

Equal

LISBON: CONNECTING POLICY WITH PRACTICE

**Theme: Asylum seekers and
refugees**

Concentus final report

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SUMMARY REPORT

Over the last two decades the issue of asylum seekers and refugees has catapulted to the forefront of European politics. The debate has been linked with the arguments about migration into Europe, both legal and illegal. Europe's politicians have found this combination of issues very hard to handle both within domestic politics and at a European level.

Equal is one of a number of EU initiatives designed to help Member States achieve its targets for growth and new jobs outlined in its Lisbon Guidelines. The Equal Initiative seeks to explore and test effective ways to fight all forms of discrimination present in the labour market and to maximise people's engagement in economic activity. The inclusion of the asylum seekers theme in Equal is a bold step. It is a recognition by the European Commission of the importance of this issue.

Equal's transnational component is designed to help promote the conditions that will create a more inclusive labour market across Europe. Transnational Partnerships (TPs) are seen as a tool for the kind of lateral thinking required to achieve innovation and new initiatives. TP **Concentus** brought together partners working on asylum and refugee issues from Berlin, Germany; Italy (across 6 cities); Warsaw, Poland; and Birmingham, U.K.

So what key lessons for policy makers arise from the Partnership's work?

Key policy messages

1. Maximise capacities and capabilities

- **Improve conditions at reception and the range of support and advice available.** There needs to be particular services that relate to the specific nature of refugees and asylum seekers themselves e.g. psychological counselling, mentoring, new approaches to training.
- **Work with asylum seekers themselves.** This should ensure that services are culturally appropriate and tailored to the needs of specific and often vastly different refugee communities. The jointly prepared **Welcome Pack** (see Outreach: developing a user-led welcome pack case study) bears testimony to the value of this approach.

2. Training, employment and working with employers

This is a political 'hot potato'. Three steps forward could be to:

- **Recognise the value of vocational programmes.** Initiatives taken by project partners show strongly that these are highly valued, facilitate the learning process and enable asylum seekers to get acclimatised to the labour market. Traineeships, job placements and other forms of work experience are a first, vital step to help the vocational integration of asylum seekers. The **Italian experience** goes further. **Its incentive**

'voucher' scheme shows the importance of building good relations with employers.

- **Ease the rules on work.** The TP Concentus experience casts serious doubts on existing Member State and EU policies. The effort to maintain rigid distinctions between asylum seekers and refugees does not work. This is all the more so given the large variety of categories into which asylum seekers fall once their claim is past the twelve month period, or in the appeal process. To leave these people in limbo with questionable rights to employment is to deny them the most important way to integrate into society. At a time when the overall European trend on asylum claims has been falling sharply, governments and the European Commission should ease the restrictions on the working rights of asylum seekers.
- **The proposed European Blue Card scheme should recognise the skills of many asylum seekers and refugees.** The very nature of refugees and asylum seekers means that in comparison to illegal migrants, **a significantly large proportion of them are highly qualified professionals.** Amongst almost all refugee communities, there are scientists, doctors, engineers, accountants and other professionals. Many Member States are now issuing calls for managed migration policies, which will allow skilled labour to enter Europe. Skilled resources are already to be found within many applying for asylum.

3. Funding

- Use fully the new European Social Fund (ESF) programmes. During 2007-2013 there are national ESF programmes in each Member State. **Asylum seekers and refugees should be included as a target group within all national programmes where they comprise a significant constituency.**

4. Support frameworks and networks

- **Recognise the importance of self-organisation.** Asylum seekers and refugees need be able to organise themselves, develop self-confidence and make progress. The UK experience of refugee community organisations, which has been enhanced by the EQUAL programme and the jointly developed empowerment tool-kit are important examples to build on. Policy makers and practitioners should endorse this approach whole-heartedly and agencies should embed it in their policy and funding strategies.
- **Improve the capacity of networks and intermediary organisations** so they can give voice and opportunities to refugees.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study looks at the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in four different parts of Europe. The Concentus Transnational Partnership (TP) brought together Development Partnerships (DPs) from Berlin, Germany, Italy (across 6 cities), Warsaw, Poland, and Birmingham, U.K. TP Concentus is one of four EU Equal Transnational Partnerships which are the subject of our overall study which covers cities and regions in nine EU member states. Birmingham and its surrounding area is the common thread to all four partnerships, which in total embrace nine countries and fourteen major cities and regions. This study has been written by the Institute of Local Government Studies at Birmingham University (Inlogov).

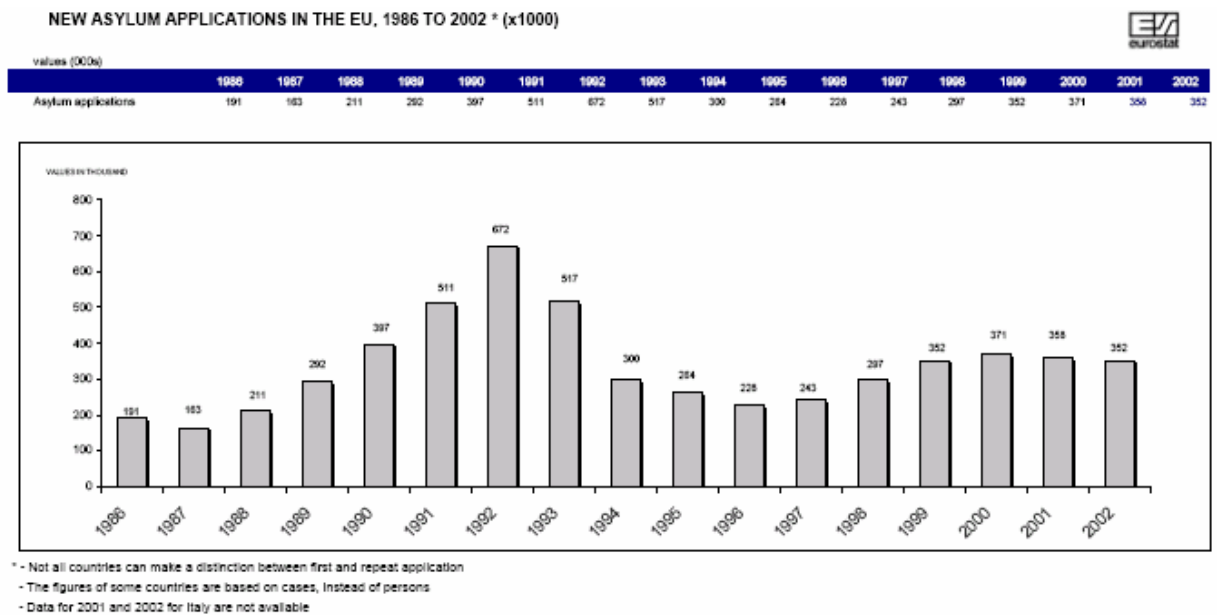
The first set of reports which Inlogov prepared for each of the 4 Equal Development Partnerships (TPs) – Bridges over Borders, Concentus, Equilibrium and Wings– focused on statistical information relevant to the subject area of each TP and EU policy and legislative material pertinent to the specific issues of lifelong learning; refugees and asylum seekers; the reconciliation of work, family and social life; and gender Equality. The reports related these matters to the labour market focus of the Equal programme and the targets agreed in the Lisbon Guidelines by the EU Council of Ministers in Spring 2005 at their Economic Council. Each report stood alone. Together, they made a set that highlighted a number of the topics facing those Europeans who are in some way disadvantaged within the labour market. The second report was a combined report, which examined the range of issues that the 4 TPs are confronting. The third set of reports, of which this is one, looks at the key experiences and joint activities of the Transnational Partnership and assesses key lessons for policy makers at local, regional, national and European levels.

