



**Good Practice Guide  
on the Integration of Refugees  
in the European Union**

**COMMUNITY AND CULTURE**



# Acknowledgements

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**The six Good Practice Guides which make up this publication are as follows:**

**Good Practice Guide on Community and Cultural Integration for Refugees**

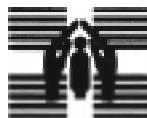
Good Practice Guide on Housing for Refugees

Good Practice Guide on Health for Refugees

Good Practice Guide on Education for Refugees

Good Practice Guide on Vocational Training for Refugees

Good Practice Guide on Employment for Refugees



Greek Council for Refugees

# Good Practice Guide on Community & Cultural Integration for Refugees in the European Union

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# Introduction to Community and Cultural Integration

## Background to the theme

This Guide deals with the specific issues involved in cultural and community integration. National history (colonialism, sectional interests in 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 be 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 European 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)<sup>3</sup>.

Thus the social and cultural context of the host society within which refugees try to be integrated varies from those who believe in the value of multiculturalism, perceiving foreigners as adding to the richness and development of their country, and those who do not. 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 who are and can become active agents for the acceptance and integration of refugees.

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3 Discussion on the definitions of terms such as “Culture”, “Community” are to be found in the paper “Community Integration and Cultural Adaptation in Relation to Refugees” on the Internet at [www.refugeenet.org](http://www.refugeenet.org), on Community & Cultural Integration

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.

## Methodology

### **A number of sources have been drawn on in writing this section of the Guide:**

- Firstly a selection of the pilot projects for refugee integration, funded by the European Commission under Budget 3-41 13 in 1998 and 1999, have been referred to where the ideas appear to be original and/or transferable. This in no way is a criticism of projects that are not mentioned in this Guide. Additionally the ongoing work of many governments, local authorities, NGO, refugee associations and trades unions, involves what can be termed “normal” good practice and some of these practices with respect to cultural and community integration have been referred to. The data was drawn from both original descriptions of projects, and the results of questionnaires sent out to them. Again many organisations may find that their positive actions have not been included in this Good Practice Guide; this may have occurred because of the ignorance of the authors or because the examples given are illustrative of practice in many organisations.
- Secondly, refugee integration projects were visited in several European countries. Task Force members visited a significant number of projects over the two years and exchanged relevant information when it was of relevance to the specific integration theme. Researchers visited projects in Finland, Italy, France, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium. These visits provided first hand information of the problems and solutions sought in the field of cultural and community integration.
- Thirdly in May 1998 a meeting was held with expert representatives from NGOs working for refugees from the different Member States, on the subject of cultural and community integration. These experts with practical and extensive experience of working with the issue of refugee integration, provided many ideas and indications of what should be considered good practice in the field of community and culture and the difficulties that exist.
- Fourthly specific workshops on cultural and community integration, in combination with other areas of integration i.e. housing, employment, health, were held in Antwerp, November 1998, with the participation

of refugees and organisations for refugee integration drawn from all the Member States and beyond. These workshops allowed debate and reflection on what aids refugee integration under the very different circumstances in the Member States. The ideas and references made in these workshops have been used in this Guide.

- Fifthly in June 1999 a meeting was held with refugees from all the Member States in Dalfsen, the Netherlands. Their experience both as refugees living in a new country, and as active agents for the community and cultural integration of other refugees in the same situation, provided valuable insight into positive and helpful actions and programmes in the field of culture and community integration. Some of these experts and representatives from the different Member States were requested to read this guide and comment on it to ensure that the variety of perspectives and programmes as well as the efforts of the different Member States are adequately represented. They have however no responsibility for the opinions expressed or the omissions in the Guide. The opinions expressed and the information gathered are the responsibility of those working for the project.

The subject of community and cultural integration is, in some ways, slightly different from the other themes covered by the ECRE Task Force on integration. The issues of employment, education, vocational training, housing and health, involve legal and social rights, issues of access and opportunity, that lead to clear indications of the problems and obstacles that need to be removed in order to aid refugee integration. They have clear policy implications in many areas, or else clarify the issues that need to be studied in order to make recommendations with respect to good practice. Community and cultural integration covers rather more general and wider subjects including the interaction with the host society; it involves both public policy and recommendations for good practice to all forms of community and associations. The legal and social rights of refugees, covering political and human rights are discussed in the ECRE policy position paper.<sup>4</sup> The variety of subjects involved in promoting community and cultural integration for refugees makes this Guide more of a stimulus than an authoritative handbook on what ought to be done in both the separate countries and at European level. Nonetheless there are some very clear signposts - marked in the text - as to what Good Practice appears to consist of in this field. Some of these involve actions by organisations for and of refugees, some actions by individual refugees, and other, by the public authorities at local, national and European levels.

The Guide is divided into different sections that examine Community and Cultural refugee integration from four main perspectives: the first section begins by examining good practice with respect to the initial **adjustment** necessary when a refugee lives in a new society. The second section continues with an examination of **community relations between refugees and the host society** and the development of suitable strategies that promote integration. The third section examines **enrichment activities** which

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2 : ECRE Position on the Integration of Refugees in Europe

provide the refugee and the community in which s/he lives with the chance of expanding their horizons; for refugees this may enable them to become creative and innovative members of their new society. Fourthly good practice that promotes the **empowerment** of refugees so that they become good and constructive citizens within the European Union, is an important aspect of integration. Within each section are to be found subsections describing different cultural and community activities, policies or practices, together with a brief presentation of examples of this. At the end of each subsection are the signposts to what can be considered good practice as defined above.

## **Section 1: Initial Adjustment**

Refugees arriving to live in a new society need help in adjusting to the peculiarities of the new host society. Their need to live peaceably and constructively with their hosts inevitably means that they have to learn such things as forms of polite behaviour, or about local and cultural celebrations, foods, laws and customs, language, world view - the list is a long one. Survival and the avoidance of conflict with neighbours, the achievement of new goals by refugees, and the creation of some basic mechanisms for reciprocity and exchange, are the initial goals of adjustment activities. Organisations responsible for the initial settlement of asylum seekers and refugees in their new country have to provide creative and appropriate methods of helping refugees from many different cultures and backgrounds in this initial adjustment. Refugees even 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, to adjust certain 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.

Another factor influencing the speed and quality of initial adjustment is the length of time that passes before the granting of refugee status, the conditions under which they live as asylum seekers e.g. permission to work, 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 southern Member States has the consequence that many seek to resettle in other countries, and this limits their willingness to adapt.

### **A. 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 by Member State; the Scandinavian countries have clear policies on cultural adaptation and integration, while most other countries are less clear on the dimensions of initial adjustment. Several Member States leave the work of initial adjustment primarily to voluntary bodies. 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.

In Denmark a woman's initiative called "Sezan" in Copenhagen makes special efforts to educate refugee women who are unable to attend regular language courses, offering information also on the culture and traditions of the host society but also organising exhibitions of the fashion clothes from the refugees countries of origin. They also help women refugees become involved in local community life.

Organisations for and of refugees in the different Member States nearly always offer opportunities for **personal counselling 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.

Most countries have developed printed and even electronic materials to provide information on the services, rights and duties as well as the institutions and culture of the new society and the facilities that are available for them. Most countries try to ensure that they are available in the major languages of asylum seekers. Despite these efforts there are problems in ensuring that this information remains up to date and that it is widely distributed in the new society.

