussions.

- ☺ Involvement of refugees and Russian children together
- ☺ The local TV channel produced a programme "Round Table" about the project.
- ☺ Pro-active way of addressing the issues of human rights and the rights of refugees
  
- ✓ *"Our organization would like to continue having finance resources for such projects and have the capacity to carry them out on an extended scale".*



Photo 2: Vozvrashchenie, Saratov, project: "Humanitarian education of young people's consciousness". Exercise "We'll catch you together", part of the seminar "Relating to yourself and people like you"



## Promotion of social and cultural interaction

The reality facing many refugees is their relative isolation and difficulty in making new friends and personal connections with members of the host society.

There is often a tendency for only a small minority from the host society to be involved with refugees while, in contrast, the remainder of the host society remains unaware, indifferent and even hostile to their existence. Many NGOs throughout Europe are aware of this gap in social relationships and have developed activities that promote interaction through the development of common community centres that are places where facilities can be shared.

One effective way of promoting social integration in the local community is by sponsoring social membership by refugees in the associations that local people belong to, since the shared interest e.g. in sports, hobbies, activities, can be a substantial basis for equality in relationships between refugees and local people.

Refugees who share the same political or religious views with others in a local community may often be welcome as equal members in such bodies as local branches of trades unions and the various churches.

### **Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR), Romania, Project: "The challenge of crossing cultural barriers"**

*"Thank you for caring about my tradition ... I would like to have more celebrations of this kind"*  
(a comment on the project)

The project has been implemented since early 1999. The first stage of the project was to assess what intercultural and recreational activities were needed through consultation with asylum-seekers living in the Government accommodation centre. On the basis of this, intercultural activities were organised entitled "Muslims and Christians in Winter Traditions", "Muslim New Year", and "Romanian ancient beliefs and rituals". In addition, a chess championship and drawing contest were organised.

- ☺ Decreased number of conflicts between communities living in the camp
- ☺ Decreased number of tensions between the entire community living in the camp and the administration (Ministry of Interior, National Refugee Office)
- ☺ Active participation of refugees in planning the project, involved in setting up activities, purchasing goods and evaluation
- ☹ Difficult to identify external funders, other than UNHCR
- ☹ Problems securing financial involvement of governmental bodies in the project implementation
- ✓ Beneficiaries should be accurately informed on the aim of the project
- ✓ Participation of governmental officials and NGO representatives in his type of activities represents a sort of proof of their sympathetic attitude towards asylum seekers problems

### **Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organization, Hungary Project: "Cultural Activities for Tolerance"**

Since the president of the organisation is Gambian, first of all African contacts were established on a cultural level. Music, dances, clothes and pieces of art are presented in a way which is easy to understand for the public, and offer a symbolic gate to those areas of the

multidimensional African culture that differ greatly from Hungarian tradition. Africans staying in Hungary present original African dances. Live African music such as jambo, juju and afro-beat is presented by the music groups. Musicians and dancers wear traditional clothes, and on occasion Cuban and Indian artists also join the program. Sometimes exhibitions are held and African cookery is offered to enrich the atmosphere. Dances are presented to involve the public in learning about African tradition. The public is invited to try on African clothes, and an environment is created to encourage conversation between Hungarian and African (and sometimes Asian and Cuban) people. In addition, through its contacts with the National Headquarters of Prisons the organisation has held several cultural presentations including dances and live music in Hungarian prisons, where prisoners of African origin are also held.

- ☺ Supports creation of multicultural Hungarian culture, and provides a tolerant viewpoint to all those, who are interested in Africa
- ☺ Programmes for prisoners implement the knowledge of "other cultures"
- ☺ Both African and other prisoners see the programs



Photo 3: Project "Community Centres", Counselling Centre for Integration, Czech Republic

#### Russian Red Cross, Russia

##### Project: "The Population Movement programme summer camps"

Within the "Population Movement programme" in summer 2000 the RRC organised 5 summer camps for refugee and local children, in order to stimulate the integration of refugee children in the society. Numerous Youth Red Cross volunteers "speak" the language of the participating children, which facilitates achieving the aim of getting a better understanding of refuge and "humanity for all" among the children. Psychologists are on hand to monitor children's behaviour and offer support.

- ☺ Possibility for refugee children to meet children of the host country and make friends
- ☺ Some of the volunteers are forced migrant themselves

#### Positive use of the mass media

A common experience is that the media (radio, TV and newspapers) often promote negative stereotypes of asylum seekers and refugees. Occasionally the media play a key role in the fight for equal rights by exposing racism and discrimination and its consequences. Organisations concerned with the welfare and integration of refugees may not necessarily have developed good media contacts and skills in dealing with the media.

There are clear benefits if organisations are able to develop active strategies through carefully planned media campaigns, counteracting negative stories about refugees with positive ones.

This involves promoting knowledge about refugees and how they come to be in the host country, information about the situation that has produced refugees, and more general work on the positive aspects of multiculturalism. Part of such a campaign that appears to have positive results is the creation of personal links to selected journalists by carefully and systematically informing them and in particular ensuring that they are provided with interesting journalistic stories not exclusively concerned with “refugee problems”.

In a number of countries local radio stations have been established for a number of years, which aim to provide refugees, migrants and minorities with a channel of communication in their own language. In other countries such stations or programmes are just beginning. They provide a news service for their listeners on general items of interest such as developments in their home country, while supporting the preservation of the refugee’s own culture. They can play a key role in informing refugees and asylum seekers of their rights and obligations in the host society, of events of interest to refugees, and can stimulate refugee action and organisation.

### Local community development

Some of the rural and urban areas where refugees find themselves settled in Europe are depressed, suffering from economic and social decline. The younger and more dynamic people may have left the area, leaving many people in the host society isolated, poorer than average and without the human resources to regenerate their area. Refugees in this context may be seen either as an additional burden or as a potential resource, a stimulus for local economic development and valuable human capital. Many refugees are relatively young and may have educational and training backgrounds better than the average in the community in which they settle. The role of the Local Authorities is critical in deciding to use refugees as a stimulus for development; where this has been done it can be considered good practice in offering the local community as well as refugees the opportunity to rebuild better and more prosperous communities, attracting new external funding and stimulating new initiatives.

**Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR)\_Romania**  
**Project: "Integration in rural areas"**

*"The assistance given for rural integration was good because it gave me confidence in life ... Now I do not need to keep asking for help and I can really be on my own..."* (a comment on the project)

This project was set up in early 2000, and was designed to focus on the integration of refugees into rural communities. The first stage of the project was to select refugees willing to settle in rural areas. Rural communities themselves then had to be selected where the necessary conditions for the arrival of the refugees could be assured, including the acceptance of the local community and the co-operation of the local authorities. Financial support was then given to the refugees to help with them housing and to assist them in setting up an income-generating activity. Regular contacts with the families and local administration were maintained to assess progress made and to ensure access to schools and medical assistance.

- ☺ 80 % of beneficiaries stated there was no need for further assistance after the initial assistance given
- ☺ Initiative of refugees themselves who were unhappy with living in urban areas
- ☺ Great interest shown for rural integration and registration of additional applications after presenting the project to the other refugees
- ⊗ Problems with relationship with the refugees who had applied for integration in rural areas but were not selected because of the restricted selection criteria
- ⊗ Involvement of governmental institutions and local authorities did not extend to financial support
- ⊗ The lack of co-operation with real estate agencies in order to identify the most advantageous offers led to a time-consuming task of identifying suitable housing
- ✓ Ensure that those local communities are selected which are welcoming the refugee family and those refugee families willing to be integrated
- ✓ Make sure that there are local facilities/services necessary for the integration of the entire family
- ✓ Assistance should be granted according to a scheme jointly agreed with each client. Small corrections of the initial scheme should be negotiated jointly
- ✓ Employ local staff to encourage local integration

## Promoting refugees' own cultures

The process of integration in the new society rarely involves assimilation, both because refugees are usually proud of their own cultural heritage and because members of the host society continue to perceive refugees as culturally different. This difference can become either a positive or a negative element in the relationships between refugees and host society members.

