

# 'A Trans-national Network: Hearing the voices of Refugees in Policy and Practice in the European Union'

Co-ordinated by the North of England Refugee Service,  
in partnership with  
ACCESS-Ireland and Associazione Rieti Immigrant

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## FINAL REPORT

A project providing a forum for collating and comparing Good Practice across three  
European Union member states in relation to the *effective involvement of Refugees  
themselves in processes of policy and practice formulation and implementation  
centred on the issue of Integration.*



Associazione Rieti Immigrant - Provincia  
Via Flavio Sabino, 25 - 02100 Rieti (Italy)  
Tel. +39-746-484587 • +39-746-484067 • +39-368-3072480  
Fax +39-746-484587 • +39-746-200456



North of England  
REFUGEE SERVICE



ACCESS  
IRELAND

REFUGEE SOCIAL INTEGRATION PROJECT



University of  
Sunderland



BANKS  
OF THE  
WEAR

## Acknowledgements

Our foremost thanks go to those 45 individuals who formed the Refugee Focus Groups in Dublin, Ireland, Rieti, Italy and the North East of England, UK. They are people from 17 different countries of origin or ethnic groups where events have forced them to seek international protection, which they have found in Europe. The content of this report represents their own personal experiences of 'Integration' and, in many cases, their experience of their efforts to assist and support the integration of others in Ireland, Italy and the UK. Their role in this project was integral. Without their dedication to the aims of the Network it could never have existed. They have contributed their independent expertise, knowledge, time and commitment in order to identify a way forwards which will benefit not just all those who follow them in this respect, but for the host communities as a whole.

Our thanks too to those members of the partner agencies participating in the Network, in particular to Eastwood O Edo Ihaza, Director of Associazione Rieti Immigrant in Italy and his many volunteers who worked especially hard to organise the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Network Seminar, and to Ann Moroney, Eileen Reilly, Olga Baliakina and Monica Blood from Access Ireland in Dublin.

We are grateful for the interest and involvement of national and regional policy makers and service providers from the UK, Ireland and Italy, 26 of whom participated in the Network Activities.

Finally, we acknowledge the support to the Directorate General for Justice and Home Affairs at the European Commission. We are grateful to them for granting us funding and giving us the opportunity to carry out this pilot project.

Georgina Fletcher

Network Co-ordinator & Co-ordinator of Regional Refugee Forum at the North of England Refugee Service

Rick Bowler  
Sunderland

Research & evaluation team, University of

Professor Keith Pringle

Evaluation team, University of Sunderland.

Stella Magoye and Debbie Lamb

Research & community development advice, Banks of the Wear

 Associazione Rieti Immigrant - Provincia  
Via Flavio Sabino, 25 - 02100 Rieti (Italy)  
Tel. +39-746-484587 • +39-746-484067 • +39-368-3072480  
Fax +39-746-484587 • +39-746-200456



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**University of  
Sunderland**



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## List of abbreviations

ARASI	Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland
ARI	Associazione Rieti Immigrant Provincia
ARN	African Refugee Network (Ireland)
CIR	Consiglio Italiano die Rifugiati - Italian Refugee Council
CoPIR	Conferenza Permanente Internazionale dei Rifugiati - International Permanent Conference of Refugees
DRASS	Directorate for Refugee and Asylum Support Services – under the Irish Department of Justice
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
FAS	Foras Aiseanna Soathair – Irish Government Training and Employment Authority
NASS	National Asylum Support Service – UK Home Office Department
NECASS	North East Consortium for Asylum Support Services
NERS	North of England Refugee Service
ReACT	Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

## Key

indented	denotes refugee participant quotation
	denotes quote from a policy document

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Project Aim

The project aimed to provide a forum for collating and comparing Good Practice across three EU member states in relation to the **effective involvement of refugees themselves in processes of policy and practice formulation and implementation centred on the issue of Integration.**

#### 1.2 Background

The Governments of several European Union member states have recently moved towards developing Integration strategies that seek to include those persons who have been recognised as refugees<sup>1</sup> as full members of society. These initiatives have involved 1) a process of policy formulation, and 2) processes through which that policy will be implemented in practice. This Network has focused on the extent to which Refugees themselves, as the target of these policies/strategies, are, could be, or should be involved in these processes, by comparing the inclusive strategies currently operating in different European contexts. This project has therefore examined the means by which the voices of Refugees themselves have been heard in the processes of policy formulation and implementation regarding their own Integration.