### **The British Refugee Council, London, UK**

For some years the council has operated many of its programmes for integration through independent refugee organisations, there are over 400 of these throughout the UK. There has been full co-operation with these refugee community organisations (RCOs) in the development of relevant and up to date information pamphlets in all the different languages of asylum seekers. They cover all major subjects relating to integration topics e.g. housing, social welfare rights, education etc. Refugee organisations can check with BRC to ensure that information is still correct, while they are kept informed of legislative changes. BRC

has also ensured that there are trained refugee advisers from the same or similar refugee backgrounds who work within the refugee community associations. The training of refugee counsellors and information officers, with the requisite funding for their support, also provides an opportunity for their employment. In addition refugee community organisations often undertake initial English language support to their communities and mother tongue classes.

- ☺ Refugee community organisations ensure good distribution of information to those from the same national or linguistic group
- ☺ Creates jobs that refugees can do well because of their experience.
- ☺ Pre-supposes an infrastructure of co-operating refugee organisations with a central body able to keep the information up to date.

The use of refugee and local advisers is clearly of importance in helping individuals, but there need to be different contexts and ways of teaching people about the culture of the society in which they live as well as their own culture. Teaching cultural relativism is important in making refugees more tolerant of each other, their experiences in the host society and the reactions and conflicts faced by their children.

### **PYXIS Integration Facilitation Centre, Greek Council for Refugees, Athens, Greece**

“Pyxis” faced with the problem of having to communicate with many refugee families uses puppet shows for refugee children and families in which the “strange” customs and language of Greece are explained and dramatised, with parents and children having the opportunity to laugh with, enjoy and learn from the puppets.

- ☺ Cheap, brings refugee children and parents together and gives everyone a good time
- ☺ Pre-supposes someone with the imagination to make interesting, creative activities that are instructional.



#### *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 counselling and advice should be offered to facilitate refugee adjustment.
- Up to date information should be provided and widely distributed in order to reduce refugees’ anxiety about “what to do next” and save time and effort spent in finding information.

## B. Volunteers and initial social networks to support refugees

Language and cultural differences, dependency on social security support, residence in problematic accommodation or areas, may lead to difficulties for refugees in meeting people in the host society. Even when this does occur it may be difficult for refugees to meet with local people on an equal footing. Most refugees have lost their professions and employment contexts and cannot easily develop their personal networks in a work related context. The majority have lost their often extensive kin, family and personal networks from their home country. Many 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, 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 neighbours met in the street and local shops, who make the community less strange and more welcoming and provide the first hand of friendship.

### **Integration Project, Portuguese Refugee Council, (CPR) Lisbon, Portugal**

The Portuguese Refugee Council, with a relatively recent and small number of asylum seekers in the country, have organised volunteers to take asylum seekers to museums and on visits in the main city so that they have the chance to communicate with Portuguese people and begin to appreciate Portugal, its history, society and culture.

- ☺ Brings asylum seekers into personal contact with local people
- ☹ Pre- supposes limited numbers of asylum seekers

### **“People to People” project, Swedish Red Cross, Stockholm, Sweden**

The Red Cross, recognising that “ordinary” social relationships between refugees and local people are not always easy to establish, recruited a number of Swedes and their families to act as mentors and friends to individual refugees being settled in local communities. They co-operate with a Contact Network consisting of 80 organisations that use Swedish people to act as guides to the municipalities. In 1999 their

“People to People” project established a mechanism for Swedes to help, something they felt unable to do on an informal basis.

- 😊 Personal contact with local Swedish people
- ☹ Time consuming to find, train and manage the volunteers

The Danish Refugee Council have started a similar project “Neighbours” to link refugees with local Danish families and friends since they recognised that refugees were frequently very isolated; two people in the social services department are employed by the authority commune to promote this programme while the rest of those involved are local volunteers.

The effective use of **local volunteers** requires that they are appropriately recruited and trained. Several countries and organisations have managed to develop extensive voluntary activity amongst host society members for refugees by offering *recognised training*. This involves interviewing and selection procedures, the signing of a “work” contract, training and certification. Some bodies have found that it is important to offer some kind of reward for volunteering, mainly symbolic; even repaying the expenses incurred may act as an official recognition of the value and contribution of volunteers.

### The Dutch Refugee Council, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Building on long established traditions in the Netherlands of volunteering, they have as many as 10,000 volunteers throughout the country who help newly settled refugees deal with their new society, and are concerned with their training and management so that they become active agents for the cause of refugees. It has a training course for all volunteers on how to combat racist attitudes they may encounter because of their volunteering activities.

- 😊 Ensuring the volunteers are active promoters of refugee issues and know how to deal with racism.

Volunteers in Europe tend to be recruited disproportionately from two or three main sources; foremost are the **churches** and religious organisations whose members may feel bound by their beliefs to support those in need, including helping refugees find work and housing. **Schools and universities** are also a source of volunteers since young people are often sensitised to multicultural issues, interested in the cultures of refugees, and may use the experience as a way of broadening their own knowledge base. In some courses placement with refugee organisations constitutes part of the student’s course work and from this experience they can be recruited for work as volunteers. Similarly NGOs in several countries had

obtained agreement with some **training bodies** that young people's work as volunteers could be recognised as part of course work; this acts as a stimulus and reward for participation.

### Tür an Tür, Augsburg, Germany

An NGO in Augsburg, Tür an Tür, recognising that refugees could not easily meet local people on an equal footing, invited them to Sunday integration workshops where they could meet with local people. Many of the local people who participated tended to be from either the local church or the university and were already sympathetic to refugees. Nevertheless from this group they were able to recruit volunteers to work with refugees on a one to one basis for a limited period to practise speaking German, accompany them to meetings with landlords, schools, assist them in dealing with the authorities etc. The organisation is increasingly recognising the need for systematic and regular training of volunteers. (For information on the housing aspect of this project, see Housing Guide Section 1)

☺ Good mobilisation of interested people among the host society to act as volunteers to help refugees feel more at home and find their way in the new society

Another basis for recruiting volunteers for refugee causes and campaigns is for local refugee associations to build alliances with minority associations that are now part of the mainstream of the host society; the prior experiences that such local association members or their predecessors may have endured as persecuted minorities or migrants and refugees, can be a strong motivating factor for them helping refugees who are newcomers.

Many countries run **migrant, refugee and human rights festivals** at local and /or national levels where the knowledge, organisational experience and public profile of organisations for and of refugees enables them to take the lead in advocacy work for all these minority groups in need of support. A few examples of the many such festivals include the Jyvaskyla region in Finland with immigrant and refugee festivals; in Athens the anti-racist festival includes a strong contingent of refugee; the British Refugee Council runs a week long festival for refugees throughout the country; ADRIM in Southern France runs a festival focused on the various forms of music and cultural self expression of foreigners. There appears to be considerable agreement amongst both refugees and NGO experts that although "fun" one off events are fine being important for the morale of refugees and raising their profile and prestige, they do not necessarily change attitudes in the host society. Examples of multi-cultural events in Portugal illustrated this; one event designed to encourage local people and refugees to mix which was organised near the CPR in a neighbourhood of subsidised housing containing a large mixture of people, attracted local Por-

tuguese residents. However people from other parts of Lisbon did not attend, while another multicultural day, organised in the central square of Lisbon, attracted only Africans, because it was not linked to the local community.