2. BACKGROUND TRENDS

Over the last two decades the issue of asylum seekers and refugees has catapulted to the forefront of European politics. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has been followed by a period of major upheavals, the break-up of states, the re-emergence of old ethnic tensions and in some cases civil war, most notably in the former Yugoslavia.

One consequence has been a sharp rise in the number of asylum seekers and refugees applying for residence within the European Union. Table 1. below gives the official figures supplied by Eurostat. They indicate the surge in asylum applications after 1989 and especially with the onset of civil war in the former Yugoslavia, with a gradual dip in the mid 1990s followed by another upsurge associated with the renewal of Balkan conflict in Kosovo at the end of the decade alongside upheavals in Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, the Southern Caucasus and Iraq.

Table 1. New asylum applications in the EU 1986-2002



Since then, there has been a **marked decline in asylum applications** to the European Union. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in its annual report 'Asylum levels and trends in industrialised countries 2006' showed that the 25 countries of the EU received 53% fewer requests in 2006 compared to 2002. In these 25 countries the number of asylum seekers in 2006 was the lowest in 20 years. Germany recorded its lowest level since 1983; the UK the lowest since 1989. In the UK the number of requests lodged during 2006 at 27,800 fell by 10% compared to 2005 and was 73% down on the 2002 figure of 103,000.

There were two regions running counter to these trends. The five Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden recorded a 17% increase in 2006, primarily due to the arrival of new asylum seekers in Sweden (+39%). The main reason for this was that Sweden witnessed a quadrupling of its Iraqi asylum requests compared to 2005 with almost 9,000 applications. Iraq was the top country of origin of asylum seekers in 2006.

The six countries of Southern Europe –Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain have seen a small increase in number of asylum seeker claims lodged over the last few years, admittedly from a low base. 33,600 claims were submitted in 2006 the second highest figure of the past 15 years. This may be linked to the sharp rise in applications during 2006 from Lebanon and Eritrea, plus a continued flow of refugees from Somalia.

Table 2. Asylum levels within the EU 2002-2006

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
EU 15	393,450	309,340	241,00	212,690	180,160
EU 'New' 10	32,090	37,250	38,860	27,080	18,740
EU Total	425,540	346,690	279,860	239,770	198,900

3. POLICY

The debate on asylum seekers and refugees has been inextricably interlinked with the arguments about migration into Europe, both legal and illegal. The collapse of the old state socialist systems and the profound shifts in Chinese policy has opened almost the whole world to commercial trade and capitalist investment. The rapid spread of computer technology has revolutionised manufacturing production and the speed and character of communications. Combined with a vast expansion of air travel and tourism, these globalising trends have been accompanied by a much freer movement of people. The potential and attraction of migration to richer, industrialised countries is now much greater; the pressures that drive people to seek this option have also grown in many countries; while the upheavals of the last two decades have led many others to flee their homes because of violent civil conflict and war. This is the tangled mixture of humanity that the European Union is seeking to respond to.

Europe's politicians have found this combination of issues very hard to handle both within domestic politics and at a European level. Both they and the European Commission recognised that with the deepening of European integration arising from the adoption of the Single Market in 1986 and the strengthening of the EU as an area of free movement of people, then the issues of both migration and asylum had to be tackled across the Union. The increasing flow of people seeking international protection in the EU shown in Table 1 reinforced this view.

4. LEGISLATION

The small-scale revision of the EU treaties at Amsterdam in 1997 introduced a new Article 13, which gave the European Union powers to tackle discrimination, alongside the powers in Article 137 on social inclusion. Since the introduction of Article 13 the EU has taken action to challenge both discrimination and in Equality. Several laws have been adopted such as the 'Race Equality Directive' and the 'Employment Equality Directive'.

Tampere European Council

This new Treaty power reinforced the capacity of the EU to act together on these issues. The first concerted attempt to do so came during the Finnish EU Presidency. The October 1999 Tampere European Council outlined the policy guidelines and practical objectives for the EU over the whole range of asylum, immigration, justice and criminal issues. In respect of asylum it put forward the proposal for a Common European Asylum System based on a full and inclusive application of the 1951 UN Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees. One consequence of this has been the formulation of a common Reception Directive (2003/9/EC) on 27th January 2003 which guaranteed a common quality of reception, services and opportunities for asylum seekers while waiting for a decision on their application.

Reception Directive

2005 witnessed the adoption of this Reception Directive. All Member States were obliged to transpose the Reception Directive into national legislation by February 2005. The Directive's 28 articles, 14 of which are directly relevant to the Equal Initiative's asylum theme, stake out for the first time a common framework for Member States' reception systems. However, the tensions and arguments over the Directive were evident in its formulations, especially over matters of employment and training. Article 11 left it to each Member State to "determine a period of time, starting from the date on which an application for asylum was lodged, during which an applicant shall not have access to the labour market." Furthermore, Article 12 also avoided any common EU position by declaring that "Member States may allow asylum seekers access to vocational training." In 2006 the EU Commission carried out a study into how Member States have transposed and implemented the directive and found significant variations between them on these matters.

The Hague Programme

Following EU Council discussions in July and October 2004 the Dutch Presidency produced a new programme for justice and home affairs for the years 2005-2010 to be known as The Hague Programme. Immigration and asylum topped the Hague agenda alongside the prevention of terrorism. Amongst key measures of direct relevance to TP Concentus, the Hague Programme called for a common European asylum system by 2009 and a European framework to guarantee the successful integration of migrants into host societies.