This project was also designed at a time when there has been an increasing focus within the EU States on policies of planned compulsory dispersal of asylum seekers awaiting decisions on their claims and changes in the legislation on entitlements for asylum seekers. This has implications for the development of any integration strategy as it is acknowledged that the foundations for successful and early integration lie in the conditions of first settlement<sup>2</sup>. In the UK and Ireland planned dispersal has been implemented and asylum seekers have been settled into areas which have previously had little or no experience of hosting or supporting asylum seekers and refugees, and where there are no established refugee community support networks<sup>3</sup>. This context has necessitated the development of national, regional and local strategic approaches to supporting settlement and promoting integration.

#### 1.3 Rationale for the project

- That Integration is recognised as being important not just for Refugees themselves but for the host societies in which they have settled.

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<sup>1</sup> Refugees here refers to those granted status under the 1951 Convention, and those granted exceptional or temporary leave to remain based on humanitarian considerations

- That evidence shows that Integration will not happen on its own. It must be policy driven.
- It is recognised that “*Integration*” is a problematic concept; that is, while it is unanimously agreed that integration is important, it seems those agencies and organisations working to achieve this are less clear about exactly *what* integration is and *how* it happens. Therefore, in order to identify action to promote the integration of Refugees in Europe, and to measure their success, integration must first be properly defined. We believed that it is only through working in partnership with individuals who have themselves been forced to become Refugees in Europe that the real meaning of ‘integration’, and what it must involve in order for it to be successful, can be understood. It is only with this understanding that those charged with designing and implementing integration strategy can produce policies and services which will be effective in supporting refugees to integrate fully and successfully.
- It is acknowledged that policies are most effective if based on evidence. We should aim to pursue what works in integration and avoid what the evidence tells us does not. It is the voiced experience of Refugees themselves, as the targets of integration policy and practice, that is a vital ingredient as one critical source of evidence. Refugees have a focal role to play in defining how inclusion strategies are appropriately operationalised for the integration process to be successful. Therefore, we need effective methods for gathering such evidence on the appropriate processes for hearing and enacting refugee experience.
- That a Trans-national network will enable us to make comparative analysis of integration and inclusion strategies through examining the experience of Refugees in different EU contexts. We will be able to identify and learn from Good Practice where it exists, and avoid repeating what evidence tells us does not work.

## 1.4 Project Participants

All participants in the Network have a shared concern and complimentary roles in promoting Integration. The Network was designed to provide opportunities for these parties to meet together to share expertise and explore ways of working together towards the common aim of integration. Full details of participants can be found in Appendix 1.

### 1.4.1. Individual Refugees

Individuals who are Refugees settled in the North of England, in Dublin, Ireland and in Rieti, Rome and Milan, Italy who volunteered to be members of the Focus Groups in each country. In total, 45 men and women from 17 countries of origin or ethnic groups

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see ECRE Policy Paper, [Position on the Integration of Refugees in Europe](#), September 1999 and report [Bridges and Fences: Refugee Perceptions of Integration in the EU](#), 1999.

participated. They are individuals with different backgrounds, experiences and skills, but who share the experience of being refugees, of finding refuge and of beginning the process of settling in Europe. They have contributed their independent expertise, knowledge, time and commitment in order to identify ways forward for refugees and for the host communities. Thus these benefits are benefits for the society as a whole.

With respect to issues of personal security that are implicit in the experience of exile, they have wished to be identified here by their first names only:

In the North East of England: members of the Focus Group:

Admir, Alma, Amer, Artur, Azad, Arezki, Bedor, Dzana, Haider, Khalid, Mahvash, Masoud, Parvin, Sanja, Sead, Sergey, Suada, Vinh.