### Refugee Day, Dutch Refugee Council and VON (Dutch Federation of Refugee Community Organisations), the Netherlands

For the past 5 years in early July a national festival for refugees is organised in the middle of a huge park. Over 20,000 people attend, both refugees and Dutch people, celebrating in the various tents and spaces the musical and cultural traditions of the different refugee groups as well as setting out the work of the many local refugee organisations. Food from the different cultures, a fashion parade, stalls with handi-crafts, IT demonstrations of refugee issues, dancing, a media event to foster understanding of refugee experiences of living in various countries, were activities in 1999. The Festival is funded through money obtained through the national lottery and prior to the event it is promoted through the lottery TV show, thus effectively mainstreaming the event.

- ☺ Allows real celebration with local people
- ☺ Is a basis for recruiting volunteers.
- ☺ Provides refugees with an opportunity to meet other refugees, and as a European event has the potential to help separated friends and families living in different Member States find each other
- ☹ Takes a lot of time and resources to organise and run well

*“I just met my brother here after so many years that we were lost to one another. He lives here, this is wonderful” (A refugee who participated in the Refugee Panels and visited the Refugee Day )*

Another important strategy in finding volunteers is for organisations to seek and recruit influential **volunteers** such as ex-businessmen or local and national politicians, who can broaden the approach to integration and act as more powerful brokers or mediators to the main local or national community. Personal sympathies and a good intellectual understanding of the refugee situation are a better basis for recruitment than political labels. In many Member states it has been discovered that allies can be found and made with significant players and leaders of a wide variety of political and social groups who might initially not appear to be the “usual” liberal supporters of refugee causes. In the Bridge Project in East London, the Somali Association have attracted a number of ex-businessmen as volunteers on the management team who help with advice for training and employment.

Many countries are increasingly recognising that recruiting *refugee volunteers* is valuable for several reasons. Firstly in times of crisis there may be inadequate numbers of professionals available; secondly though in many countries refugees obtain social welfare support, they may be quite unable to get work and as a result find themselves increasingly demoralised. Thus overcoming enforced inactivity and social marginalization by encouraging refugee volunteers to participate in the support of new arrivals is of considerable value. It provides an opportunity for them to learn new skills, gain experience, and make contacts which can provide practical experience and possibly create paths toward finding paid employment in the future. Importantly refugee volunteers are able to understand the immediate problems of new arrivals and offer friendship and support. Many large and small NGOs for refugees have adopted active policies of using refugee volunteers<sup>5</sup> In Germany the Deutscher Caritasverband encouraged refugees to participate as volunteers in a “talent exchange pool” which enabled them to help others in their community. In the Athens PYXIS centre for integration run by the Greek Council for Refugees, refugees work as volunteers teaching English, Greek and computers. The arrival of 18,000 Bosnian refugees in Denmark led to the allocation of funding to them as a group; most were inactive and not permitted to work. About 50% started to work as volunteers for others, while many also became active in producing Bosnian-linked radio programmes and newspapers. Others were paid to return to Bosnia to act as assessors concerning the feasibility for refugees to return. A Forum of Intellectuals from Bosnia who are well integrated into Danish society, help other Bosnians who are not integrated.

*“It helps ‘our’ people to get information; it’s a form of self-help”* (A Bosnian refugee living in Denmark, Refugee Community and Culture Panel).

Working as a volunteer restores self esteem and a sense of value to refugees who may often feel marginalised and excluded.

*“When refugees arrive they are psychologically very tired. They want to feel useful; doing something is very important as a start”* (Refugee Community and Culture Panel)

The problems of unemployment, in both the host society and amongst refugees raise a moral problem about volunteering. How far is it ethically correct for people to be asked to work as volunteers and not found paid work? This is an issue of general debate in Europe and a clear line has to be drawn as to the responsibilities of professionals and volunteers but *in discussion with the latter*. Countries vary in the degree to which voluntary work is developed and part of the normal social infrastructure and the degree

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5 The role of voluntary organisations of refugees is discussed later as is their development, support and training.

to which refugees can be expected to be active. In southern European countries where refugees have to work in the informal labour market in order to survive and where voluntary work is less common, the strategy of volunteering may be less feasible.

*“voluntary work is important in the integration of refugees. They learn about the work ethos in the country, and through voluntary work refugees get familiarised.”*, (Refugee Community and Culture Panel)

Success in using volunteers to promote the integration of refugees in local communities, whether from the host or refugee communities, is determined by several factors including methods of recruitment, training and clarity from the outset as to the type of commitment required from potential volunteers and management.

Although NGOs and local authorities accepting refugees must bear responsibility for their integration and the settlement of issues related to basic survival such as an income, housing and education, host communities and refugees have also to play an active role. Refugees may come to realise that their acceptance and integration into the host society depends in part on their own initiatives. In many countries refugees and local people have organised football clubs, sports events, celebrations, talks; many of these subjects are discussed later in this good practice guide. Other refugees have understood that their own initiatives and actions in talking to local people, writing to local and national newspapers, playing an active part in the local community associations, are positive steps in aiding not only their own personal integration but of refugees more generally.

*“One has to give something in order to take something”* (Refugee Community and Culture Panel).



### *Signposts to Good Practice*

- 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 fulfil refugees' special needs.
- Emphasis should be put on the recruitment of influential volunteers (e.g. employers) as it leads to the promotion of refugees' interests and the creation of more powerful networks (see Employment Guide, Sections 2 &3)
- Refugees should be encouraged to become volunteers as a way of being active agents for their own integration, increasing their self esteem and empowering themselves.

## C. 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 also as cultural mediators explaining the social context and meanings for both asylum seekers and those in authority who have to deal with refugees. In some situations e.g. dealing with the public authorities, the work of mediation is often best undertaken by those who are professionally trained, preferably drawn from the refugee community itself. However mediation may also be undertaken by members of the refugee communities in order to promote general knowledge about themselves in local communities, schools and media. In Koto, Finland immigrant and refugee communities set up forums in the various suburbs of the town to find out about refugees' needs, to encourage independent activities and act as a liaison body between refugees and official bodies. In the Netherlands the state funded Educational Development Centres are active in creating positive images of refugees e.g. by having women refugees telling stories in schools backed by suitable educational and cultural materials.

In the Shannon area in Ireland which has only recently begun to receive asylum seekers and refugees, some asylum seekers have been very active in outreach work to local communities. They regularly visit schools and local rural associations to talk about their experiences as refugees. This gives many Irish their first experience of meeting people of different cultures and ethnic origins, allows them to understand the reasons that brought them to Ireland, and is the basis for developing a longer standing positive attitude in these small traditionally conservative communities.

### **Cultural Mediation, CIES, Rome, Italy**

In Rome the need for help with the cases and problems of refugees and asylum seekers so that these are properly and fairly presented to the public authorities was noted by an organisation, CIES (Information and Education Centre for Development), with long experience in working on issues concerning the developing world. They developed a training course for cultural mediators in Florence, Rome and Naples, originally for immigrants (78 were trained) and then specifically for refugees (20). They had to have the necessary linguistic and educational abilities. The project's aim is to establish the profession of cultural mediator ie. people who can work with private and public institutions who require their ability to interpret linguistically, culturally and socially in an impartial, ethical and confidential manner between the authorities and refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in order to aid mutual understanding and comprehension. CIES has signed contracts with the Municipalities, the Department of Justice, the Association

of Social Services and the Ministry of the Interior for the purchase of the services of these mediators. CIES acts as an “employment “ agency for the free lance refugee cultural mediators. They perceive this as a way of establishing refugees in a new, accredited profession that changes their image to a more positive and educated one, while also promoting multi-culturalism by helping Italians and refugees understand one another. (See Vocational Training Guide, Section 3)

- ☺ Refugees facilitate cultural understanding
- ☺ Creates new employment opportunities for refugees

### *Signpost to Good Practice*

- Efforts should be made to develop skills amongst refugees which enable them to work as cultural mediators, either professionally or as volunteers, and enhances mutual understanding.