The pace of EU activity to fulfil the tasks set out in The Hague programme is quickening. On 17th February 2006 the Commission issued a "Communication on Strengthened Practical Cooperation" in the area of asylum. The main goal is to improve the quality of individual decisions by Member states within the framework of the rules set by Community asylum legislation. The intention is to achieve a single procedure, to standardise country of origin information and to help address particular pressure points, such as Malta. These structures should result in the establishment of a European Support Office to oversee all

forms of cooperation between Member States on the operation of a common European asylum system. The hope is that the establishment of a common EU-wide framework will then reduce the proportion of challenges to negative decisions which turn down an individual's application for asylum.

Just two months earlier Commissioner Frattini from Directorate General (DG) Justice and Home Affairs and Commissioner Spidla from DG Employment jointly presented a 'Policy Plan on Legal Migration' which the Commission will develop over the coming four years in line with the Hague programme. Of particular note to the Concentus TP, it proposes to develop policies aimed at supporting migrants and their dependents into the labour market and in the host society

There has been intense discussion about workers' mobility within the EU, most notably from the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe, to countries of the old EU15. Only the UK, Ireland and Sweden operate a no restrictions policy, while the remaining 12 EU countries adopted transitional arrangements to restrict the free movement of workers from the 10 new Members States into their countries. Many of these countries are now revising these arrangements and giving serious consideration to the adoption of a free movement of labour policy for all citizens within the EU 27. Concerns expressed in the referenda in France and Holland on the proposed EU Constitution produced fierce arguments about the EU Services Directive and the supposed impact of the symbolic 'Polish plumber'. All these issues illustrate the deep uncertainty about current European and member state policies on issues related to population movement, migration and asylum.

5. EQUAL AND A THEMATIC FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY ANALYSIS

The Equal Initiative seeks to explore and test effective ways to fight all forms of discrimination present in the labour market and to maximise engagement in economic activity. At the EU Council of Ministers meeting in Lisbon in March 2000, the European Union set itself the ambition of becoming the world's most successful and dynamic economic region within the decade. The Council of Ministers meeting in 2005 acknowledged the limited progress that had been made and tried to provide a tighter focus on growth and jobs by outlining a set of Guidelines with 24 key tasks; the first sixteen relating to broad economic policy and the last eight relating to employment policies. The document as a whole has a strong supply-side emphasis seeking to draw more European citizens into the world of work. Thus the employment guidelines begin by setting as its Lisbon target an overall employment rate of 70% by 2010, with a specific target of a 60% rate for female employment to be achieved by that date. (Guideline 17). The following seven guidelines then outline a range of activities that Member States are expected to pursue in order to achieve these targets. Equal is one of a number of EU initiatives designed to help Member States achieve these targets. Its transnational component is designed to help promote the conditions that will create a more inclusive labour market across

Europe. Transnational Partnerships (TPs) are seen as a tool for the kind of lateral thinking required to achieve innovation.

The inclusion of the asylum seekers theme in EQUAL is a bold step. It indicates a recognition within the Commission of the importance of this issue. While the rights of asylum seekers to engage in labour market activity while awaiting the outcome of their applications vary across Member States, there is plenty of learning and good practice which can be gained by Development Partnerships working together. Furthermore, a proportion of asylum applicants will be successful and the social, vocational and linguistic activity in which they engage while remaining as applicants, will be vital in ensuring their future integration into the labour market and wider society.

The agreement by which Equal programmes included asylum seekers and refugees created a labour market tool for this category of person for the first time. The Equal Initiative constitutes an important EU level instrument to help Member States to make the Reception Directive operational within their national or regional contexts, as one of its main themes is focused on the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers. 38 projects were supported in Round 1 from 2001 to 2004 and more than 60 in round 2 from 2005 to 2007. The focus on socio-vocational integration relates to 14 of the 28 articles within the Reception Directive.

This project activity has been undertaken in large co-operative alliances called Development Partnerships. They have opened the potential for experiments and pilots focused on countering discrimination in the labour market. In terms of best practice the DP involves all the project organisers, participants and partners working at the political/strategic level to achieve a common objective, with an integrated approach to find solutions to labour market problems.¹

This report is one of a series which have been written by the Institute of Local Government Studies at Birmingham University (Inlogov). Inlogov has been commissioned by the Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council on behalf of the four Equal Development Partnerships (DPs) which it has been running during the 2005-2007 Round 2 EQUAL programme. These four DPs and their Transnational Partnerships (TPs) - Bridges over Borders, Concentus, Equilibrium and Wings - have each been tackling a range of issues highlighted by these Employment Guidelines. Birmingham University's policy work has examined the practices and experiences which the different partnerships have been developing in relation to these Guidelines. From this we have selected eight common topics, which emerge from the four Transnational Partnerships. These relate to different aspects of European labour markets but are all concerned with reaching into every corner of the population and finding ways to maximise their potential for engagement in economic activity. Eight themes across the four Transnational reports are:

¹ For one national example of good practice see Maren Gag. Moving Systems. Equal programmes for refugees and asylum seekers in Germany: The role of the Development Partnerships. Fluchtort Hamburg p.9.

1. Outreach: connecting with the most excluded
2. Maximising capabilities and capacities
3. Utilising Information and Communication Technologies to address labour market disadvantage
4. Encouraging women into business
5. Challenging the barriers to women.
6. Working with employers and developing Corporate Social Responsibility
7. Managing labour flows within the European single market
8. The role of support frameworks and networks

The Concentus TP has brought together partners from Berlin, Germany; Italy (across 6 cities), Warsaw, Poland, and Birmingham, U.K. (see Appendix for more details). Their individual activities within their ESF funded programmes and their joint transnational activities have focused on many of these eight themes. The specific focus of TP Concentus on asylum seekers has meant that the weight of its activity has been on themes such as maximising capacities and developing support frameworks rather than, for example, challenging the barriers to women. In many respects Concentus has similarities to the general trends among the Equal asylum seeker programme across Europe which have focused on three main sub-themes: Advice, education and training; employment; and capacity building.² Within TP Concentus, four main working groups were established: on raising awareness; empowerment; support services; and comparative studies. So what has TP Concentus and its individual partners achieved?

6. THEMATIC ACTIVITY

6.1 Outreach: connecting with the most excluded

Given the fraught and often dangerous conditions under which asylum seekers often leave their own countries and arrive in Europe, it is not surprising that many find entering the 'official' world a difficult experience. In a number of major cities, single centres have been established which serve as a reception point able to offer basic support, advice and accommodation to those stating a claim for asylum.