Refugee parents often want their children to learn their language of origin both as a matter of pride, as a means of communication within the family and of preserving their cultural inheritance. Refugee children may be ambivalent about this and it is not unusual to find generational tension within refugee communities precisely because children do not always want to learn their mother tongue and preserve their own culture in their anxiety to be accepted in the new society. Refugees are not always in a position to be able to fund private language teaching.

Of importance here is to note that the devaluing of a refugee's own culture is likely to hinder and work against integration.

The defensiveness and conservatism of refugee groups and communities against the perceived and sometimes real threats represented by the host society and its culture, is often the result of feelings of rejection by members of the host society. Nonetheless refugee communities have to provide opportunities for learning about aspects of their traditional culture, otherwise a large barrier grows between different generations of refugees. In countries with a long history of receiving specific groups of refugees there is often provision made for story telling by the elders, for organised care for older refugees by younger members of the refugee community and, if circumstances permit, organized trips back to the country of origin that include the young people, so they can understand the parents' or grandparents' culture rather better.

Another issue relates to how refugee communities and NGOs can negotiate and deal positively and constructively with new and emerging gender relationships amongst refugees that may alter the traditional roles of men and women.

**Equilibre – Solidarity (SOL), Russia**  
**Project: "Community Centres"**

This project was established in September 1999 involved the creation of community centres for asylum-seekers which offer them a space for their own community activities. The centres offer the following activities: laundry, hairdressers'/cosmetic salon, sewing workshop, PC class, wood carving studio, pottery, sport classes.

- ☺ The asylum-seekers were the ones who gave ideas on setting up different activities in the centres, which has led to different centres focusing on different activities
- ☺ Local officials give their agreement for the set-up of the community centres
- ☹ Not all activities proposed by the asylum-seekers could be organized in community centres
- ☹ The conflicts between refugee communities has led to requests for specific centres to be set up for different ethnic groups
- ✓ *"The people support the idea of keeping up their own culture and traditions and having a safe place where they can convene, talk, drink tea, practice job skills. The people always request us to expand the program and set up new community centres in other districts of Moscow"* (SOL representative)

## Women's development

The special need to enrich the lives of those refugee women who are less educated or not already employed in the labour market, has been recognised by NGOs in many States.

Suddenly placed in difficult circumstances, such as becoming heads of households, confronting the long term unemployment of their husband, not understanding their children, having an inadequate grasp of the local language, social isolation, there is a recognition that special attention needs to be paid to their needs. The development of special facilities and programmes for refugee women over and beyond language classes has been undertaken with success in many countries. The provision of childcare facilities is an obvious barrier to refugee women's participation in programmes and a need for child minding facilities to be provided and advertised. The development of links to local women is clearly important in helping them to understand the host society, the new opportunities they have in their creative and personal lives.

### Independent Social Support, Belarus Project: "Society and Culture"

The main aim of this project "Society and Culture" was to overcome social isolation and the improvement of refugees' lives. This has been achieved through organising committees of assistance within the community of refugee women in Minsk, and to organise various forms of leisure activity with their active participation. A club for refugee women has been created which focuses on psychological and social adaptation, knowledge of Belarusian culture, and encouraging good mutual relations with Belarusian women. The project involved around 60 refugee women, all from Afghanistan.

- ☺ Women – refugees independently try to solve their own problems together, potential leaders have emerged among the group
- ☺ Interest from the media led to the national newspapers "Seven Days" and "Free News" issuing several publications, in which the destiny of the refugees in general and the life of one family of Afghani refugees in particular were depicted
- ☹ Existing legislation does not make it possible to solve the problems of women who have not yet been officially recognised as refugees
- ☹ Distrust by refugee women and their families of the organisers of the projects, which was overcome by a sincere and interested approach to them, trying to involve them in the decision-making for the effective realization of the project itself
- ✓ *"In our view, in the organization of a similar project, the activity of the refugees themselves should be more and more encouraged; it would be useful listening to their proposals and considering the special features of their background. This is necessary to avoid activities which are uninteresting or pointless for the refugees themselves"*

## General signposts to good practice

- ✓ Alliance should be made with a wide range of influential persons or appropriate intermediaries in the host society as an effective way of increasing interest in the support of refugees
- ✓ Refugees should be helped to take a proactive role as this has a positive effect for their human rights, stops them being victims and creates social solidarity with others
- ✓ In order to sensitize fellow pupils about refugee issues, school children willing to act as sponsors for refugee children in their school should be identified
- ✓ Participation of refugees in local associations and clubs should be facilitated so that they can meet members of the host country on the basis of common interests and equality and on a long term basis
- ✓ Community centres shared by refugees and local people providing common facilities and common events should be developed as they constitute a place where local people and refugees can meet on an equal basis
- ✓ Contacts should be made with local and national journalists and accurate information provided to combat negative stereotypes of refugees in the media
- ✓ Refugee cultural heritage should be valued and used as a way of enriching the host culture and preserving the identity of the refugees
- ✓ Special programmes should be developed to help aid those refugees women at risk of social exclusion to expand their horizons and to understand the host society, in which they are living
- ✓ Projects supporting refugee creativity of all kinds should be promoted as an effective way to integration

## 3. EDUCATION

### Introduction

Education furthers integration in every society and helps human beings to become more constructive and active members of society. To facilitate education, the basic needs for housing, health and nutrition first need to be satisfied. As a result of adequate provision for education and training, opportunities for entering the labour market and finding long-term employment will be substantially increased.

Education should not be a one-way process of teaching skills and rules to an “unknowing” person, with adaptation as its ultimate aim; education should be a two-way process during which both sides – teacher and student, host society and refugee community – can learn from each other. The knowledge brought by refugees should be used to enhance the diversity of the host society.

Several organisations provide educational services to refugees and asylum seekers. These services include language courses for adult refugees, refugee children and interculturalism and access to higher education for refugees (including the recognition of foreign qualifications).

This guide has two parts. The first part focuses on educational provision for refugee children and young people in schools. The second part focuses on language courses for adults and access to further education; it also describes the processes and procedures required for the recognition of foreign qualifications for further education and employment.



## Section 1: Educational provision for refugee children and young people

Young refugees and asylum seekers are a diverse group that has a wide range of educational and social needs, but the following list aims to encompass some common experiences:

- an interrupted education in the country of origin;
- an overwhelming trauma in the country of origin (for a small number this may affect the ability to learn and rebuild their lives in the country of settlement);
- a decrease in standard of living or other major changes in their lives;
- not being cared for by parents or usual guardians;
- living with people who are not fully informed of their educational and social rights;
- receiving reduced or no welfare benefits;
- living in temporary accommodation (and as a result attending several schools);
- speaking little or none of the national language of the country of settlement;
- suffering from bullying or isolation in school;
- finding it difficult to gain access to further or higher education due to their immigration status or a lack of access to benefits.

### Assessment of educational level

The reception and orientation of refugee children and young people is one of the most important stages of the process of integration into educational activity. It is vital, not only for the pupil, but also for her/his family or guardians, and to ensure that the education provider obtains accurate initial information about the pupil. Both the pupil and the guardian need to understand the new education system and the input that will be required or expected of them. The education provider needs to obtain as much information as possible about the pupil – her/his origin, language(s), educational background, health, immigration status and future plans – in order to place her/him according to her/his needs and abilities.

#### **Equilibre-Solidarity, Russia**

#### **Project: "Primary/secondary education based on self-developed methods and program of teaching"**

This project was set up in 1994 and offers primary and secondary education in Russian schools for refugee children. Support is also offered to the families of the refugee children through regular parent-teacher meetings, while preparatory classes are offered for children and adults in community centres. Russian is taught according to the methodology of Russian as a Foreign Language (RKL); for children of primary school age most lessons are offered in the native language with intensive Russian classes as well; the intention is that after one or two years the child is ready to be enrolled into the local school. Around 700 pupils benefit from this project per year.