## **Section 2: Community relations and development**

Refugees settle or are settled into local communities and neighbourhoods 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, 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.

### A. 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 their constituents. Nor can it be assumed that middle

class liberals support refugees. An important strategy for promoting refugee integration concerns the making of alliances with a wide range of appropriate persons in the host society. While individuals belonging within one political or dogmatic tradition often a priori have positive attitudes to refugees, attempts need to be made to seek much wider alliances. In Denmark the Forskel Lighed project called “Ethnic Equality on the Danish Labour Market” run by the Danish Association for International Co-operation, has created a campaign to inspire local trades unions and work places to debate what they can do to achieve equality for refugees (See Employment Guide, Section 3).

### **Borough of Ealing, London, UK**

Alliances have been created between refugee bodies and other actors in public sector housing, creating a positive role for refugees. In the borough of Ealing refugees began leaving social housing provided on estates when they became the object of racial harassment; many moved into private housing, usually in a worse condition and more expensive. To overcome this problem, a local support group was formed that met victims of racial harassment; dealing with the issue on a case by case basis. They involved the victims and their families from the start, trying to help them see how they could deal with the situation and experience. There are now 300 people in the Refugee Support Group who offer counselling and support; an emergency service helps a victim to plan how they can look after themselves and their families and there is a help line in 12 languages. Victims help one another and have developed skills in confronting racism in the local community. Additionally it has had the effect of empowering refugees. (See also Section 4)

- ☺ Refugees are helped to stop being victims of racism and play an active role in helping themselves, their families and other refugees.
- ☺ Confronts racism in an active way.

One group in the host society who are placed in the difficult role of mediating between racists in the home society and refugees, are the police. The work of sensitising the police to the issue of refugees is important in the development of good practice. In Helsinki, Finland, a negative image of refugee and migrant young people developed because they stayed on the streets till late at night; the city police realised that this was both a cultural difference and potentially had a negative effect on the integration of refugees and their acceptance by the local society. They decided to deal with the issue by organising basket ball games in the evenings in Helsinki in which the police and refugees and migrant youths participated. In Jyvaskyla in Finland work by the refugee association (The Nightingale Association) with the local police has created a positive set of relationships and understanding, enabling the police to act in a preventive capacity.

In Spain refugees have formed an organisation called “Intercultural Animation” which seeks to explain the refugee issue to local people by systematically visiting police stations and teachers in schools, explaining the problems associated with becoming a refugee. In the UK local police liaison officers participate in the local refugee networks and fora.

### *Signposts to Good Practice*

- Alliances 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.
- Local police force should be sensitised to the issue of refugees in order to reduce tension between refugees and host society.
- 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.
- NGO and refugee organisations should keep full and accessible records of racial incidents since these can be used for advocacy purposes.

## B. Actions to reduce racism amongst young people

Parent-teachers associations<sup>6</sup> 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. In Italy the RUE project in Udine started training courses for parents of refugee children (and immigrants) to learn about intercultural education.

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. In Austria the “Big brother, big sister” exists in selected schools, where local Austrian people help pupils who have learning difficulties, specifically including refugee children. In Denmark some schoolchildren go on experiential holiday camps and play act at being refugees as a way

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6 See also Education Guide, Section 1, E for involvement of refugee parents/guardians in the education of their children

of helping sensitise them to refugee issues and supporting refugee children in schools. In Belgium, Italy and France, an experiential temporary exhibition, “un Voyage pas comme les autres” (“a Journey like no other”) <sup>7</sup> was developed by CIRE in Belgium. In each participating country it is run by consortia of NGOs and public bodies and staffed partly by refugees who act as facilitators or play various roles inside the exhibition. The main visitors are school children and teachers who attend to gain insight into the reasons for the flight of refugees and migrants and the often terrible experiences they had gone through. Visitors are asked to take on the story of one of the approximately 10 refugees or migrants whose “portraits” are given.

### Refugee Team (RT), Camden Language and Support Services, London, UK

The Refugee Team started in 1990 as a specialised part of the Camden Language and Support Services of the Camden Local Authority. It offers school support, home-school-community links, counselling services and training provision. Initially it was set up to meet the needs of 153 refugee children in the Borough's schools; in 1998 there were 1800. Many of these young refugees are unaccompanied. It was awarded the Commission for Racial Equality Race award in 1997. It has worked in 14 primary schools, helping to link refugee parents and the school; this is supported by two home-school-community workers who encourage refugee parent participation. They also provide individual assessment of refugee children, support to teachers, and links to appropriate support agencies. RT works in 5 local secondary schools offering after school support and advice, outings for refugee children and encouragement to refugee parents to participate in the parents associations of school governance. RT helps train teachers, works in professional development teachers courses after school support, and offers a telephone help line for teachers and staff as well as refugee parents and young people. RT encourages work with refugee parents associations; thus by 1998 the Somali Parent Association has 5 parents who are school governors, and since 1995 it has established a Saturday school where Somali language, history and culture are taught. This Association together with the Somali Community Organisation in Camden presented an award to RT recognising the latter's valuable work in helping refugee children and their families and stating “*Because of you we feel not excluded and because of you our mother tongue and identity are valued.*” October 1998. RT also developed a health check list for refugee children together with a local Refugee Health Project and distributed it to schools in Camden.

- ☺ Supports refugee families in the new educational system they confront.
- ☺ Reduces family tensions and promotes cultural understanding
- ☹ Depends on there being a considerable number of refugee children in an area.

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<sup>7</sup> See also Education Guide, Section 1,C

Influencing young people in their leisure activities, in such contexts as youth clubs (Scouts, church clubs, local youth clubs) is an important arena for actions to influence young people. The club leadership can play an active role in ensuring that racism and harassment are not acceptable. This may be particularly important in areas where the local young people are deprived, poorly educated and socially excluded. Their own depressed environments makes it important that club leaders are active in helping these local young people realise their own dreams and expectations, enabling them to have more positive experiences in life. This appears to reduce their need to blame others i.e. refugees, the “outsiders” for their problems. Thus empowering local youth can help avoid racism though at the same time they have to understand that their own society forbids racism as the solution to their problems. In the Berlin area youth leaders were prepared to throw young racists out of clubs by branding them as “Not Good Germans”, thus taking the nationalist appeal of racists and using it against them. Additionally recognising the problems faced by the young people they encouraged them to confront the issues e.g. unemployment, poverty, and also fulfil their own wishes e.g. travel, creative activities, helping others. In Berlin the Romani Union have started summer camps where locals and refugees can meet and enjoy common artistic creative activities.

### *Signposts to Good Practice*

- **In order for them to become familiar with their children’s needs and develop social networks, refugee parents should be encouraged to participate in parent associations.**
- **In order to sensitise fellow pupils about refugee issues, school children willing to act as sponsors for refugee children in their school should be identified.**
- **Local community initiatives aimed at deprived young people should be developed to give them an opportunity to have more positive experiences in life.**

## C. 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.

*“ when you live in such a society, you feel isolated. More than that relations with neighbours are virtually non existent.. I’ve no idea what my neighbours are like- they sleep here, get up and go to work, return in the evening.”* (A refugee interviewed in Luxembourg, the Refugee Interviews)

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. In Spain the NGO FEDORA has developed a multicultural centre where parties and cultural days are organised for the members of the local community where refugees live and these activities are particularly popular with students. In the Netherlands seven municipalities in rural Friesland and in Delft municipality have combined in co-operation with the Dutch Refugee Council and VON the refugee federation, to help refugees develop personal social networks with the members of the local communities.