However, this does not always reach those fleeing from persecution and distrustful of all authority. Colleagues in Sanremo on the North Italian Ligurian coast were aware that they were unable to contact many asylum seekers and refugees living in their area near the French border. They decided to use the EQUAL programme to try a new approach. They transformed an existing vehicle into a motor-home and operated it as a mobile advice centre for asylum seekers and refugees. They opened up in the three towns for half a day each week and provided a range of advice and support. Marco Boeri and

² See Minimum Standards – and Beyond: The contribution of EQUAL to a Dignified Standard of Living for Asylum Seekers. Background paper for the European Policy Forum on Asylum 22-24 May 2007 Malmö, Sweden. P.9.

Patrizia Angelelli of the Centro di Solidarieta L’Ancora in Sanremo proudly speak about the success of their motor van. “It offered an informal service, not an institutional one,” says Marco and during the 15 months of the scheme’s operation they contacted and supported more than 250 asylum seekers.

Case Study

Outreach: developing a user-led welcome pack

The transnational partnership recognised the importance of this initial ‘reception’ dimension in their working group on support services. They developed a **Welcome Pack**, which is one of the products of Concentus. At first sight, this may not appear to be novel: these have been prepared in many countries over the last few years. However, the partners were clear that this was a Pack of a new type. As Abdirahman Ali, Chair of the Birmingham Aspire network expresses it,

“Whereas previous packs have been top-down material, like the one in the UK produced by the Home Office, ours is user-led and is informed by the direct experiences and needs of asylum seekers themselves.”

Developed through workshops with asylum seekers and their organisations it focuses on their key needs e.g. legal assistance and advice on accommodation. The joint transnational sessions have helped to focus the document further and to concentrate on a limited number of priorities. It is brief and to the point with a section on Frequently Asked Questions to help crystallise issues in everyday language. It avoids the temptation to be a compendium or catalogue of all available services. As such in both its language and style it is distinctive from previous documents, as well as being drawn up in consultation with organisations from across the four countries of the partnership. The initial version will be available in English but since the themes, frequently asked questions and hot tips have been developed across the four countries, it is designed to be easily adjusted to the specific conditions of each partner. Similarly, its availability electronically on a website, is designed to ensure that it can be updated quickly and thereby avoid the fate of many printed packs which date very easily.

6.2 Maximising Capacities and Capabilities

Given the circumstances of their departure from their homeland and arrival in Europe, an absolutely crucial area for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees is the range of support services to which they have access. It is not surprising that each DP in the Concentus Transnational Partnership has focused on this area. Aside from a range of language projects, actions have included psychological counselling and support; mentoring; cultural initiatives

and pre-vocational training. These initiatives are designed to help asylum seekers and refugees to recover from their ordeal, renew their confidence and rediscover their capabilities.

6.3 Counselling

Giving precise and sustained support to asylum seekers, many of whom have experienced deeply traumatic events, is one of the distinctive tasks facing those working in this area. This is one of the main facets of the work of the Intercultural Institute in Warsaw; while it forms the core of the activities of the Berlin Centre for the Treatment of Torture Victims (BZFO) in Berlin.

Case Study

Support to traumatized refugees, Berlin

BZFO was founded in 1992 with support from the German Red Cross. It has an annual budget of € 1.7 million. It employs twenty-five staff and supported 371 users during 2005. Organised as an outpatient clinic, BZFO supports both adults and children. Its staff are drawn from a wide range of disciplines including medical doctors, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, physiotherapists, music and art therapists and social workers. Additionally, a key role is assigned to interpreters for many users have limited German: their role is not only to serve as language facilitators but also to supply the therapist with essential information about the cultural and social background of the patient.

In Birmingham the My Time association, located in a mainly immigrant neighbourhood has developed a regular drop-in day centre under the Equal programme, where alongside befriending, legal assistance, cooking and gardening groups the centre provides psychological counselling and support for those suffering from post-traumatic stress. While the majority of users are male, the Centre has also developed a female counselling service which as well as trained professional staff now also has fourteen trainees who can address users in eight different languages. The head of My Time, Michael Lilley, feels that the project has not only helped asylum seekers but also the association's staff and volunteers to develop their own practice on asylum seeker issues.

My Time has used the transnational partnership to take this work a step further with a series of cross-country work placements looking at psychological counselling, following a shared methodology. As Lilley describes it,

"We have hosted colleagues from both Berlin and Warsaw and shall be going to Italy. We are looking at developing a European model of best working practice in the counselling field. It involves lots of non-talking, a focus on diet

and exercise to get over language difficulties and help refugees to function better. We are looking at a cross-cultural model here, using methods that can be adapted to people's specific backgrounds."

These initial developments are inevitably tentative but the Conventus colleagues see the potential for promoting a network of professional expertise across Europe. Michael Lilley has proposals to establish a more permanent link with the National Health Service mental health trust in the city. He says, "*A Foundation with European links established together with the Birmingham-Solihull Mental Health Trust has real potential.*" This type of practice development with professional staff working shoulder to shoulder for one week with colleagues in another country has proved extremely beneficial to the colleagues working in the areas of stress, trauma and psychological counselling. With their final common report on the work placements it has enabled them to gain shared insights into their work and suggest new approaches. Its ramifications extend far beyond this field. Such learning by linking could be replicated in many areas of professional activity across European labour markets.

6.4 Cultural initiatives

One of the most effective ways of renewing the self-confidence of asylum seekers and drawing on their skills is through music. The transnational partnership has shown its potential in the production of a 'Home from Home' DVD (see 6.3). Within the Birmingham Aspire partnership the community music association Sound It Out has run the Infusion project, which has brought together an exiled musicians ensemble. (see the using culture a means of development case study below) The success of this and a number of other cultural initiatives within the Aspire programme has led to the emergence of an embryonic Refugee Arts Consortium which is looking to develop initiatives and programmes on a more systematic basis.

Case Study

Using culture as a means of development. Birmingham

Sound It Out has run community music programmes across the West Midlands for fifteen years. They designed Infusion in three parts:

- A 10 week training course in artistic forms, one session per week.
- A follow-up 10 weeks in developing the ensemble.
- A series of participatory music workshops in four working class and immigrant neighbourhoods in different parts of Birmingham.

The ten-strong ensemble was a mixture of asylum seekers and people with the 'right to remain' status drawn from a wide range of countries, including Albania, Angola, Congo, Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Zimbabwe. The musical director was able to blend together those playing keyboards, guitar, saxophone, clarinet and percussion along with vocalists into an accessible musical set. As Infusion trainee Fidel Ndombasi expressed it, *"In the beginning cultural differences made it hard to understand how we could create music together. This is not a problem any more."*

Chief Executive Matt Daniels and Programme Manager Liz Ralls fully recognised the ambition of the project.