- ☺ High number of pupils involved in project have subsequently been able to enrol in local schools
- ☺ Refugee parents' opinions taken into account when planning the project
- ☹ High turnover of pupils due to departure of many refugees
- ☹ Need to develop new methodology to suit the refugee children, as existing methodology was unacceptable



Photo 4: Project "Community Centres", Equilibre-Solidarity, Russia. This shows the performance of the Afghan children's theatre troupe performing the Russian play "Snegurochka" written by Ostrovski. The costumes were handmade by women refugees and the performances were held in all the community centers of the organization, local schools, local orphanages (as a charity event).

**Hope Assistance Centre for Refugees and Forced Migrants, Perm region, Russia**  
**Project: "Educational Centre for refugees and forced migrants"**

This project was set up in 1999 and financed by the Ford Foundation through its small grants programme. The programme was designed to open an educational centre for Afghan refugee children. The centre offered free educational services in order to prepare the refugee children for education in local schools, and also included extra-curricular activities such as computer skills and summer camps. Teachers were found from the local Teacher Training college, the local NGO Centre of Children's Creation, and the municipal Committee for the Protection of Nature.

- ☺ All children who took part were subsequently able to enter local schools
- ☺ Involvement of refugees and forced migrants in planning and implementation of the project
- ☺ Strong involvement of other governmental and non-governmental actors.
- ☹ Initial shyness of refugee children to attend special classes and, potentially, go to school with younger children.
- ☹ Problems with teaching girls and boys in one classroom

**L'vov regional organization "Afghan Refugees", Ukraine  
Project: "New Homeland"**

In 1999, with funding from UNHCR, Afghan Refugees opened a Sunday school for Afghani refugee children to study Afghan language and culture for 18 children. A refugee teacher was employed to offer the classes, and special textbooks were produced. In addition to the classes for Afghani refugee children, adult refugees were offered courses on Ukrainian culture and local history and over 20 different classes were organised per week. As a complement to this, consultations were offered to refugees on issues relating to education, including help in completing documents, translation services and direct assistance with gaining access to education

- ☺ Involvement of adults as well as children made access easier for the children themselves
- ☺ Individually tailored consultations on education issues
- ☺ Involvement of refugees in planning and implementation
- ☹ Relatively short duration (nine months) as no funding was available in 2000

## Teacher training

Raising awareness amongst teachers and other educationalists about issues facing refugee children is recognised in all countries to be essential to the successful provision of education for this client group. The teacher is a crucial mediator between the refugee family and the host society. She/he will have the greatest contact with the pupil and can make all the difference to the progress of that pupil.

Experts believe that teacher training should aim to improve knowledge and understanding about the development of identity of refugee pupils and the effect on their education and learning.

**POST Education Centre, Belarus  
Project: Teacher training on inter-cultural education for Minsk secondary schools**

This project builds on a programme of intercultural exchange for young people from Belarus, Poland and Germany. This idea has been extended under a UNHCR programme to incorporate groups of refugee children in the Minsk region. It is hoped that this programme will make possible for students to have positive relations with representatives of other ethnic groups, nationality and culture, including refugees. The project involves representatives of local authorities, education departments and school headteachers to emphasise the importance of raising awareness on the situation of refugees in Belarus, and on issues such as stereotypes, prejudice, racism, discrimination. The project also trains teachers in participatory and inventive teaching methods such as role-play, and aims to explore new approaches to teaching world-history and extra-curricular activities. Time is also spent looking at the importance of evaluation of feedback from pupils in the classroom and analysis of this. The teacher training takes the form of four seminars entitled: "Content, form and inter-cultural education in schools".

- ☺ Involvement of local authorities, teachers and headteachers to ensure maximum distribution of the training materials
- ☺ Publication of a textbook entitled "Intercultural Education in Schools" planned for Autumn 2001

## Special provision for young people

Refugees from the age of 14 to 25 need special support and provision. They are approaching the end of their school careers, but often have no school qualifications. Sometimes they are refused places in mainstream higher education, and are therefore driven into vocational training that is not always appropriate or desired.

Even worse, they are forced to stay at home with nothing to do because they are too old for compulsory education (over 16), but too young for adult language provision (over 18). This group has the capacity and potential to achieve high levels of motivation. However, if neglected, motivation levels can fall to the other extreme.

### **Equilibre-Solidarity (SOL), Russia**

#### **Project: "External education project for adolescent asylum-seekers"**

This project, set up in January 1999, is aimed at adolescents who are too old to attend local school or whose level of knowledge does not allow them to attend the grades that correspond to their age. The pupils are divided into three groups; the first is educated at preparatory level, the second corresponds to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of the local education and the third corresponds to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Ninth and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students receive official certificates of education when they leave the school. 80% of project beneficiaries are girls, 20% boys.

- ☺ This project improve young people's opportunities for successful integration and prevent them from being neglected by a system in which they are too old for compulsory education, but too young to access adult provision
- ☺ Growth in numbers passing exams, from five in 1999 to a projected 18 in 2001.
- ☺ High number of pupils carry on to pass exams in local schools after completing the courses
- ☺ Possibility for continuation from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- ☺ Three graduates have been accepted into medical college
- ☺ Asylum-seekers employed as deputies to local headteachers
  
- ☹ Problems with local education authorities; only one has agreed to allow pupils educated in this system to enter local schools

## Refugee community involvement in education

The involvement of parents/guardians in the education of their children is generally seen as extremely important for successful schooling in Europe. It is often difficult for guardians of refugee children to participate easily in their education due to lack of knowledge of the national language; lack of knowledge about the host educational system; a different understanding of schooling; and the amount of time that is often taken up by trying to find employment and surviving in a new country. For this reason, special steps must be taken to ensure that refugee guardians are fully enabled to participate in parental activities of mainstream schools.

Successful integration into society is often dependent on integration into a refugee community. The refugee community also plays an important role in teaching minority languages and culture to refugee pupils. At present, this form of education takes place entirely separately from mainstream schools. Closer communication and involvement between refugees communities and schools would be an advantage both for refugee pupils and for non-refugee pupils.

**ADRA Ukraine**  
**Project: "Refugee Family Support Centre"**

The project was set up in March 1999 as the first of its kind on the territory of the CIS, in rooms within the buildings of Kindergarten No. 758 in Kyiv. Each day between 10 and 100 people are involved in the centre's activities. Working groups are organized for intensive pre-school preparation and tuition in Ukrainian and Russian. The Centre also intervenes with schools in allowing children to gain access to education. This has led to agreements with four schools at which refugee children study, and negotiations are underway with a further 20 schools. Refugees who speak good Ukrainian and Russian are appointed as supervisors at the schools, and act as go-between to assess what aid should be provided to the children.

- ☺ Good interaction between Centre and local education authorities
- ☺ Good involvement of refugees themselves
- ☺ Attention on most vulnerable categories of refugees and asylum-seekers, in particular women and children
- ☺ Co-operation with refugee women's committee
- ☹ Limited space in rooms in a kindergarten
- ☹ Initial difficulties in attracting representatives of the refugee communities to the work of the Centre; need to undertake extensive consultation before gaining the full trust of some sections of the refugee community

## General signposts to good practice

- ✓ Assessment of educational levels should consider all language competencies in order to get a full picture of the language and cognitive abilities
- ✓ Standardised systems of assessment should be developed and implemented nation-wide in order to create a consistent process; a properly co-ordinated approach is especially important for pupils who are frequently being re-housed and therefore changing schools
- ✓ The tuition of the language of the host country in all mainstream classes is seen as crucial for the integration of refugees pupils in their classes. This includes the use of mixed ability teaching
- ✓ The implementation of mainstream provision of minority language tuition should be considered as an important integration activity
- ✓ The careful revision of existing teaching materials and methodologies and the development of new materials and methodologies which take in to account cultural difference and raise awareness about exile amongst pupils and teachers is important for furthering integration of refugees in schools
- ✓ In order to use the skills of refugees and their special knowledge of refugee issues, it is recommended that refugees are provided with improved access to teacher training course and that specific training for refugee teachers is developed
- ✓ Refugees should have the opportunity to act as cultural mediators
- ✓ Special efforts should be made to raise awareness of refugees issues amongst pupils of the host country in order to achieve greater acceptance of refugees and asylum seekers in society and to combat xenophobia and racism

## Section 2: Language courses for adult refugees and recognition of foreign diplomas for refugees

Language is a vehicle for integration; if a refugee can speak and understand the language of the host country, opportunities for integration are dramatically increased. Learning the national language is therefore a top priority and should be made available at a very early stage of the integration process. There are currently wide differences in the educational provision available to refugees in different states, and these varying levels of quality affect refugees' opportunities for learning the national language and accessing further education, training and employment.