18 individuals - 11 men and 7 women, from 11 countries of origin or ethnic groups: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bosnia, Iran, Iraq, Kurdish, Kosovo, Somalia, Sudan, Former USSR, and Vietnam. The Focus Group met 17 times. Participants included members of 'Lilja', the Bosnian Support Group, and the Iranian Society of the North East.

In Italy (Rieti province, Rome & Milan)

Abdelhakim, Ali Hussain, Amal, Amina, Asmare, Fatima, Filipe, Hassan, Jackson, Mirsad, Nouradine, Saliha, Simon, Sonni, Sunday, Yusef Ahmed.

16 individuals - 13 men and 3 women, from 9 countries of origin or ethnic groups: Algeria, Angola, Bosnia, Ethiopia, Kosovo, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia and Tunisia. Six Focus Group meetings were held, in Rome and Rieti. Participants included founder members of CoPIR (International Permanent Conference of Refugees)

In Ireland (Dublin)

Faiza, Joao, John, Juliette, Lucky, Nasser, Olga, Sade, Smilja, Svetlana, Yvon.

11 individuals - 5 men and 6 women, from 8 countries of origin or ethnic groups. Angola, Bosnia, Iraq, Nigeria, Rwanda, Former USSR, Somalia and Zaire. The Focus Group met 5 times. Participants included founder members of the African Refugee Network (ARN), the Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland (ARASI) and SORUSSI, a Russian Speakers support society.

Examples of the skills and qualifications of the refugee participants include medical doctor, midwife, university researcher, students, graduates, veterinary surgeon,

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<sup>3</sup> This is supported by evidence from the UK Audit Commission's report Another Country, 2000

pharmacists, refugee support worker, interpreters, school teachers, community worker, computer engineer and business enterprise.

#### **1.4.2. Refugee Agencies**

These are independent, charitable and voluntary sector organisations with experience of supporting asylum seekers and refugees towards settlement and integration through a range of direct service provision and support and by representing and promoting the interests of asylum seekers and refugees.

North of England, UK:

The North of England Refugee Service (NERS), based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sunderland and Middlesbrough. NERS was the lead agency and overall network co-ordinator.

Daoud Zaaroura – Chief Executive

Georgina Fletcher – Network Co-ordinator

Rieti, Italy:

Associazione Rieti Immigrant Provincia (ARI), based in Rieti, Italy. Partner agency.

Eastwood O Edo Ihaza – Co-ordinator

Marsella Hoxhaj – project co-ordination

Volunteer assistants from the European Voluntary Service: Rita Bento Queiroga, Marta

Gutierrez Pendrosa, Sarah Olsen, Michela Boncompagni.

Dublin, Ireland:

ACCESS-Ireland (Refugee Social Integration Project), based in Dublin, Ireland. Partner agency.

Ann Moroney – Co-ordinator

Eileen Reilly – project co-ordinator

Monica Blood – project administrator

Olga Baliakina – project facilitator

#### **1.4.3. National, regional and local policy makers and service providers from UK, Ireland and Italy**

Twenty-six individuals who have a professional role and responsibility for promoting the integration of refugees were invited to participate in the project activities. Some already had many year's experience of the issues faced, while for others being involved in the integration of refugees was a new responsibility.

#### **1.4.4. Research, consultation and evaluation partners**

Two partner agencies in the UK provided on-going research consultation to the Network and contributed to the analysis of findings, with particular responsibility for facilitating community development processes and overall project evaluation.

Banks of the Wear – community based housing association and community development agency

Stella Magoye – social researcher

Debbie Lamb – senior projects manager

University of Sunderland, International Centre for the Study of Violence and Abuse,  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Professor Keith Pringle – Professor, Comparative Social Policy

Rick Bowler – Senior Lecturer, Community and Youth Studies Department

## **1.5 Design of Network and Activities: January 2000 – October 2000**

The nine month network schedule was divided into three phased work programmes, each with interim evaluation and dissemination packages. A concerted evaluation and dissemination package took place at the conclusion of the network schedule. For a timetable showing the full details of network activities see Figure 1.1.