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. In Denmark, in a project undertaken by the Nakskov Commune, refugee membership or subscriptions to join important Danish community institutions specifically sports clubs and mini gardens (allotments) clubs were funded by the Local Authority so that refugees could meet with Danes on the basis of common interests and of equality. One northern Swedish Local Authority appointed a social worker who systematically enrolled each refugee and family member in the many local clubs and associations existing in the town. Shared common hobbies were the basis for real communication and equality in exchanges and for the formation of local friendships.

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.



### *Signposts to Good Practice*

- 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.

## **D. Positive use of the mass media**

A common experience is that European mass 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”.

*“I decided to take an active part in promoting understanding here by writing to the newspapers about refugees and I find it works.”* (An Iraqi refugee man in Sweden, the Refugee Interviews)

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. Denmark, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Luxembourg and the UK all have regular radio programmes where refugee problems get discussed. Importantly they also provide some employment for refugee journalists.

In the UK the national lottery allocated 0.3% of its budget to national refugee community associations but this was treated in a very negative way by the popular and tabloid press. As a result the BRC pays for and periodically organises for the work of a media adviser consultant. The consultant helps develop presentational skills for individuals in NGOs, focusing on how to give positive images of refugees and refugee issues. This is particularly important for all those refugees in leadership roles in the various refugee community organisations who are likely to be asked for their opinions or who are delegated to represent their organisation.

### **Radio Voix sans Frontières , World Association of Community Radio (AMARC), Sheffield, UK**

A project undertaken by the European regional section of UK based World Association of Community Radio, set up a link between radio stations involved in making programmes about or for refugees and

related issues. Radio Voix sans Frontières co-ordinated a 28-hour multi-lingual broadcast for the UN International Day against Racism. (21<sup>st</sup> March 1999) and hopes to continue linking up with other organisations who support anti-racism initiatives.

☺ Sets up European links and enables refugees to talk to each other and citizens directly

☹ Hard to sustain and difficult to ensure that it does reach a wide public.



### *SIGNPOSTS TO GOOD PRACTICE*

- Contacts should be made with local and national journalists and accurate information provided to combat negative stereotyping of refugees in the media
- The participation of refugees in the media showing them in constructive and positive roles in the community should be promoted

## E. 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. In a poor area of Marseilles in Southern France, with a long tradition of community work development among local people and immigrants, refugees have provided a new stimulus for community development.

The Bridge project, a charity established in 1982 in East London as a response to the problems faced by socially and economically disadvantaged in this depressed inner city areas, is actively involved in social and economic regeneration. Refugees, mainly Somalis, are provided with advice, counselling and training ranging from basic skills development (reading, writing, English language) to management training so as to improve their chances of getting a job, getting training or starting up a business of their own.

Experienced business people counsel and advise clients on business matters e.g. the tax problems of the self-employed, advice on business start-up (Business planning, Marketing Law etc.) and improvement of the performance of established businesses. The project is clear that economic regeneration of the area provides a key to social integration for refugees. Aid to the initial adjustment of refugees is followed by training to enable refugees to become active players in the regeneration of the area. The East London Somali Association has also ensured that Somali women are included within these plans.

### **Pro-Badolato project, CRIC, Calabria, Southern Italy.**

In the small village of Badolato in Calabria in Southern Italy, the arrival of many Kurdish refugees by boat in December 1997 provided an opportunity for rural regeneration. The local Mayors in co-operation with a development company CRIC from the Region of Calabria, designed a project to both aid local economic regeneration and the integration of the Kurdish refugees in the community. The social and economic development of the village, which had been suffering from a serious decline in its population and contained few local people able to take on the risk of new initiatives, was designed to occur through the development mainly of alternative tourism (environment, cultural heritage). Refugees were housed locally and started on the project of renovation, both of rooms and apartments for tourists in the medieval houses, of a Kurdish restaurant where tourists can eat, and some shops. Locals and refugees were trained in ironwork and pottery leading to the setting up of workshops in the attractive medieval village located on a hill site. Refugees also work in a tourist shop selling local ecological products and third world souvenirs. Locals and refugees have trained as tourist guides for local tourist sites and alternative tourism such as trekking. Residential Italian language courses have also started as part of the alternative tourism plan. The local community and the refugees, supported by the authorities, development company and local co-operatives, organised the Festival “Borgo”, where there were theatrical and musical performances and exhibitions involving Kurds and local people. Systematic work has been done with the local media to promote the Kurds good image and their contribution to the development and renewal of the local society and economy. The project is able to deal with a variable numbers of refugees, (currently over 30 refugees are involved) as new arrivals seek asylum and other Kurdish refugees seek to be united with family members elsewhere in Europe. (See Vocational Training Guide Section 3, D)

- ☺ Original, perceiving refugees as an opportunity rather than a set of problems.
- ☺ Brings economic and social development to a deprived area.
- ☹ Depends on very good co-operation between local authorities, developmental bodies and refugees.

## *Signpost to Good Practice*

- Local authorities should perceive refugees as a potential resource for the regeneration of declining rural and urban areas.

## Section 3: Enrichment

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.

### A. 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. The role of community leaders in promoting acceptance and enjoyment of the cultural difference and positive aspects associated with refugees' cultures has already been indicated in the section on Community relations and development. Some countries have changed their attitudes; thus in the UK in a number of local authorities containing people of many nationalities, the wearing of "national" dress by minorities working for them is seen as a positive aspect enriching local society. Many organizations and bodies are sensitive to people's cultural and faith needs e.g. the British Refugee Council has a policy which gives all staff three additional days of annual leave for the observance of religious holidays.

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. In some of the Scandinavian countries, such as Finland and Sweden, children from minority cultures have the right to mother tongue language instruction<sup>8</sup>. 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 up between the 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, organised 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.

## B. Multiculturalism in host societies

*“My understanding of a multicultural society is that every culture has to contribute to the creation of a wider culture. But people are not talking in this context, in reality what they are talking about is the westernisation of other cultures...”* (Kurdish refugee living in Denmark, the refugee Interviews)

The issue of multiculturalism has already been referred to explicitly and implicitly in the earlier sections of this Guide. One characterisation of multiculturalism is that it involves the acceptance of another's cultural heritage on an equal basis. This is not always easy to achieve given that old attitudes and perceptions towards those from the third world may still persist. These are sometimes enforced by the fact that in most Member States a majority of refugees are excluded from the labour market or employed in low

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8 See also Education Guide, Section 1,B

level jobs, often with a wide discrepancy between their level of training and education and the new reality. Thus perception of refugees as a resource, enriching local and national society, depends on the reactions of national government, local authorities and employers. (See also Employment Guide) Amongst refugees are those who can help the local and national economy by being a culturally sensitive group whose grasp of the international situation or of the cultural particularities of specific markets can help those in business and international relations.

*“ We used to be asked just about problems and becoming a refugee; now we are asked to contribute our knowledge about an African society and the events that make it in the news. ”* (An African refugee living in Finland, the Refugee interviews)

In Jyvaskyla, Finland, the local refugee and migrant association (the Nightingale Association) has ensured that its members are invited to contribute their knowledge and opinions to local radio news and current affairs programmes on events in the different countries from which refugees originate.