### Training of teachers to meet refugees' needs

In most countries, special training courses are available for teaching foreigners, but very rarely are these courses designed to cater for the special needs of refugees or other traumatized students. For the majority of teaching offered to refugees, the teacher's previous experience can be the most positive element. Whether teachers are volunteers or paid staff is not relevant for this discussion, as long as they are professionally trained, consistent and motivated.

### Simultaneous learning of language, culture and vocational training

In order to enhance language classes, teachers should work with those providing information about culture and society, and psychologists or counselors. Learning new skills whilst learning the national language can increase motivation and technical skills as well. For refugees who have a higher qualification, vocational training courses linked to language courses are more fruitful and efficient than only language courses, provided the students are not complete beginners.

#### **Caritas Polska, Poland** **Project: "Educational programme"**

As part of its programmes in the field of migration, Caritas Polska provides assistance and facilitates access to vocational training in computer and driving skills. It also offers educational counselling and assistance in contacts with schools; facilitates access to secondary and higher education, and provides language training for recognized refugees. In addition, a separate children's project offers school materials and monitors children's progress at school.

- ☺ Increased interest in learning language through combining this with other skills
- ☺ Facilitates contacts between refugees and national education system
- ☺ Children's project – providing children with school materials and monitoring children's progress at schools
- ☹ Insufficient fund to cover all needs

## Specialized projects catering for particular needs at different stages

Some refugee projects are designed to meet the needs of a specific group of refugees, either of a particular gender or nationality or by age or those who are survivors of trauma. Every individual carries a baggage of experience, knowledge, trauma and dreams, all of which are constantly evolving. Provision for refugees should be able to match all these elements in order to meet needs as and when they occur.

There is a direct link between health and the ability to learn. In some cases, especially for older refugees who may have lost their social status when they left their home country, studying provides satisfaction and can be seen as a way of healing trauma, and therefore providing a bridge for integration.

### **Counselling Centre for Integration (CCI), Czech republic: Project: "Community Centres" (see details in section Community and Culture)**

Within the "Community Centre" project various educational courses are offered. Czech language courses are complemented by course in computer skills, provided by community workers and often directed at children. Lectures are offered in asylum law and legislation of the Czech Republic concerning refugees, involving academics and university students.

- ☺ Increased interest in learning the language when students get involved in different activities and gain different skills
- ☺ Increases knowledge amongst refugees of legislation concerning them

## Improving motivation for course attendance

Particularly in those countries in which refugees are not entitled to social benefits, it is essential that attendance of classes is facilitated and encouraged. This entails paying for travel expenses and either providing in-house childcare, or paying a childcare allowance. Courses should also be organised to be flexible in order to accommodate the students.

In those countries where courses are not compulsory, they are mainly organised by the voluntary or the training sector and retaining students is difficult. The main problem is inspiring the initial motivation to attend a language class, and overcoming uncertainty about status and financial insecurity. When basic needs have still not been resolved, such as housing, food and status, it is obviously very difficult to concentrate on learning the language and investing time and energy in the integration process. Incentives could include refunding travel costs, childcare support, provision of food or snacks and, above all, assurance that the course is directly relevant to the refugee's needs. The place where the courses are held is also important; refugees might be more likely to attend courses where they can also socialise and exchange cultural information, such as in a community centre or a university.

**Bjornson Society, Slovakia**

**Project: "Integration of refugees in the Central Slovakian Region"**

This project lasted throughout 2000. As part of the project, residential six-month Slovak language courses were offered, four times per week for two class hours per session. Upon completing the residential courses refugees were offered affordable accommodation in various areas of Slovakia. The courses were held with qualified teachers in specially equipped classrooms. Textbooks were supplied free of charge. Further courses were offered according to the needs of individual refugees. In addition, re-qualification courses and employment training was offered, including helping refugees to have their qualifications recognized domestically.

- ☺ Individually-tailored to suit refugees' needs
- ☺ Incentive to complete course and be offered accommodation
- ☺ Helps qualified refugees to work according to their specialisation



Photo 5: Project "Integration of refugees in the Central Slovakian Region", Bjornson Society, Slovakia Trip to ore mine in town Banska Stiaunica for refugees living in central Slovakian region, July 2000.

## Recognition of foreign diplomas for refugees

As mentioned in relation to the Bjornson Society's project above, the recognition of the qualifications held by refugees is a crucial step in the process of settlement and integration into the host society. Recognition is required both for furthering their education and for getting a job. Many refugees in Europe come from cities and have good levels of education; a substantial number hold academic and professional diplomas and have had considerable work experience. However, research has identified lack of recognition of their foreign qualifications as one of the key barriers they will face. Lack of recognition can be due to the following:

- lack of necessary documentation held by refugees;
- lack of appropriate provisions in the host country for assessing and recognising foreign (and refugee) qualifications;
- lack of appropriate financial resources required for recognition procedures;
- even when recognition is not required, or when there has been a formal recognition process, refugees still might find that their diplomas do not receive 'de facto' recognition by employers or education providers.



## General signposts to good practice

- ✓ Free access to language courses should be made available on the arrival of the asylum seeker.
- ✓ Speaking a language is not enough to integrate fully into a new society; cultural and social orientation is an asset for successful integration, and should be part of all integration programmes for refugees. Integration is a two-way process and the host society should also promote understanding of and familiarity with the cultures of refugees
- ✓ Special provision should be made available to address isolated cases and meet the needs of smaller groups
- ✓ All language classes should include provisions for childcare and travel costs
- ✓ Refugees should have the opportunity to act as cultural mediators
- ✓ Recognition of qualification both for education and employment should be a right
- ✓ Procedures for recognition should be simple, transparent and effective, and carried out in accordance with international conventions and standards. They should lead to a recognition statement that is authoritative and accepted by employers and education providers
- ✓ Advice and guidance with regard to recognition and qualification should be available
- ✓ In case of partial recognition, when a qualification does not reach the appropriate standards of the host society for that particular qualification, provision for remedial action (such as adaptation or bridging courses or supervised re-training) should be made available to refugees
- ✓ In the absence of papers, refugees should be given the opportunity to "reconstruct" their qualifications through alternative means such as photocopies, student ID cards, statements and other testimonials

## 4. EMPLOYMENT

### Introduction

#### Key players in refugee employment

**Government agencies:** Government-run bodies such as public employment services have to deal with the question of to what extent should refugees be treated similarly to others and to what extent as a special group. They also have to assess the extent to which the way refugees are treated simply reflects a national tradition, and whether specific programmes targeted at refugee employment will have any real effect.

**Non-governmental organisations [NGOs]:** These include national or local organisations dealing only with refugees, those dealing with them together with other immigrants, ethnic minorities or vulnerable groups, and refugee-based organisations including community organisations. A key question is how much they should be advocating or supporting special measures specific to refugees. NGOs are also, of course, frequently employers of refugees, and so must be aware of employment issues in the context of their own organisations.

**Employers:** There are often differences between how employers see the problem of refugee employment, and how refugees themselves see the problem, and this needs to be addressed. Attitudes of employers in the public as well as the private sector need to be taken into account, as there can be differences as well as many similarities between the two.