"We weren't sure it was going to work at the start," Daniels recalls. "But it did, despite so many different backgrounds and styles. It has proved to be a real inter-cultural project."

The project also had a raising awareness dimension with twenty participatory workshops in schools and at arts sites in the four neighbourhoods, which complemented existing Sound It Out initiatives. But the project had important consequences for the asylum seekers themselves. As Liz Ralls recalls

"It helped them develop and, in some cases, rediscover their musical confidence. It helped them understand about how we do music teaching in schools in the UK. And it has created opportunities for the musicians individually and the ensemble as a whole. There has been lots of on-going interest."

6.5 Mentoring

Another area of innovative support activities is in the field of mentoring. In Birmingham, for example, the Time Together initiative selected a group of thirty mentors who meet their asylum seeker or refugee mentees on a monthly basis. Within a carefully prepared framework the mentors help with language development, writing and speaking skills, awareness of political and cultural institutions as well as offering more immediate practical support as necessary. Tandem is a similar project operating in Berlin.

6.6 Pre-vocational Training

Case Study

Mentoring refugees in Berlin

This mentoring project run by the Workers Welfare Association (AWO) uses volunteers to offer and provide support to both those applying for asylum and those with 'Duldung' – permission to stay but of an indeterminate time during which they cannot work or study. It is a small-scale pilot project run by a well-established voluntary organisation. The mentors are carefully recruited. They tend to be "open and curious people" reports the project organizer, Gundula Daerr. They are matched to the refugees and

"Activities focus around three things: most important is to improve their German language; secondly is to help them find ways into German society and this is especially important for the women; and thirdly they help with the bureaucracy - dealing with papers."

AWO run three types of mentoring programme and have found that their engagement with DP Bridge has increased the flow of contacts coming onto their programmes, in a way which indicates the benefits of an integrated programme. For Daerr, the benefits of this type of activity are clear.

"For these asylum seekers and refugees the reality is to make little steps forward. That is what this activity does. And for many it often lifts them out of their fatalism."

Given the restrictions placed on asylum seekers joining the labour market projects within the Equal programme have adopted a range of approaches to use the skills and capacities of asylum seekers. In Germany, associations have used a legal loophole so that they can prepare asylum seekers and refugees with 'leave to remain' for jobs in areas of labour shortage such as nursing. Thus, managers and psychologists at the Psychological Centre for the Victims of Torture in Berlin have used both Equal 1 and Equal 2 programmes to give training to refugees and asylum seekers in nursing. This helps them to enter the labour market in an area of labour shortage once they have gained permission to remain in the country. Of the twenty-five participants on the current nursing course, two-thirds have been referred on by other partners within the Bridge project. This illustrates how the project has helped achieve the closer integration of activities related to asylum seekers across the German capital.

6.7 A combined approach

Poland has traditionally had a relatively low number of asylum seekers and refugees. However, it has been a major recipient of refugees from the war in Chechnya, while it has also had significant numbers from Syria and

Afghanistan. The officers in the Polish Equal DP have pursued an integrated approach seeking to develop the capacities of their users by combining a number of these elements in one centre. (see box)

Case Study

Integrated Action: the Example of Warsaw

Established in the centre of Warsaw the Intercultural Centre for Vocational Adaptation in Warsaw has adopted a three-pronged approach to asylum seekers. Firstly, it has provided psychological support to those people needing help in the recovery from traumatic experiences. Secondly, it has provided both language and cultural assistance, in particular running Polish courses and encouraging wider cultural communication and adaptation. Thirdly, it has offered vocational assistance with individual counselling, skills assessments followed by suggested training and other activity. Katarzyna Szyniszewska, the project assistant says that the Centre has had more than 600 users pass through its doors and that this integrated approach has equipped a number of these users either for further study or to set up their own business. The Centre has also played a role in sensitising front-line staff to the realities of asylum seekers' lives. The Centre has run inter-cultural training programmes for staff such as border guards, police, social workers and educational managers so that they are more able to respond to the legal, organisational and psychological issues that asylum seekers may present.

Overall Szyniszewska and the project Director Marek Szopski are very positive about the achievements of the project . However, Szopski acknowledges the current difficulties confronting the project as it considers its post-EQUAL future in an unpromising political climate.

"I am not sure if the project will continue. There is not that much interest from officialdom, whether municipal or national. This could be just a one-shot deal."

6.8 Utilising Information and Communication Technologies to Address Labour Market Disadvantage

Compared to other EQUAL programmes considered in this study, there has been relatively little use of ICT. However, one of the joint products has made an innovative use of music and film to develop a 20 minute documentary outlining the position of asylum seekers, designed to raise public awareness of their real situation and the causes of their plight. Entitled '**Home from Home**' this is a combined piece of work done across the four countries drawing on the musical skills of asylum seekers from many different cultural backgrounds. Interspersed with interviews with the musicians, with sub-titles in the various languages '**Home from Home**' shows how new technologies can bring people together. The DVD was compiled by asylum seeker musicians in the four countries but woven together by the director since none

of the asylum seekers had permission to travel to any other EU country. It is a product prepared by the TP Cententus Raising Awareness working group and is designed for use in independent cinemas, on regional and networked TV channels, at festivals and through educational institutions. Further, the partners are considering using it on e networks such as My Space and YouTube.

Bob Geldof has described music as the world's lingua franca. This documentary lives up to that description, especially in an age of new technology. The director of **Home from Home** is able to blend the diverse musical styles into a coherent piece, which lends power and meaning to the DVD.

6.9 Encouraging Women into Business

This is a relatively neglected area of activity too. However, the Berlin based 'Initiative Selbstaendiger Immigrantinnen '(ISI)³ is an exception.

Case Study

Training Refugee and Migrant Women for Business in Berlin

This agency supports open migrant women into business. The core activity of the agency has been going since 1990 and during that time more than 350 women have participated in its dedicated business practice courses. Traditionally, these have been one year courses, with eight months of study, two months of practical and two months of holiday. The courses have a solid record with 15% of participants setting up their own business and a further 75% going into other employment or further training. This European Social Fund funded activity has been supplemented by 2 EQUAL projects focusing on asylum seekers and refugees. These have modified the general approach, which ISI has followed in its previous work, running shorter courses drawing on referrals through the DP Bridge network. A four month course for people with long-term permission to stay has focused on people with an academic background, while the second option is for a three month course. Women have been selected onto these courses following a skills competence assessment undertaken by another member of the DP Bridge partnership, illustrating how bringing together agencies through Bridge has helped facilitate more joined-up service provision. These courses have also shown their value in providing refugee women with the know-how and confidence to enhance their opportunities in the labour market. Besides these business start-up courses ISI also provides one to one interviews and personal advice on business issues.