At the local level there are a number of ventures which seek to enrich their neighbourhoods and communities. The multicultural dimension is evident in enterprises of refugees and migrants throughout Europe, nowhere more evident than in the various catering and restaurant businesses which promote foreign food. In Belgium the African Corporation (supported by EU Budget line B3-4113) seeks through its catering business, to promote knowledge about other cultures and refugees. The EU Kitchen project in Botkyrka Community, Sweden, (supported by EU Budget line B3-4113), has trained refugee women to provide culturally appropriate meals to the older migrant and refugee people living in the municipality.

### **Global Village, Ostend, Belgium**

This private venture by African refugees originated as an effort to establish a positive relationship with the local community through a sports club and cultural association. In 1998 some members started a self financing enterprise, an international restaurant and catering service, but with a longer term aim of offering management and advice to other refugees and migrants who wanted to start up enterprises and initiatives in various fields including music and commerce. The enterprise plays an active role in the integration of refugees (with status and de facto) and other marginalised people in the Ostend area e.g. the unemployed, homeless, by offering part and full time employment. It plans to offer an IT based information service to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. (See Employment Guide, Section 4, A)

- ☺ Refugee independent initiative to aid local integration and promote multiculturalism  
Meeting place for refugees and local people.

The promotion of multi-culturalism through systematic work by NGOs is a contribution to more general societal efforts that have to be made. Many associations have tried to promote multi-culturalism through developing shared forms of self-expression, creative and intellectual development. Some of these are discussed below.

### C. 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 Member 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. In Germany the Deutsch Caritasverband, in one of its district projects, helped refugee women who are heads of families and living in refugee accommodation through the development of a women's cafe, the running of language courses specifically for these women, the organisation a playgroup. Refugees and local people worked as volunteers in this project. The SUSRET project, discussed in section B below, also was designed to help refugee women overcome their financial and psychological difficulties. In Germany the Caritasverband in their project on the social integration of refugees offers in various centres such activities as dancing, music workshops, sports events, reading and excursions with particular focus on the needs of refugee women.

#### **AGORA Centre, Goteborg, Sweden.**

The Centre began in 1997-8, one of the two EU funded projects for refugee integration concerning women, with the aim of becoming a permanent institution. Its aim is to provide a meeting point for Swedish and refugee women aiding them in new activities and in expanding their networks, in developing their personal resources and in learning about their place in the world. It employs 6 women, 2 Swedes and 4 refu-

gees. These latter women have benefited from the empowerment offered to them by involvement in the project since the environment of supportive women has encouraged them. The project, recognising the wasted skills of many immigrant and refugee women, sought to support them by offering them opportunities to meet and make extensive social contacts and networks. The various courses offered in the Agora Centre - from cookery to language courses, creative writing, meeting Swedes, sports, women's health etc. - have drawn many women to attend – approximately 500 per month on average and provide a place where refugee women and Swedish women have an opportunity to meet one another on an equal footing.

- 😊 Supports local and refugee women's development and expansion of social and cultural opportunities.
- 😞 Problem of long term funding.

### **The ARKI Project, Kerava and Jarvenpaa Municipalities, Southern Finland**

These two Local Authorities developed a joint programme to aid refugee family integration. One element of this involves taking women refugees for a 2 day seminar on a boat journey where issues concerned with their development are discussed with local social workers and support persons from ethnic minority groups. The same seminar is run separately for men with men social workers and local participants. In this way they hope to help both the sexes adjust to their lives in Finland and the new gender roles they confront.

- 😊 Promotes gender sensitivity and an understanding of changing gender roles.

### *Signposts to Good Practice*

- Public bodies should work systematically with refugee associations to make the local community aware of other cultures.
- Refugee cultural heritage should be valued and used as a way of enriching the host culture and preserving the identity of the refugees.
- Alienation of the younger generation of refugees should be avoided in order to promote multiculturalism
- Special programmes should be developed to help aid those refugee women at risk of social exclusion to expand their horizons and to understand the host society, in which they are living.

## D. Support for self-expression and cultural activities

### **Support for self expression activities in art, craft and sports**

While refugees originate within specific cultural traditions, living in a new society can be a positive stimulus for learning both new forms of self-expression and extending and developing the original cultural tradition. Many NGOs and other bodies have recognised that the promotion of various forms of creativity does aid some refugees in their participation in the cultural evolution of the society they live in. However while creativity and the arts are important areas for enrichment, the exact role they play in refugee community integration is not clear.

#### **SUSRET Project, Frasantz, Austria.**

A very successful initiative that started as a way of helping traumatised women refugees from Bosnia-Hertzogovna is that of SUSRET in Austria. Women's traditional skills in handicrafts were initially used as a way of using their time effectively and earning some pocket money. This became the basis for a co-operative venture which used these traditional skills but adapted them by using modern art designs; artists and designers internationally were asked to contribute designs which could be made into textile products. These products are promoted internationally through exhibitions in Europe and the USA, and specific markets identified who can provide orders for the products. The benefit of the project is not only in the employment of refugee women and the economic rewards that this venture brings but also in the way in which it has created arts objects based on co-operation between craftswomen and designers and thus helped to expand refugee women's own creativity as well as their independence. This project was supported by Budget line B3-4113. (For information about the health aspect of this project, see also Health Guide, Section 3,C )

😊 Creative, original work for refugee women that also provides an income.

#### **OMEGA project, Graz, Austria**

In Graz, Austria, the established OMEGA project has a number of dimensions including the support of a modern musical group, "World Beat" made up of both local youth and refugees from Bosnia, Kosovo, Romania and Togo. Making new music by drawing on the different cultural heritage of the refugees and Western music has proved to be a creative enterprise for participants and the local community. (For information about OMEGA's work with women in the sphere of health, see Health Guide, Section 2,C)

😊 Promotes original self-expression as a fusion between world cultures.

Though several other countries have encouraged the formation of refugee bands the positive aspect of this project is in its creation of a multicultural group that creates its own new music.

Schools play an important pedagogic role in opening up to all children different forms of creativity. In the field of the arts refugee children may be able to express some of the frightening and negative experiences they have undergone, while also communicating these experiences to local children.

*“Schools are important for our children; they can express something about what they and their family have been through and it seems to help.”* (Refugee Community and Culture Panel).

### **Refugee Children’s Art, ISS Athens, Greece**

The International Social Service in Athens supported an arts competition for school and refugee children. The artwork was presented in an exhibition in Athens and then sent on tour to other ISS branches in the USA and Europe. A book was produced and is used for advocacy purposes since it dramatically illustrates refugee children’s experiences.

- ☺ Promotes awareness of refugee children and their lives
- ☹ The impact of such work is difficult to evaluate.

In most countries the encouragement of refugee participation in the sports life of the host society has been promoted by NGOs and refugee community organisations. While this often provides a very direct and generally positive way of young people meeting, it is not without its problems. In the area of football, for example, rivalries between refugees from different ethnic groups, rivalries with local host teams, exclusion from the major leagues, can actually increase tensions between refugees and the host society. The teaching of other sports such as the martial arts, may provide refugees with psychological support enabling them to feel slightly more in control of themselves and events. The role of sports both generally and specifically needs to be investigated. How far are associations right to try to seek bonds with the wider host community through sports events and in which kind of sports?

### **ANM? (Will You Play with Me?) project, Oulou, Northern Finland.**

The arrival of many young unaccompanied refugees in the town of Oulou led to the initiation of a football club for all foreigners. It encouraged all ethnic minorities and foreigners, including refugees, to band together to play various sports with the aim of integrating these with similar Finnish sports events and

teams. It also ran a programme to teach young children to play games together. However recognising that sports activities can lead to rivalries rather than bonding, they are organising a European meeting (Spring 2000) to discuss methods of ensuring that sports work positively, for refugee integration.