**Trade unions:** These play a varying role and there would seem to be room for more good work to be done on refugee employment issues through this route. This could be in furtherance of public and work-place awareness to include the recognition that certain issues are specific to refugees, work in the field of anti discrimination and work with employers, or campaigning on human rights and refugee issues, such as the right to work for refugees and asylum-seekers.

This Guide has two parts: the first focuses on training and employment programmes to help refugees get jobs, as well as how to remove barriers to eligibility for work; the second part is on self-employment.

## Section 1: Training & employment programmes to help refugees get jobs

### The right to work for asylum-seekers and refugees

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees states that:

*...States shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory the most favourable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country...2. ... restrictive measures imposed on aliens...for the protection of the national labour market shall not be applied to refugees...3. ...States shall give sympathetic consideration to assimilating the rights of all refugees with regard to wage earning employment to those of nationals...[Wage earning employment: Article 17.1]*

There have been a number of active campaigns across Europe on the issue of permission to work for asylum seekers. These are usually long-term campaigns where strong alliances are important, but where changes, often only small ones, can be effected by consistent campaigning as well as through working with individual clients.

#### Centre of Social Innovation, Belarus

##### Project: "Creation of a centre of professional support for refugees"

The centre of professional support was opened in February 2000 with the financial support of UNHCR Minsk. The centre helps recognised refugees to find suitable employment and acts as a mediator between the employer and the refugee. The centre also introduces the refugee to the basic principles of the labour market. The centre has helped around 150 persons since it opened, all of whom have refugee status. Since February 2000 several refugees have received assistance in registering their own legal businesses, while two refugees were offered work in a construction company. In addition, two business plans, submitted by groups of refugees in two towns of Belarus, Gomel and Grodno, were considered and changes suggested. Finally, a series of training seminars took place on issues such as "How to start a business" and "Working with the labour market", and pamphlet were published entitled "How to search for a job" and "Refugees in the Belarusian labour market". All activities involved the close collaboration of government bodies, in particular the Committee on Migration and the regional Migration Service, and other NGOs including the Red Cross and the Refugee Counselling Service.

- ☺ Effective links between NGOs and public bodies
- ☺ Respects individual needs
- ☺ Provision of information through the publication of the aforementioned pamphlets
- ☺ Consultation with refugees in preparing the project
- ☹ Initial caution from the side of the refugees. This was overcome by advertising the centre in places where refugees often visited, such as the Committee on Migration, the Belarusian Red Cross, and the Refugee Counselling Service. Letters were also sent to refugees inviting them to visit the centre.
- ☹ Difficult to find time to hold training courses for the refugees
- ☹ Many refugees preferred not to look at long-term solutions offered by the centre, which led the centre in turn to focus more on individual consultations
- ☹ Lack of legal status or residence registration of many refugees in Belarus

## Presenting refugees to employers

“Refugees are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances”. This was the conclusion of some market research completed in the UK in 1998 as to arguably the best way for refugee agencies to represent refugees. This seemed to be preferable to their being persistently portrayed (i) as if they were all Einsteins via an unrepresentative and elitist use of famous figures (ii) through shock tactics causing a national guilt trip (iii) as not here through choice, however true that may be (iv) as if they were the only problem in the world, or (v) as purely the result of distant dictatorships in far off lands. Refugees themselves are often in a dilemma between wanting to be portrayed equally with the host population, and needing (at least initially) to be given special treatment.

### **Charitable Foundation Edelweiss, Ukraine** **Project: “Professional training for job placement”**

In 2000 Edelweiss set up a project on professional training for refugees, with the intention of training them to be placed in a Ukrainian carpentry firm. Twelve refugees received professional training in a technical school, and on completing the course the refugees were employed by the firm, where they continued to improve their skills.

- ☺ Useful example of NGO/private sector partnership
- ☺ Providing qualified professional training
- ☺ Reassuring improvement of refugees' skills also after job has started
- ⊗ The skills were not so high as expected and only two refugees remained working in the firm

### **Menedek, Hungary** **Project: “Social Services for Refugees – Integration into the Labour Market”**

Since March 1998 Menedek has run a programme of employment services for refugees. The programme aims to train or re-train refugees and help them find employment. Assistance is offered in skills development, job-hunting and entrepreneurship, and the organisation offers Job Finding Clubs and Orientation Trainings. The Orientation Trainings give basic information about the Hungarian labour market and give examples of how to look for a job in Hungary. The Job Finding Club takes place in Menedek's own offices and focuses on developing job-finding skills. This is a seven-day course with the following elements: job goals, presenting oneself to employers, making business cards, writing a CV, looking at job adverts, writing formal letters, interview techniques and completing forms. Participants were encouraged to actually start looking for a job during the course. Within this programme Menedek has also offered advice to over 70 refugees wishing to submit an application to the UNHCR Hungary Small Business Grant Programme, and to date around 30 people have submitted a business plan to UNHCR to receive a 500 000 HUF non-refundable grant.

- ☺ Tailored to suit individual needs
- ☺ Equips refugees with strong vocational skills to excel in the workplace
- ☺ Allows refugees to take advantage of other financial resources ie. UNHCR small business grants

**Equilibre-Solidarity (SOL), Russia**  
**Project: "Job-skills training for asylum-seekers"**

This project was set up in September 1999 and implemented by SOL in order to help asylum-seekers in Moscow integrate into Russian society. Many of the asylum-seekers involved already had professional qualifications, so SOL focused on short-term re-training. Asylum-seekers were asked to fill in questionnaires on their own background and needs, and training organised to match those needs. After the trainings took place asylum-seekers were asked for their opinions, to help improve future courses. In addition, SOL arranged for state-recognised diplomas to be awarded to those who had trained to a sufficient level and organised internships prior to helping the asylum-seekers look for jobs. In 2000 over 150 people benefited from such training.

- ☺ Relatively high success rate
- ☺ Project initiated by asylum-seekers themselves
- ☹ Many refugees lacked official documents and so faced more problems registering for courses
- ☹ Many refugees failed to gain employment immediately after completing the course, and became critical
- ✓ *"In general people choosing the course alternative already know what they need the certain skill for"*

## Equal opportunities in employment

Several different national traditions exist in relation to equal opportunities policies. Amongst many refugees, however, this is a contentious issue. Some consider that equal opportunities policy is little more than political correctness; others, that such policies are purely cosmetic and hide continuing inherent inequalities between minority groups and the rest of the population. A more positive image is that equal opportunities initiatives offer a real prospect of introducing greater fairness and of utilising talents in the work-place that would otherwise remain under-used or hidden. Thus, monitoring "equal opportunities" with reference to ethnicity, let alone separately identifying refugees, is a complex issue with emotional, legal, constitutional and geographical differences across European countries.



Photo 6: Project "Community Centres", Counselling Centre for Integration, Czech Republic

## General signposts to good practice

- ✓ Those with refugee status should have unconditional access to permission to work under the 1951 UN Convention
- ✓ Given the current length of asylum determination procedures together with governments' commitment to make speedier decisions it is seen as essential that governments should make a commitment to give permission to work to asylum seekers who have not had a decision after a reasonable period, and to others with subsidiary protection
- ✓ Dependants of asylum seekers (spouse and children over 16) should be included in the right to work or have access to training
- ✓ Alliances need to be created (with employers, trade unions, public, media) to press for changes where these are still needed. It is necessary to encourage refugee involvement in the delivery of advice and guidance to refugees in the employment context: this increases refugee employment and shows refugees as role models
- ✓ Any employment restrictions that are claimed to be justified by national security and citizenship considerations should be minimal and based upon reasonable grounds
- ✓ Great need for the further development of the potential for use of internet to foster employment prospects for refugees and information and training for adviser
- ✓ Refugees are not a homogeneous group and appropriate care needs to be taken to treat refugees as "special" where this is needed and in the mainstream where this is possible
- ✓ However, refugee's perception on the need not to be treated "differently", as this causes more discrimination and resentment, must be respected

## Section 2: Self-Employment

It is clear that, in order to start up their own business, refugees need the following:

- Information upon which to base decisions before starting a business, and advice before starting
- Information, training and support after start-up
- Money for business starts and for expansion
- Money for individuals and families while starting up

Different national contexts demonstrate different ways of supporting entrepreneurs in the initial stage through the benefit system. Some national examples exist of good practice in national “welfare” policies offering help with survival income and wage subsidy programmes, aiming to reduce personnel costs during the first crucial stage after starting a business. These use the welfare benefit system “actively” to help create self-employment opportunities including, but not exclusively, for refugees.

### Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR), Romania

**Project: “Self Employment”** (for further details on rural integration see Community and Culture)

The rural integration project of CNRR involved a component of granting material or financial support, according to the needs expressed by the refugees. This focused on support for the household and assisting them in setting up an income-generating activity such as agriculture or a small family business in areas such as micro-farming, car servicing or carpentry.

- ☺ 80 % of beneficiaries stated they needed no further assistance after initial start-up costs had been covered
- ☺ Co-operation with other actors involved in running the project in order to select the best form of employment for the refugees
- ⊗ Problems with the relationship with refugees not selected for the programme because of the strict selection criteria
- ⊗ Lack of financial support of government bodies
- ✓ *“The assistance given for rural integration was good because it gave me confidence in life ... Now I do not need to keep asking for help and I can really be on my own...”*

### Caritas Polska, Poland

**Project: “Access to the job market”**

In 1994 a three- year project between Raphaels-Werk and Caritas Polska began, with the objective of offering counseling to migrants on various issues including access to the job market. Three small business grants were awarded thanks to UNHCR, of between 1500 and 2000 Polish zloty each.

- ☺ Provision of funding to set up individual business
- ⊗ Insufficient funds to cover all needs



Photo 7: Trip for asylum seekers to Bcjnice castle, summer 1999; project "Integration of refugees in the Central Slovakian Region" Bjornson Society, Slovakia.

#### Legal consultation centre "Human rights without borders" (HRWB), Ukraine Project: "Job placement"

In 1999 HRWB offered consultation to 18 clients relating to job placement. Six of these were directed to resource centres which offer instruction on carrying out work and creating a business plan. In addition, a further 12 clients were offered advice on Ukrainian labour legislation and 41 people were advised on obtaining assistance from UNHCR.

- ☺ Good links between NGO and public service guarantee more effective outcomes in employment results
- ☺ Tailored to suit individual needs

## General signposts to good Practice

- ✓ It is necessary that refugees receive welfare benefits which do not terminate once a refugee enters into self-employment, but must continue for a reasonable period until a business is seen to be sustainable
- ✓ Legal barriers, restrictions and unnecessary "red tape" are particularly hard for refugees to overcome as they are new to the system
- ✓ Funds are needed for specialist advice and training on "self-employment" both before and after start-up
- ✓ Refugees are not a homogeneous group and appropriate care needs to be taken to treat refugees as "special" where this is needed and in the mainstream where this is possible
- ✓ However, refugee's perception on the need not to be treated "differently", as this causes more discrimination and resentment, must be respected





## 5. HEALTH

### Introduction

According to the definition of the World Health Organisation (WHO) health is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Refugees can suffer from a range of health problems relating to their experience of political persecution, imprisonment, torture and the conditions of flight from their country of origin. Once in the country of asylum, refugees’ health can also be affected by a serious decline in their standards of living (housing conditions, unemployment or underemployment, social isolation and low income). Other external factors in the settlement phase such as insecurity of the asylum application, fear for the safety of family members, legal and bureaucratic difficulties in family reunification, adaptation to the new environment (e.g. new language, habits and culture) and hostile attitudes within the country of asylum might have an impact on refugee health, especially mental health.

Health is to be considered a vital element in the integration process as people’s quality of life and personal development is related to their physical and mental well-being. Therefore focusing on refugee health means taking into account prevention strategies carried out by the country of asylum in order to alleviate refugee health problems; reflecting societal aspects and the accessibility of appropriate treatment; and last but not least the setting up of special provision tailored to refugee-specific needs and their expectations of care, if and when this is required.

This Guide consists of two sections; the first focuses on access to health care services and the second on dealing with traumatic experiences.

## Section 1: The issue of entitlement; access to health care services

The right to health is affirmed by articles of several treaties and international Conventions<sup>1</sup>. Notwithstanding, its substantive meaning is far from being assured as it also involves societal aspects and varying health care systems. If health and human rights are considered to be an interdependent phenomenon, they are especially at risk among the most vulnerable groups of society: children, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, persons deprived of liberty, the mentally ill, drug addicts and prostitutes.

According to article 23 of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a Convention refugee is fully entitled to access to the NHS (National Health Service) on the same ground as nationals. On the other hand, asylum seekers' and humanitarian / de facto refugees' right to health varies according to national legislation. Some European countries, because of financial constraints, limit the access and treatment of asylum seekers and humanitarian refugees to necessary care only. Some of them provide asylum seekers with a health check-up on their arrival; some others neither entitle asylum seekers to access to the NHS nor provide them with any medical reception.

People arriving at the border could be in poor health, having spent some time in a refugee camp, or as a result of coming from regions where health conditions are bad (e.g. war-torn countries). Unfortunately host countries have the tendency to concentrate on immediate complaints only, whereas prevention would be an investment in future well-being.

There is a "continuum" as far as refugee health is concerned from the pre-asylum period through to the time asylum seekers get refugee status. Adequate reception schemes and a timely recognition of the consequences of violence and forced migration are extremely important for the realization of an effective policy of health prevention.

The main question at stake is how the health check should be implemented and whether it should be compulsory or voluntary. For mandatory screening the major drawbacks are: people can be tested without being informed; public opinion could associate refugees / migrants crossing a border with diseases; screening could interfere with the asylum procedure. If care is a voluntary process, from a public health perspective things are obviously different. One hypothesis could be compulsory screening for some contagious diseases in reception centres and voluntary ones for others.

Granting health rights does not necessarily imply a full enjoyment of such rights, especially for newly arrived refugees. Various obstacles can hinder refugee access to health services, connected with problems of communication, as well as economic and administrative hindrances. In this sense there is the need for some kind of provision to help refugees access the healthcare system.

The major problems with regard to accessing the health care services are:

- (i) communication problems
- (ii) language and cross-cultural barriers
- (iii) lack of information on how the NHS functions
- (iv) lack of training / awareness by health personnel about refugee issues, and their specific needs and care expectations
- (v) lack of understanding on both sides
- (vi) lack of trust on the part of refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> Art.1 and 55 of the Charter of the United Nations; art.25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; art.2 and art.3 of the European Convention on Human Rights; art.11 and 13 of the European Social Charter; art.3 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine.

Refugees with a professional background in health are not allowed to practice in most European countries as their qualifications are not recognized, although the exact situation may vary from country to country.

The need for special provision to bridge the gap between mainstream health facilities and asylum seeker/ refugee clients is shared by NGOs, practitioners and refugees. The idea is not to set up refugee health facilities but to make the existing ones accessible to newly arrived refugees. In fact, if refugees are to be integrated in all aspects of society, setting up specific institutions for them could lead to their ghettoisation. On the other hand, health care providers might never come to know how to deal with refugee clients.

Facilitating equal access to “appropriate” services, especially in the first phase of arrival, should never lead to the creation of special ghettos where “refugee doctors” are good enough for refugee patients. The retraining of health personnel with a refugee background has to be considered an important contribution to the host society as a whole, in terms of the promotion of a multicultural environment. This is the only way of fighting discrimination in the long run, the final goal being not only an equal access to mainstream health provision but also full social integration.

**Legal consultation centre “Human rights without borders” and L'vov regional organization “Afghan refugees”, Ukraine**  
**Project: “New Homeland – health and education programme”**

In 1999 “Afghan refugees” participated in a project funded by UNHCR entitled “New Homeland”, which focused on the education and health of refugee children. This was complimented by the Human Rights Without Borders’ own project on refugee education and health, also sponsored by UNHCR. With the help of the local Red Cross branch and in co-operation with the local ‘Sheptitski’ hospital refugees and asylum-seekers in L'vov region received medicine and passed a medical examination. Aid was also given specifically to elderly asylum-seekers.