### January 2000 – March 2000 Work Programme 1: Data collection and initial dissemination

1. In each country, Focus Groups of Refugees were formed and met to provide a self-definition of 'integration': to identify the factors involved, how integration happens, when it happens, who and what it involves, and to identify self-chosen indicators of successful integration from the perspective of Refugees themselves.
2. Project participants selected criteria by which success of the network would be measured at completion of the project schedule.
3. Representatives from the Focus Groups met at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Network Meeting in Dublin, Ireland (March 23<sup>rd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>) to share and compare their findings, and to address the issues raised. A comparison was made of the regional and national contexts within which integration takes place.
4. A collation and initial analysis of the findings was fed back to the Focus Groups in each country for further evaluation.

### April 2000 – June 2000 Work Programme 2: Comparative dialogue and analysis and engagement with policy makers

1. Focus Groups met to consider outputs from work programme 1 and to consider further the roles and responsibilities of all parties in the formulation and implementation of integration policy and practice.
2. Interim outputs were disseminated to selected policy makers and service providers.
3. Each partner agency hosted an In-country Interface Workshop for Refugee Focus Groups and policy makers/practitioners to address roles, responsibilities and inclusive strategies / processes through which Refugee voices are heard in the process of developing and implementing Integration policy.
4. A collation and analysis of findings from each country context was fed back to Focus groups for further evaluation.

### July 2000 – October 2000 Work Programme 3: Final analysis and dissemination of overall outputs

1. Representatives from the Focus groups and invited policy makers and service providers from each country met for the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Interface Seminar held in Rieti, Italy (July 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>) to consider outputs from work programmes 1 and 2.
2. Feedback of findings to Focus groups for further evaluation.
3. Project participants give their evaluation of the ‘success’ of the project processes.
4. Production of final report for dissemination throughout EU member states.

### **1.6 Methodological approach**

The methodological approach is outlined in Figure 1.2.

The method of enquiry mirrored the substantive content of the network activity, ie: the method itself (as process) sought to make central the role of refugees in the research process, while the research focused on the extent to which refugees are integral to the process of Integration policy and practice formulation and implementation. Thus reflection on the research process is an integral part of the network outputs.

Recognising the value of refugee involvement was the guiding principal of the Network both in its philosophy and concrete structure.

The network was structured so as to make concrete the involvement of refugees via the constitution of the Focus Groups, international network meeting, the interface workshops and the international interface seminar.

The Refugee Focus Groups were positioned at the core of the network with refugee participation in all activities. Since January of this year these individuals have held a total of 28 Focus Group meetings. In addition representatives from each Focus Group participated in 2nd international Network meetings in Dublin, Ireland and Rieti, Italy. Focus Groups also held interface seminars with policy makers and service providers in each country.

The evaluative process for the Network programme was, like the rest of the network activity, collaborative and with a major structural role accorded to the Refugee Focus Groups. I.e. not only did the Refugee Focus Groups generate the data but they also had a central role in the analysis, evaluation and re-evaluation of that data as an on-going process of feedback into the Focus Groups was built into the network’s activities. In this way the outputs of each work programme were fed into each succeeding stage.

#### Multi-dimensionality in the categoric identity of ‘Refugee’:

Membership of the Refugee Focus Groups demonstrated/reflected cultural diversity amongst individuals who are refugees, as well as gender, age, experience, skills and family structure. The ‘Transnational’ context of the Network reflected the significance of

geographic and national context of the place of refuge – reflecting the socio-cultural-economic-legislative variation in the environment of settlement.