☺ Confronts the problems of young refugees and attempts to overcome racism

*“We have to be careful. Otherwise we can find different groups fighting with one another.”* (Somalian refugee living in Finland)

The development of the creative aspects of IT clearly are important for individual refugees but the role of IT e.g. the Internet, in promoting communication both between refugees in different European countries and with others in the host society may be of rather more importance as a way of promoting integration. The initiation of the refugee site [www.freevillage.com](http://www.freevillage.com) is an initial step.

While supporting refugee activities in sports, the arts, hobbies and any other form of creativity, is undoubtedly important for the individual refugee and their personal fulfillment and enrichment, the actual role these activities play in community and cultural integration are not entirely clear.

*“The Internet may solve many problems as it can bring in contact refugees in all Member States”,* (Refugee Community & Culture Panel).

### **The development of cultural activities promoting public awareness of the need for refugee integration**

Cultural activities involving sports and various forms of creativity are often organised by agencies and associations as a way of promoting the visibility of refugees and helping in the work of advocacy. Some of these methods have already been discussed. Yet creativity and artistic expression are not primarily for propaganda purposes. Additionally many forms of artistic expression are oriented to minorities while those forms of cultural expression designed to act on behalf of refugee causes may only attract the already sympathetic. Nevertheless if the art or form of creativity has merit it can be a tool for promoting positive attitudes and knowledge about refugee issues. In Spain FEDORA created a theatre play about how Africans are treated by the Spanish police. This was important for solidarity building among refugees, but also had an impact on Spanish society because it brought to the forefront the visibly bad treatment of immigrants and refugees. In the UK the BRC through its Media Advisor encourages the participation of refugees in the arts and sports as well as promoting the representation of refugee lives in the arts. Thus Chat's Palace, a community theatre in Hackney, London, UK, has actively supported refugee theatre performances, bringing to the notice of the public the issues of being a refugee and living in the UK.

Cultural adjustment has been promoted in Sweden by combining a theatre group of refugees with a Swedish theatre group. In Denmark the Danish Red Cross Culture House was conceived originally to provide refugees from the former Yugoslavia with some possibility of meaningful activity while they waited to receive refugee status. (Asylum seekers in Denmark have no right to work: see Employment Guide, Section 1). The Culture House is run by a few paid professional staff, and staffed otherwise wholly by refugee volunteers from the Red Cross run reception centres. Activities included courses in computers, language courses, artistic and musical activities. One high profile result is a permanent public exhibition of sculptures made by artists and refugees.



#### *SIGNPOSTS TO GOOD PRACTICE*

- **Projects supporting refugee creativity of all kinds should be promoted as an effective way to integration.**
- **Theatre, art, film and sports clubs should be encouraged to take in refugees as trainees or professional staff.**

## **SECTION 4: Refugee empowerment and citizenship**

Though some European host societies provide considerable practical support and help for refugee integration, by far the most active agent in integration is the refugee himself/herself or as an organised member of a refugee group. The relationship between local and national government bodies, host NGOs and other local associations is critical in the support they offer for refugee organisational initiatives. While in some countries with relatively small or new refugee populations there may be very few organisations of or for refugees, in other Member States there may be many organisations. In both situations refugees, NGOs and refugee community organisations have to learn to co-operate rather than compete with one another, in order to maximise resources, avoid unnecessary duplication of work and communicate a united message. This is particularly important when acting as advocates for refugees' rights and as a voice for their problems. Advocacy is an essential task at all levels of society, from the European level e.g. that undertaken by ECRE, to that done at national level e.g. advocacy towards governments, towards different interest groups, and at the level of the local community.

### **A. Refugee involvement in decision making**

Refugees despite all the problems they face in arriving in a new country, often have enormous capacities

and personal resources. One common difficulty for members of host societies with well-developed welfare states is to accept that refugees can often undertake activities and responsibilities for themselves. Some NGOs with rather paternalistic approaches to refugees as “clients” may also not recognise them as people who could take on some of the work, both paid and voluntary, to help the integration of other refugees and asylum seekers. Above all, support for refugees so that they take an active role in their new society is a vital element in integration, one that can be promoted by local authorities, trade unions as well as NGOs. In Denmark the 20,000 Bosnian refugees accepted in early 1990s were placed in special centres cut off from the rest of Danish society; these refugees had no choice but to develop their own resources and form more self sufficient groups. They obtained training which allowed them to become more able to deal with the management of their own issues e.g. the training of selected Bosnians to assess the possibilities for repatriation, Bosnian journalists remaining in Denmark were trained in how to adapt their skills to the Danish context and were successful in establishing a radio network, a venture that is now being copied by the Somali people. The experience of working with the Bosnian refugee communities inspired the Danish Refugee Council to shift the focus of its work from the individual refugee to that respecting the possibilities of refugee self-help and working with the network or community of refugees.

NGOs have an important role to play in supporting and empowering refugees; in particular ensuring that they are represented on the relevant administrative bodies and committees of the NGO and are given an effective voice. This representation needs to be as wide as possible, including men and women from different cultural backgrounds, thus ensuring that the experiences and opinions of all refugees are available. In the ACCESS Ireland pilot project in 1998 refugees were brought together to contribute to the design of their future training e.g. describing existing and desired skills. The Greek Council for Refugees has instigated a regular committee in which refugees participate and make decisions on an equal footing with the social workers with respect to the allocation of refugee families in the housing programme. The Portuguese Refugee Council include refugees in the design and implementation of their training projects; in their 1998 pilot project they trained professionals in the reception and integration of refugees allowing professionals to talk about their experiences in the provision of services and refugees to give their perceptions on the training and its content.

### *Signpost to Good Practice*

- NGOs, Trade Unions and local authorities should attempt to incorporate refugees at all levels of administration and decision making

## B. Support for self-organisation

There appears to be widespread agreement amongst both local and refugee experts that one of the keys to successful community integration for refugees lies in the development of their own capacities to organise and make their own decisions. Refugee self development and empowerment depends on their own motivation, support from relevant NGOs and other local host institutions, as well as capacity building. While NGOs can offer refugees opportunities to meet and participate in decision making, the actual development of refugee organisations must depend on refugees themselves. Many refugees have escaped from authoritarian regimes and control and need to rescue their dignity by deciding independently to organise themselves and not be forced to organise.

Positive examples of what can be achieved by refugee self-organisation may act as a stimulus to other refugees but there are problems which are worth listing:

- Should refugee community organisations be based on common cultural or national origins? At one level this seems to be a widespread phenomenon and a natural one, given the common history and language shared by participants. But political and dogmatic differences may make co-operation very difficult within some groups. Additionally the development of separate refugee community associations may not provide a basis for easy co-operation with refugees from other nationalities.
- In countries where refugees are relatively few numerically and of different nationalities, there may be a major problem with the formation of effective refugee community organisations.
- While in many countries there are refugee organisations they are not necessarily linked to local communities in the host society. Yet if community integration is to be promoted then co-operation is essential

Overcoming these organisational difficulties involves the drawing up of a common set of goals on which those of all nationalities are able to agree as a first step in refugee self-organisation and co-operation with others.