- ☺ Direct involvement of a hospital to help outreach to newly arrived refugees
- ☺ Reducing isolation of vulnerable groups such as elderly asylum-seekers by providing them with medical aid
- ⊗ Refugees often have to pay for medical treatment, so the limited help the organisations could give for free was often not enough to help them in the longer- term

## Section 2: Dealing with traumatic experiences

Trauma is present at various stages of the asylum seeker's experience. It occurs when fleeing from the country of origin and also in the host country during the reception procedure. Some factors seem to have a strong negative impact on asylum seekers' psychological condition: a long waiting period; insecurity and great uncertainty concerning the future; lack of meaningful occupation and work; lack of control over one's own life; being "stored" and not being seen as a person; lack of psychological support and treatment; deficiencies in accommodation; isolation from the majority of the population of the country; and negative attitudes towards refugees among the majority of the population of the country of asylum.

### Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR), Romania Project: "Overcoming the language barrier in psychological assistance"

This project was set up in early 2000. Its purpose was to offer psychotherapy to traumatised refugees. The first step was to assess the needs of recognised refugees and asylum-seekers. Then, together with a psychologist, alternative therapy was identified which would be of benefit. Once the refugees had agreed, financial assistance was given to cover food and accommodation for the client during the course of treatment. After treatment, regular contacts were maintained with the families of the refugees to assess further needs.

- ☺ 90% of the beneficiaries successfully completed the program
- ☺ Over 50% of the enrolled beneficiaries found employment after therapy
- ☺ Refugees and asylum-seekers were themselves actively involved in art therapy, movement therapy and self-help groups
- ⊗ Some beneficiaries were wary of undergoing such therapy, claiming 'if I am normal then why do I need therapy?'
- ⊗ Lack of support from mental health services led to the project being run independently
- ✓ *"Since I have started to attend this program I felt like I was having a hope for the future. I really enjoyed that because it made me felt well. I am not depressive any more. Now, I feel like I am an important person."*

### Menedek, Hungary Project: "Social Services for Refugees – Psycho-Social Counselling and Therapy"

This programme was set up in March 1998, intending to improve the mental-health and social care of migrants (with different status) whilst simultaneously promoting their integration. Within the framework of the programme, the Association operates psychiatric out-patient services in the Refugee Reception Centres and Shelters of the Office of Immigration and Naturalisation. These are available free of charge for those who are not eligible for treatment provided within the National Health Care System. Psychiatrists see patients on a weekly basis and provide assistance in solving their problems. Within the framework of the programme the organization also contributes to the therapeutic services provided by the experts of the Cordelia Foundation to traumatised refugees.

- ☺ As the users have no direct access to the existing facilities, new structures are established, in which the needs are met, but in a separated and segregated way
- ☺ Reception scheme is tailored to asylum seekers with personal difficulties and behavioural problems

**The Russian Red Cross Society (RRC), Russia**  
**Project: "Psychological Rehabilitation Centre and Psychosocial Rehabilitation Network"**

The purpose of the Psychological Rehabilitation Centre in Moscow is to provide consultation to refugees from 'Far Abroad' (i.e. non-CIS) countries. Five psychologists offer consultations and medical check-ups are also given. This project was funded by UNHCR and was ended in December 2000. The Psychosocial Rehabilitation Network was set up under an agreement with Moscow State University, and has led to the publication of an information bulletin for forced migrants, and a series of workshops.

- ☺ Direct involvement of academic institutions, in particular Moscow State University

**Caritas Polska, Poland**  
**Project: "Psychological support and counselling"**

This project is funded by UNHCR, and designed to offer psychological support to children and families of refugees and asylum-seekers. The intellectual, emotional, social and physical development of children is monitored, and psychological counseling is given to those in the most vulnerable positions. It was set up in 1994.

- ☺ Long duration of the project
- ☺ Dealing with traumatic experiences in a non stigmatising way, through counselling and providing advice in a familiar environment
- ☺ Improving welfare of refugee children by offering special support
- ☹ Insufficient funds to cover all needs

## General signposts to good practice

- ✓ All asylum seekers should have full access to health care facilities independent of their legal status
- ✓ A medical check up for asylum seekers should be available on arrival
- ✓ Help centres should be set up to orientate refugees to appropriate services
- ✓ Treatment should be flexible and creative by using body-oriented methods, music/art therapy: using self-help methods: avoiding medicalization
- ✓ Health aid to asylum seekers/ refugees should involve the National Health Care service and other state actors (university, local administration etc)
- ✓ Training of health personnel at all level should be a priority, also including personnel with refugees background
- ✓ Refugees should themselves be included in the health care service, for example by training some of them as health educators
- ✓ A policy of health prevention and early treatment of consequences of violence and forced migration should be pursued, considering the high presence of refugees from territories in conflict, such as Chechnya and Afghanistan
- ✓ Immediate psychotherapeutic help should be provided to traumatised asylum seekers/refugees

- ✓ Rehabilitation centres should be set up to help traumatised refugees to overcome their traumas
- ✓ The need to alleviate cultural shock should be taken in to account
- ✓ Clients should be treated as “normal” people, avoiding making them feel they are victims and abnormal

## 6. HOUSING

### Introduction

Housing is not often associated with human rights. Yet the right to adequate housing is laid down in some of the basic international human rights documents:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25(1), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 11(1), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, art. 5(e)(iii), to mention just a few. In fact no less than 12 different texts adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations explicitly recognise the right to adequate housing (UNHCR, 1997).

The 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees contains two articles relating to housing for refugees:

Article 21 - Housing.

*"As regards housing, the Contracting States, in so far as the matter is regulated by laws or regulations or is subject to the control of public authorities, shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory treatment as favourable as possible and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances."*

Article 26 - Freedom of movement.

*"Each Contracting State shall accord to refugees lawfully in its territory the right to choose their place of residence to move freely within its territory, subject to any regulations applicable to aliens generally in the same circumstances."* (Geneva 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees)

The ECRE Position Paper on Integration of Refugees in the Europe para: 93 states the following:

*"Shelter is a basic human right and necessity. The conditions in which people live determine to a great extent their health, well-being and ability to engage in gainful occupation, pursue self-improvement through education and recreation and in consequence attain a decent standard of living."*

This quote stresses the important part housing plays in the integration process. Decent housing provides refugees with a secure home base from which to start building their lives. Housing can thus be seen as one of the prerequisites for any integration process.

This guide looks at issues relating to housing including access to accommodation, discrimination, quality of housing, and accommodation during the initial reception period.



## Access to housing: Problems and obstacles

The question of access to housing refers to the obstacles refugees encounter when trying to find accommodation once they have been granted asylum.

The lack of access is one of the main problems many refugees face regarding housing.

Accessibility problems of refugees can be categorized as follows:

- housing shortage
- discrimination by the receiving community, in particular from landlords, which can mean that accommodation is very expensive and often temporary in nature
- asylum seekers often forced to live in overcrowded accommodation
- allocation schemes: lack of choice, dispersal, sometimes housing far away from other facilities, such as education, care facilities etc.
- failure to recognise specific needs

### *Housing shortage*

Many European states are coping with a shortage on the housing market, especially in the social rented sector. This shortage results in huge waiting lists and few housing options.

## Discrimination

As access to social housing is becoming more and more difficult for asylum seekers and refugees, often the private rented sector is the only alternative left. However, access to this sector is not easy for refugees and asylum seekers. Landlords who rent their property privately are often reluctant to admit they do so, in order to avoid paying tax, and in Eastern Europe at least, this leads to refugees and asylum seekers having problems obtaining official residence permits. There is also little knowledge among landlords about the legal position of refugees and asylum seekers. Many landlords charge increased rent to asylum seekers and refugees, as they know they have few other options.