³ The Initiative for Independent Women Migrants

6.10 Challenging the barriers to women.

This has not been an area taken up to any extent by the four DPs in TP Concentus.

6.11 Working with employers and promoting Corporate Social Responsibility

There is no doubt that drawing asylum seekers into the labour market represents one of the most troubled and complex areas of activity. The political sensitivity of the issue for politicians and the 'flexibility' of Articles 11 and 12 of the Reception Directive means that there are different rules within Member States but also varied interpretations within official bureaucracies as to the rules governing employment, work experience and work placements. These are complicated further by the differing eligibilities of asylum seekers for work after a 12 month period when their claim has not been resolved. Furthermore, attempts by official bureaucracies to demarcate clearly between asylum seekers and refugees are bound to cause problems, when grey areas abound such as 'tolerated status' and 'leave to remain'.

These difficulties undoubtedly discourage the involvement of asylum seekers in labour market activity. A common approach has been to try to find work placements for asylum seekers. Thus, the project undertaken by Birmingham's Asylum and Refugee Council (ARC) has sought to move people into unpaid work experience posts. They have found a reasonable response from public and community sector employers – local libraries, housing associations, Crown Prosecution Service; museums – but have had less success with private sector contacts. In contrast, another Birmingham initiative Trellis has found this less of a problem with interest being shown by one of the main companies responsible for car parks in the city. ARC have also tried to use this scheme to address the particular need to build the capacity of refugee community organisations within the city. Thus, the scheme is designed to place five refugee community organisation leaders within mainstream non-governmental organisations in the city, so that they can learn a range of useful skills. This type of placement matching is good in principle but ARC has found it hard to apply in practice. At the time of writing just one such placement had been secured. Moreover, the asylum seeker/refugee boundaries have also hampered progress of the placements scheme. The ARC have found that many applicants to the scheme are in fact refugees with leave to remain but strict interpretation of the rules has meant that they have been excluded from participation within it.

The employment rules on asylum seekers are less strict in Italy. The government has placed just a 2 month restriction on the engagement of asylum seekers within the labour market. After that time they are free to work. This has allowed for the development of pilot schemes under the Equal programme which give asylum seekers work experience. (see working with employers in Italy case study). Following the success of these pilots, project

staff are now seeking to get national government agreement to spread these schemes across the whole country. Effectively, they are subsidy schemes whereby the newcomer gets work experience related to his/her area of interest and the employer gets a free labour trial.

Case Study

Working with Employers in Italy

The DP Refugee Inclusion Network recognises how important the opportunity for work is to newcomers so it has drawn on the experience of its staff in finding work for other disadvantaged groups e.g. former prisoners, ex-drug addicts and applied a similar approach to asylum seekers. Antonio Boschini, the Project Co-ordinator has promoted a work experience scheme within the EQUAL programme. This has had two elements. Firstly, project staff have discussed the job interests and inclinations of the asylum seeker. Then, the staff have sought to match these with a local employer. The inducement for the employer is that the project pays the wages of the placement for the first two months. In other words, for the employer it is a two-month free labour trial.

Project staff trawled websites to find companies looking for labour. But they had to go 'door-to-door' too, meeting employers directly and persuading them of the advantages of the scheme, overcoming a range of apprehensions and prejudices amongst employers.

But Antonio recounts with pleasure the impact and success of the scheme.

"We have placed sixty people in work experience within Venice and we have a 75% success rate. Thirty-two people have been given a job in the company where they did the work experience and another sixteen found a job within two months of completing their work experience. The fact that they had done work experience so recently was a direct factor in their getting a permanent job."

There has been a similar successful pilot in Parma too.

There are signs in this Equal programme of how project activities have themselves thrown up new labour market niches which asylum seekers and refugees can fill. For example, as training in para-medical skills where there is a local labour shortage (Berlin) or co-ordinators of refugee community organisations (Birmingham). The **Migration Council in Berlin Brandenburg** which acts as the umbrella organisation for 65 associations of different nationalities and minorities has used the Equal programme to establish training programmes and internships within migrant organisations themselves. This offers practical on-the-job training and enables people to deepen their professional competences and gain new faculties while awaiting entry into the labour market. This trend is found in other cities too. For instance, projects, which draw on the language and cultural skills of asylum seekers to act as mediators and para-professionals in the health and social care sectors of the economy are found in both Malmö and Hamburg. What this suggests is that

with training and support asylum seekers themselves can best meet the needs and requirements that arise from within their own communities and that there is an important employment strand that should be recognised here.

7. MANAGING LABOUR FLOWS WITHIN THE EUROPEAN SINGLE MARKET

The development of the European Single Market and its recent enlargement has had many unforeseen consequences. Since the entry of ten new Member States into the EU in 2004 those countries, which opened their labour market straight away have experienced a very large influx of labour. However, the asylum seeker experience illustrates another example of how business and commercial differences between Member States also have migratory consequences.

In the UK one popular way around the difficulties of labour market access for asylum seekers and refugees is that they turn to self-employment. Basically, they set up their own business. Since the turn of the century there has been a significant flow of Somalis into the Greater Birmingham conurbation, mainly a secondary wave coming from Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Estimates vary, but some put it as high as 30,000. Innocent Ochan from the Regional Training Advisory Forum confirms that

“self-employment among Somalis is very high. Shops, cafes, restaurants, car mechanics, removals, painting and decorating, sub-contracting for delivery firms, as well as food distribution and textiles. It is all much easier than in Holland. In the UK there are lots of premises and corner shops you can rent. Or you can use your house as a business much more easily. The ease of starting up your own business is a real contrast to other parts of Europe.”

Thus Somalis with EU residency, can move in large numbers partly due to a more liberal business environment.

8. ROLE OF SUPPORT FRAMEWORKS AND NETWORKS

Bringing people and intermediary organisations together has helped strengthen their joint capacity to promote their particular client or interest group. In Berlin, Ulrich Raiser from the City administration says that it was only through the creation of an Equal programme that fourteen separate associations and interest groups dealing with migrants and asylum seekers including the Berlin Senate actually managed to club together. What they found as a result was that they developed common initiatives which helped each other and improved the overall situation for their users in the city.

Project Manager Antonio Boschini from the DP Italian Refugee Inclusion Network is very clear that bringing together organisations involved in work with asylum seekers from different areas into one common project has helped enormously to increase the overall competence of partners as a whole.

Further, by sharing ideas and experiences together has helped to increase overall levels of engagement and activity.

"It is vital that network structures are maintained."