The traditions of each country with respect to community associations and NGOs differ markedly; the countries of southern Europe tend to be less organised in terms of a plurality of NGOs and local community associations, basing their social relationships and organisation on more familial and informal relationship networks, though this is changing. In a significant number of Member States community development workers are a recent phenomenon and thus their experience of refugee community integration is very limited. In contrast in some northern European countries NGOs and local community associations may be the very fabric of social and political life. In Denmark where small local democratic groups play a key role in local decision making, refugees who tend to be very isolated from one another and the host society, were unaware of their need to participate and get their voice heard. They are being helped to overcome their problems with the language and their fear of authorities in one project called tant form of

“Neighbours” which ensures that local people create a network with refugees and visit them to explain about their rights and responsibilities in participation. Two social and health services employees and voluntary workers help create these contacts and ensure that refugees are able to participate. In Portugal an aftermaths of a long period of dictatorship is that local people are wary of one another as well as of strangers. Refugees realising this have tried to forge mechanisms for integration through using an Asian-African football club and trying to play with the local people.

### **Community Outreach Team, British Refugee Council, London, UK**

In the UK refugee community organisations (RCO's) have been in existence for many years and there has been a tradition of these working at the local community level (there are approximately 400). They meet on an equal level, are independent, but may form federations of local and regional refugee community organisations. The British Refugee Council originally developed the Community Outreach Team to advise individual refugees, but agreed with its reorientation to more community development work. One result was a working paper for the BRC advising its restructuring to allow for refugee community organisations to participate on an equal level. The current Community Development team in the BRC, with 10 staff of whom 3 advisers are refugees themselves (1 male and 2 female) provides support for approximately 100 refugee community organisations in the form of capacity building, e.g. management of finances and communication skills. RCO's of the same nationality but from opposite political/ideological sides often work together through links to local/host community associations. Such an approach can help to diffuse any political conflict which may arise. The team is sensitive to the different cultures and needs of communities. It encourages the involvement of refugee women in the activities of community organisations. It has one post dedicated to work with women, to develop women refugees' participation in organisations. Their training provides crèche and allowances for travel expenses. In addition the 5 representatives of the refugee community organisations sitting on the board of the BRC can advocate for the concerns of all RCO's, thus enabling them to shape policies. They are encouraged to examine all issues in terms of what they share in common and the common needs of refugees in their country of asylum.

- ☺ Systematic, long term work to help the development of refugee community organisations
- ☹ Requires long term funding.

The encouragement and support of refugee self-organisation by local communities, trades unions, NGOs and the government, is helped by appropriate funding and/or material or organisational support. Thus in Denmark and Luxembourg formal initiatives by small groups of refugees (5 and 3 people respectively) to form associations were reported as being able to receive support from public funding. Another impor-

support in the development of refugee community organisation occurs through offering technical know-how, training, written materials, and managerial support.

In the Netherlands refugee community organisations have formed a federation called VON. There has recently been a transformation in the relationship between the Dutch Refugee Council and the federation. The pilot project “Dialoog” involving 31 refugee organisations, concerns refugee organisations have the opportunity to define their own views of integration, including women’s issues and the way refugees are represented in the media. They then meet with the Dutch Refugee Council and other organisations as well as Dutch people to discuss future practices and policy.

### The Evelyn Oldfield Unit, London, UK

This is an independent, not for profit organisation set up in 1994 to support and strengthen refugee community organisations and the development of necessary skills and abilities amongst leaders and participants. It is funded by a variety of charities and public funds. A major part of their work concerns training refugees, though they also provide consulting and advice services. The main areas where training is felt to be needed for the many refugee community groups in the London area is with the refugee community leaders and programme operators who are given the opportunity of learning a variety of necessary skills. These include programme design and planning; management skills including equal opportunities, staff support and supervision, quality assurance, financial management and fund raising; and democratic procedures including the roles and responsibilities of management committees and managing people. It has developed special training materials which are available to the various refugee community groups. It has also developed a training course and qualification for refugee co-ordinators with Goldsmith’s College. It makes special efforts to support women refugees as co-ordinators.

- ☺ Provides independent, technical support to ensure that refugee community organisations function effectively
- ☹ Needs independent funding and administration.

However one difficulty for refugee organisations lies in how they can retain their perspective and opinions where they are exclusively funded from the government. Thus it appears to be essential that refugee organisations pay systematic attention to finding diverse sources of funding.

*“It is important to think independently of the government, but then a diverse form of funding is necessary”, (Refugee Community & Culture Panel, Dalfsen)*

*“Another reason why refugee organisations are not getting the money is that their purposes and objectives are not very clear” (An NGO Expert from Belgium )*



### *Signposts to Good Practice*

- Organisations working to develop refugee self organisations should emphasise issues of common concern (e.g. refugee rights in the host country) as the bases of successful community integration
- Material support and training in management skills, fund raising and democratic procedures should be provided to help refugee community organisations to overcome organisational and structural difficulties.
- More refugees should be recruited as paid staff and volunteers for projects aiding refugee integration this would constitute a step in the refugee self-organisation, (see Employment Guide, Section 5)

## C. Support for political participation

After the initial period of adjustment and with their inclusion in sections of the host society or local communities, refugees may seek to become more committed and active members of their host society. Some may also seek citizenship, though bearing in mind their longer-term plans and the repercussions this can have on their possible return to their country of origin. Since many refugees arrived as a result of their political activities, further involvement in local politics may have negative results, while if they plan to be politically active again in their country of origin if the situation changes, they may find that citizenship of the host society works against them.

The issue of citizenship is a problematic one in the EU Member States. Some countries are clear as to the criteria that have to be met to become a citizen and do have a good record of allowing refugee applicants to be admitted as citizens. Other states make citizenship very difficult to obtain in practice, while there are no clear criteria allowing refugees to understand the basis for acceptance. This appears to be one area where there needs to be some monitoring of Member States.

The benefits of citizenship for refugees are that they become full members of the new society with rights to vote in local, national and European elections as well as participate actively in political life. However the results of granting citizenship vary. In some countries refugees settle and lose their refugee identity, while in other countries refugees may simply feel more secure and even more able to participate effectively and without fear in the refugee community organisations and in political issues around refugees.

Despite this problem of citizenship, some EU Member States have made efforts to encourage the participation of refugees and migrants in political life through the setting up of local community councils for foreigners. This is particularly important where they represent a significant if small percentage of the population. In Austria the ZEBRA project encourages refugees to join and participate in local political parties by offering refugees and migrants training seminars on political processes. In the town of Graz there is a “Foreigners’ Council” where refugees’ and migrants’ political interests and opinions are represented. The trades union organisation UGT, in Aragon, Spain, has supported refugees to organise themselves and provided them with training courses which enable them to participate in the political system, in policy making bodies and in civil society.

In Denmark refugees are taught specifically about the rules for participation in local community democratic associations e.g. housing associations, since this is a key element in “belonging” in Danish society. ADRIM in Marseilles, France, has also been active in assisting refugees to organise themselves to gain power and organise so that their voices are heard in the local political system

*“Foreigners must participate; it’s important to show an interest in local life. We (refugees) are in difficulties; we are frightened of democracy, authorities, so it’s difficult to participate and not be frightened.” (Bosnian refugee living in Denmark, Refugee Community and Culture Panel)*



### *Signposts to Good Practice<sup>9</sup>*

- There should be clear internal administrative criteria in the Member States which allow refugees to apply and receive citizenship as a way to promote political participation.
- Resident settled refugees should have the right and opportunity to have their opinions heard in their local communities and thereby become full members of their host society

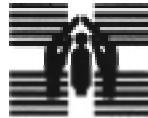
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9 See also Appendix 2: ECRE Position on the Integration of Refugees in Europe, paras:15-19





# Community and Cultural Integration: **GCR**



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