Many refugees feel discriminated against on the housing market. Discrimination in this respect also refers to institutional discrimination resulting from bureaucracy, and from information only being available in the specific regional or national language, often with very difficult vocabulary and explanations.

## Practices to enhance access to housing

### *Provision of accommodation*

The actual provision of accommodation to refugees is among the activities carried out by refugee assisting NGOs and governmental bodies across Europe. Yet most organisations that offer accommodation do so temporarily, as a kind of emergency shelter to prevent homelessness. There are only a few organisations that are able to rent accommodation and sublet it to refugees on a more structured basis. They usually have a very limited housing stock.

### *Advice and mediation*

Many agencies run advice centres for refugees. Usually these advice centres give information on various integration issues and legal advice; often housing issues are included.

### *Raising public awareness*

By providing information about refugees to the landlords (and sometimes neighbours) of refugees, organisations aim to diminish the lack of information and prejudice among the receiving communities.

**Human rights without borders (HRWB), Ukraine**  
**Project: "Support in searching for accommodation"**

In the absence of refugee camps in L'vov region of Ukraine, refugees and asylum-seekers often find themselves in extremely difficult situations regarding housing. In 2000 HRWB offered assistance to several refugees from Iraq and Georgia. Petitions were sent to the local authorities asking for agreement to live without rent in temporary accommodation, all of which were successful. In addition, several asylum-seekers from Chechnya were found sleeping rough at the railway station and, through the support of the local Red Cross branch, they were transported to Transcarpathia, where they have been accommodated through the NGO "Neeka".

- ☺ Advice service is not limited to housing issues but also includes general counseling (in particular about formulation documentation, registration of marriage for people without citizenship and asylum-seekers) as well. This enables multidimensional problems to be tackled in a more effective way.
- ☺ Involvement of other regional NGOs

## Housing quality: Problems and obstacles

The quality of housing refers to much more than solely material minimum standards, such as available space, window size and health requirements. Most regulations concerning quality of housing in fact only concern quality of houses.

Quality of housing also refers to the environment, physical and social. Is the house located in a segregated neighbourhood or not, are there facilities nearby for education, employment, health care, etc? What is the social environment like?

From this perspective, housing quality is an important issue, given that the right to adequate housing is a human right (see Introduction). However, because many refugees and asylum seekers in Europe are homeless, the issues of accessibility and affordability usually have more priority.

## The influence on integration of accommodation during reception

In most countries where asylum seekers are accommodated in reception centres, they are not allowed (or allowed only under very strict criteria) to live outside of the reception centre. In these centres they are not (or only very exceptionally) allowed to work or to follow education while their asylum application is being processed. This leads to a long stay in the reception centre, in a condition of prolonged insecurity and forced passivity.

While living in the reception centre, almost every decision about your life is made by others. These factors are damaging to people, since they become institutionalized. The asylum seeker loses self-esteem and initiative and will have more trouble rebuilding his life, be it in the host society or in his country of origin. Because it affects peoples' motivation and self-esteem, it affects not only health but other spheres of integration as well, including employment and education.

### *Recognition of specific housing needs of asylum seekers and refugees*

An instrument meant to tackle the housing shortage and the homelessness problem at the same time is group accommodation. Though this can be a very efficient way of housing people with acute housing needs, this form of accommodation does not always fit the specific needs of refugees. Some refugees have had traumatic experiences and for these people it might not be advisable to be housed together with other people.

Furthermore, it is important that the needs of the individual are met. The integration needs of refugees should not be limited to just the need for housing. Sometimes refugees are housed at locations far away from other facilities such as education, health care and other public services. This will not enhance their integration process.

*Dispersal versus concentration*

An often-debated issue concerning refugee housing is whether it is better to disperse refugees across the country or to concentrate them in specific areas. Both models have advantages and disadvantages. There are countries that have a governmental allocation programme for the first independent housing. Housing allocation is not only concerned with access to housing, but it also influences housing quality, because it determines the environment in which a refugee comes to live.

Strict dispersal policies would be a violation of the right to freedom of movement mentioned in the Geneva Convention. Such allocation programmes are important for those refugees who are for some reason unable to find accommodation for themselves independently. They also remove the access barrier of discrimination from landlords and housing agencies.

However, as mentioned above, many important factors are often not taken into consideration in the decision where to accommodate the refugee. In any case, refugees should only be allocated to housing in those parts of a country where integration resources are available, as some refugees might get very isolated if they are allocated to a municipality where no co-nationals live.

As accessibility and affordability of housing are often the most pressing housing problems refugees face, few organisations aim explicitly at improving quality of housing provision. Ensuring good housing quality is often considered to be mainly a task for governments (supplying the framework) and housing providers.

Yet in some countries NGOs are responsible for housing refugees, which calls upon them to ensure housing quality. In other countries, many NGOs advocate with housing providers and mediate between refugee tenants and housing providers when complaints about the quality of housing arise. Especially if one takes a broad definition of housing quality, also encompassing principles like meeting individual needs, availability of integration facilities and the presence of a safe and friendly environment, it turns out that many of the mainstream activities of NGOs are in a way concerned with housing quality.

**Polish Humanitarian Organisation, Poland  
Project: "Refugee Counselling Centre"**

The project has been running for its third year and is due to end at the end of 2001. The purpose of the project is to provide good quality housing to recognised refugees who leave government-run refugee centres once they have been granted refugee status. The government's own integration programme does not offer accommodation once refugees leave the refugee centres, and refugees find it almost impossible to rent rooms or apartments themselves as rental prices are high, the refugees often have no knowledge of Polish and few financial resources.

Financial support was granted by the local government of Mazovian Province, which has given subsidies for three years to organise Polish language courses and accommodation for recognised refugees. Twenty apartments were rented for one year, offering accommodation for around 80 persons. The tenants rotate and often share rooms; all efforts are made to put people of the same sex and same background in the same apartment. Tenants sign a three-month contract which is renewed provided that the refugee is a) studying Polish; b) looking for a job; c) registered with the Labour Office; and d) paying a subsidy to the Polish Humanitarian Organisation. The contract can be continually renewed until the refugee is granted a place in a council flat, a process which can take several years. At the start of 2001 only two families have been offered council flats. Some individually have left because they could afford to rent their own accommodation, while others were asked to leave because

they broke the regulations listed above.

- ☺ Helps eliminate immediate problem of homelessness among refugees, and so give more incentive to study Polish or find employment.
- ☺ Acts as a kind of 'springboard' to more permanent housing solutions
- ⊗ Lack of funds to accommodate all those refugees in need.
- ⊗ Temporary project, ending at the end of 2001, to be replaced by a government housing programme which will be implemented solely by government bodies.
- ⊗ High rental prices of apartments and reluctance of landlords to have refugees living in their apartments
- ⊗ Housing problem affects Polish citizens as well; therefore, it has been difficult to encourage any kind of special treatment for refugees.

## General signposts to good practice

- ✓ Refugee newcomers should be offered practical information and advice on how to manage a household
- ✓ Among the key prerequisites enabling refugees to exercise choice are: access to information about housing options and the profile of individual regions; financial resources in the form of income support and housing assistance; and an unrestricted right to employment
- ✓ Direct and indirect discrimination in the housing sector needs to be tackled. The national governments should introduce anti-discrimination legislation to be supported in its implementation by funding provision for developing mediating services, establishing systems of monitoring racial harassment incidents and dealing with problems of spatial segregation
- ✓ Convention refugees and people with a complementary protection status should be given choice as to where to settle and enjoy full access to housing rights. Upon receiving permission to stay, people accommodated in reception centres should be given all necessary information to make an "informed decision" following full consideration of the type and location of housing which might be available to them
- ✓ Refugees' own initiatives and responsibilities should be facilitated and encouraged. This means looking at the case of the individual refugee and determining the needs together with refugees.
- ✓ It is necessary to stress the important part housing plays in the integration process. Finding a place to live helps refugees and asylum seekers to ease their integration in the new host society and feel "normal".