Refugees are particularly dependent on the stability of social relations due to their own personal experiences. The ability of the networks to link together the formal and the non-formal training programmes in combination with specific counselling and support makes it easier for them to participate in the labour market and integrate more widely into society.⁴

In addition, the self-organisation of refugees and asylum seekers themselves has also had a profound impact. Enabling people to self-organise is an important way to help to develop confidence and esteem together. The development of refugee community organisations (RCOs) offers a particularly interesting example.

Case study

Developing Self-Organisation amongst Refugees in Birmingham

Abdirahman Ali chairs the Birmingham DP Aspire and also runs Afro-British Support Services (ABSS). *"There are 180 RCOs in Birmingham: from those with an office, to those with a briefcase."* Some are generic such as the ABSS, which originally was formed by Somalian refugees in the city.

"We are an RCO but it is no longer a Somalian defined one." RCOs are "very variable in their effectiveness and their existence. We are trying to bring RCOs together on the important issues but they have an important local role, for instance with mother tongue teaching and interpreting. Therefore, the RCO movement needs to grow from below."

Neither he nor his colleagues are naive about RCOs. There are continual difficulties with their development and often sharp differences, originating from political disputes in the mother country intervene. Yet, they are able to help agencies reach into the furthest recesses and corners of the labour market.

Recognising the importance of this issue the TP Cententus partners developed a **tool-kit** to empower organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees. The decision to focus on organisations rather than individuals was a subject of debate but the **tool-kit** was designed to look at the financial, political, social/cultural and technical aspects of an association and to equip it to maximise its effectiveness and impact. The tool-kit is designed to be available as a CD-ROM and as a loose-leaf manual so that it is easy to update.

⁴ Gag op.cit p.15.

CONCLUSIONS: THE KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICY MAKERS

The topic of asylum seekers and refugees is highly-charged politically. It is an issue of sharp controversy, frequent polemic and on occasion media misrepresentation and hysteria. Despite these challenges it is clear that both the individual partnerships and their transnational activity have undertaken a series of valuable initiatives and developed some profound transnational joint work. However, this type of transnational working is not conflict-free. Thus, Italian Project Manager Antonio Boschini does not hide the difficulty he and his colleagues found within the empowerment group, which focused on developing the tool-kit for the community and support organisations who are working with asylum seekers and refugees. “We had a difference of philosophy there. My project is about asylum seekers. They are my beneficiaries, not the support organisations.” As policy analysts we observed at an early meeting that employment and training issues were not featuring in the Concentus transnational work proposals. This continued to be the case, perhaps a reflection of the difficulties caused by the restrictions and complexities evident in the legislation on this issue. Further, the small number of partners in the Polish project meant that it was not able to participate in the transnational activity as fully as the other three partners. Yet overall, it is clear that TP Concentus has been a very successful initiative. The following policy conclusions are drawn from the experiences of partners within the Concentus programme and other Equal partnerships within this theme. They are evidence-based but inevitably, on occasion, lead to policy proposals, which will be controversial in some quarters.

Reception and support services

1. The first key policy message to draw from this study is the **importance of conditions at reception and the range of support and advice available** to newly arrived asylum seekers. There needs to be particular services and initiatives that relate to the specific nature of refugees and asylum seekers themselves. Hence, the role of psychological counselling, mentoring, new approaches to training and work, etc.
2. The second key message is the **importance of working with asylum seekers themselves and, where they exist, their own organisations**. This should ensure that services and initiatives are culturally appropriate and tailored to the needs of specific and often vastly different refugee communities. The jointly prepared **Welcome Pack** bears testimony to the value of this approach.

Training and employment

1. The key message here is the **crucial importance of training and employment**. This is a political ‘hot potato’ but there can be no running away from the issue. Initiatives taken by project partners in this

programme as well as other EQUAL DPs in this theme show strongly that specific vocational programmes for asylum seekers are highly valued, facilitate the learning process and enable them to get acclimatised to the labour market. Traineeships, job placements and other forms of work experience are a first, vital step to help the vocational integration of asylum seekers. But the importance of engagement in the work environment goes further. It obliges the newcomer to speak the local language and takes them out of the refugee milieu. They have to both participate and engage within wider society. The **Italian experience** goes further. **Its innovative 'voucher' scheme** shows the importance of building good relations with employers and that once initial doubts are dispelled, employers come to appreciate the value of employing asylum seekers in their enterprise.

2. **Ease the rules on work**

The Concentus experience and that of other EQUAL DPs casts serious doubt on the efficacy of existing Member State and EU policies with regard to asylum seekers, refugees and the world of work. Firstly, the efforts to maintain rigid distinctions between asylum seekers and refugees does not work and causes lots of bureaucratic hassle. This is all the more so given the large variety of categories into which asylum seekers fall once their claim is past the twelve month period, or in the appeal process or when they can prolong their stay within the Member State without receiving full refugee status. Secondly, despite the efforts by Member State governments to accelerate the approval process, the reality of dealing with both present claims and the backlog means that there are large numbers of people with indeterminate status. In the UK, the optimistic estimate by the Home Office is that it will clear a backlog of 450,000 cases by 2011. To leave these people in limbo with questionable rights to employment is to deny them the most important way in which to integrate into society, which is via work. At a time when the overall European trend on asylum claims has been falling sharply for five years, governments and the **European Commission should ease the restrictions on the working rights of asylum seekers**. The Italian experience shows the way and corresponds to the central thrust of the Lisbon agenda, namely that the way to boost the economy is to increase the numbers of people in work.

3. There is another component that needs to be considered here. The very nature of refugees and asylum seekers means that in comparison to illegal migrants, **a significantly large proportion of them are highly qualified professionals**. Governments often feel most threatened by dissidents amongst their own intelligentsia, while the intelligentsia themselves are more likely to have contacts abroad and the means to facilitate their escape. This situation means that amongst almost all refugee communities one finds scientists, doctors, engineers, accountants and other professionals. Certainly, this is evident in discussion with partners in the TP Concentus and elsewhere. Indeed, in Malmo, the Volksuniversitat and the City Council

run a 2 year programme with 400 participants specifically designed for the Integration of Well-Qualified Newcomers. Many Member States are now issuing calls for managed migration policies, which will allow skilled labour to enter Europe. In many instances skilled resources are already to be found within those applying for asylum. Their skills may require up-grading or adjusting to European conditions, but it is clear that there is a skilled, professional sector within asylum seeking communities which is frequently overlooked.

Funding

1. The key policy message on funding relates to the use of the new European Social Fund (ESF) programmes. For the 2007-2013 period the EU has decided that the pilot programmes that it ran during the 2000-2006 period designed to tackle specific issues of disadvantage such as Equal should be mainstreamed within the core Structural Fund programmes financed by the EU. This primarily means ESF. All parts of the Union are eligible for ESF and during 2007-2013 there will be national ESF programmes in each Member State. The experience of both the TP Concentus and the other Equal TPs in this theme suggests that **asylum seekers and refugees should be included as a target group within all national programmes where they comprise a significant constituency.** National, regional and local authorities should allow their inclusion in programmes and projects funded by ESF and should seek to be as flexible as possible in permitting the involvement of asylum seekers in vocational training and employment initiatives.

At the same time the EU has established a framework Programme entitled the Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows, 2007-2013. Two of its four specific instruments relate to the subject topic of this report. Both the European Refugee Fund with €699 million available and the European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals with €825 million available have scope for activities within member states and in transnational partnerships that are similar to those that the EQUAL partnerships in the asylum seeker theme have been developing. Those involved with asylum seekers and refugees should utilise the opportunities given by these two programmes.

Giving a Voice

21st Century Europe is an increasingly networked society. The “well-off” and the well educated generate connections spontaneously: the disadvantaged cannot. For asylum seekers this is even harder. Therefore, it is more important that they have organising frameworks within which they are able to operate. There are two aspects to this:

1. **The importance of self-organisation.** In modern society one size does not fit all. Young people, migrant communities, women, people with disabilities, refugees and others: all need the opportunity to be

able to organise themselves, develop self-confidence and make progress. This policy approach will be controversial in some parts of Europe but it is not a policy of separate development. Rather self-organisation helps these disadvantaged groups to engage more effectively within society as a whole.⁵ The UK experience of refugee community organisations which has been enhanced by the EQUAL programme and the jointly-developed empowerment tool-kit are important examples to build on. Policy makers and practitioners should endorse this approach whole-heartedly and agencies should embed it in their policy and funding strategies.

2. **The importance of intermediary organisations which can give voice and opportunities to refugees.** As Inti Haberman, the Berlin Co-ordinator expressed it, “Networking has been absolutely vital for our work in Berlin. Now we need to persuade national departments, member state governments and the EU institutions how important these issues of asylum seekers and refugees really are.”

⁵ For an example of the shift in German thinking see *Zuwanderer in der Stadt. Immigrants in the City: Recommendations for Urban Integration Policy* Schader Stiftung, Darmstadt 2005. especially Summary pp.62-66.

APPENDIX

1. **The Bridge Development Partnership** is a project for asylum seekers and persons with unsecured residence status within the Lander of Berlin and Brandenburg. Currently in Berlin there are around 10,000 people with an ongoing refugee application or receiving short-term exceptional leave to remain.

The aims of the Bridge DP are to:

- Undertake a competence assessment
- Recreate self-confidence where it has been lost.
- Prepare asylum seekers and persons with unsecured residence status through targeted qualification for possible integration in Germany.
- Make the period of stay as worthwhile as possible.

The DP engages 14 institutions, ranging from small associations to large national renowned organisations. The overall co-ordination is undertaken by KOMBI Consulting alongside the Commissioner for Integration and Migration within the Berlin Senate.

The partnership has developed an overall Guidance Counselling System. This has three elements: a competence assessment – this lasts several days and results in:

- a personal development plan
- the development of qualifications
- deployment in placements

The partnership also offers a range of cross-cutting support that may be necessary to users such as psycho-social support, especially for victims of torture; resettlement counselling; and mentoring support.

The qualifications cover two basic strands – German language courses and PC training, alongside specialist vocational training e.g. health and nursing; automotive mechanics; business practice i.e. accountancy and book-keeping; and start-ups.

The integrated, targeted interaction between different institutions in the social and economic sector is new for organisations operating in the field of refugees and asylum seekers in Berlin and Brandenburg. This co-ordinated, integrated approach within an overall guidance framework is the key innovative feature of the Bridge DP. Thus, this Equal programme is the test-bed for this new model of integrated support, counselling and competence development for asylum seekers and persons with unsecured residence status.

2. **The Inclusion Refugees Network** is a national Development Partnership in Italy covering the areas of Venice Mestre, Parma, Sanremo, Caserta, Gravina and Roma. Amongst its key partners are the Employment office of the Province of Venice, the Buon Pastore Foundation, the Asylum Seeker office of the Municipality of Venice, Viterbo University and a range of arts groups.
The Italian partnership has a number of key objectives. These include the identification of best practices to aid the integration of asylum seekers; the creation of a new template for training and work based courses; the promotion of inter-culturalism; and the exploration of the opportunities for hosting asylum seekers in family settings.

3. **The Intercultural Centre for Vocational Adaptation of Immigrants and Refugees** is a Development Partnership, which focuses its activity on the capital of Poland, Warsaw. The key partners involved are Warsaw University, the National centre for supporting vocational and lifelong learning; La Strada, a foundation involved in activity to combat the trafficking of women; and the Warsaw Centre for assistance to Families.
The Warsaw partnership set itself three key objectives. Firstly, to improve access to the Polish labour market for ethnically and culturally diverse immigrants, refugees and repatriates. Secondly, to provide support to asylum seekers and refugees in the adaptation process. Thirdly, to help to overcome social exclusion.

4. **ASPIRE (Asylum Seekers Pursuing Integration, Refuge and Empowerment)** is a Development Partnership covering Birmingham and Solihull which aims to develop innovative solutions for supporting asylum seekers and organisations working with them while they await a decision from the Home Office.
Central to ASPIRE are the themes of partnership, innovation, empowerment, Equality of opportunity and transnationality, which influence how the partnership operates and the range of activities it delivers.
ASPIRE tests out innovative activities around vocational English as a Second Language (ESOL), capacity building for Refugee and Community Organisations, the Arts and Volunteering. A number of organisations work together to deliver and evaluate the activities. If they are successful the aim is to find mainstream funding so that they can continue in the future.
ASPIRE also works with its transnational partners in Italy, Germany and Poland on joint activities, which are of benefit to all four countries.
ASPIRE is being delivered through a Development Partnership (DP). The Learning and Skills Council Birmingham and Solihull is the accountable body for the partnership. The DP is made up of over 20 organisations including statutory bodies and non-statutory organisations such as community groups and refugee community organisations e.g. Birmingham Voluntary Services Council (BVSC), Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Race Action Partnership,

Banner Theatre, ISE Professional Development Centre, the My Time Ltd, Asylum Refugee Council etc

There are a number of groups, which manage different aspects including:

a steering group made up which leads on the strategic direction of the partnership; a core group which is responsible for the day-to-day operational activities of Aspire; and time-limited task groups which are set up as and when required to concentrate on specific tasks

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