#### Overall evaluation of the 'success' of the project:

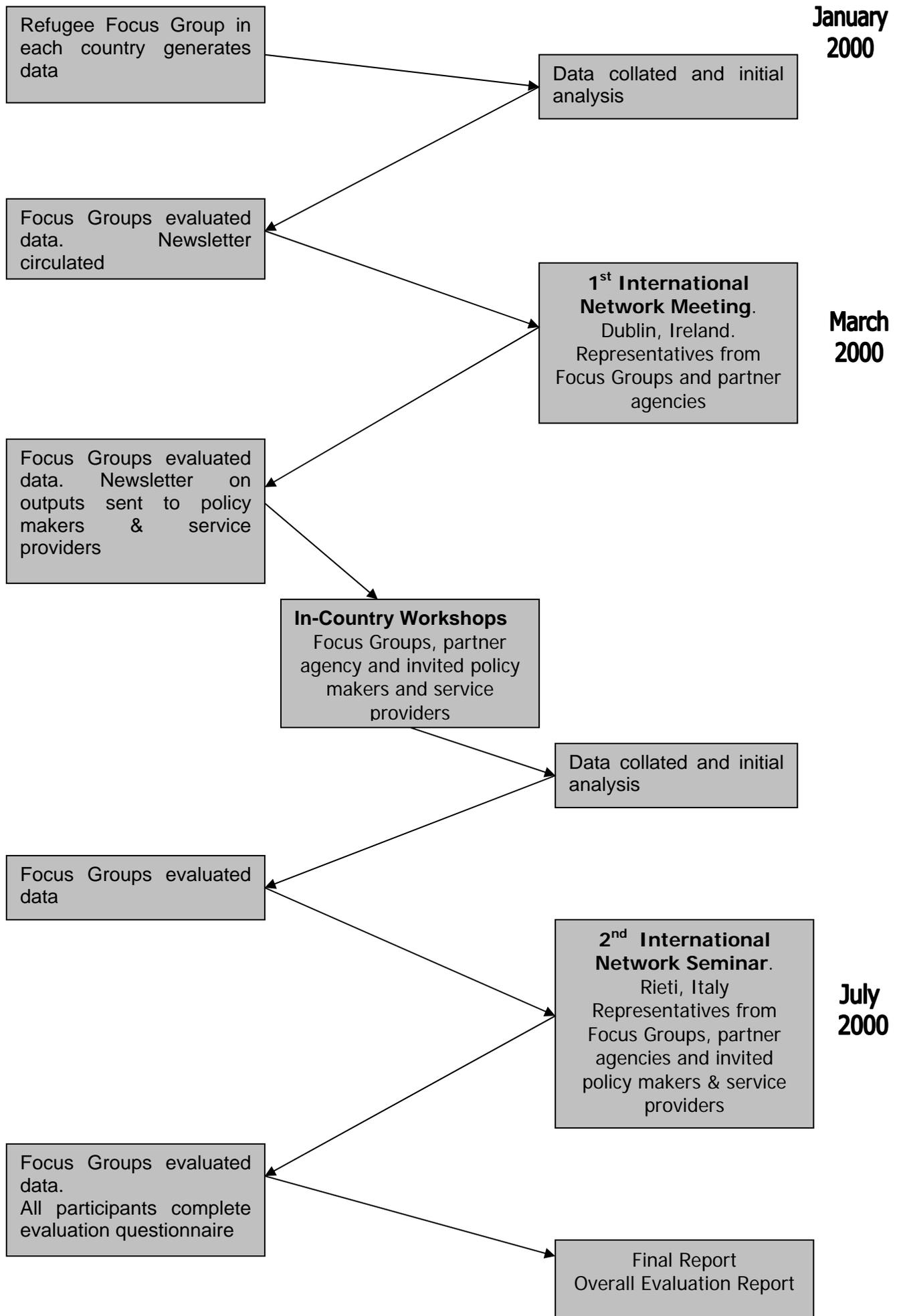
Responsibility for overall methodological and evaluation approach of the project has been facilitated by Professor Keith Pringle and Rick Bowler from the University of Sunderland. However, the criteria by which the 'success' of the network is measured has been defined, from the outset, by the network participants themselves. Hence the evaluation of the network activity itself mirrors both the substantive focus and methodological approach of that network activity. The project team, therefore, operationalised collaborative processes in the design, data collection and delivery of the project itself.

#### Style of writing:

The content of this report represents information and data generated by the Network activities and evaluated by the refugee focus groups themselves. Only sometimes are the ideas of participants expressed as direct quotations. The Evaluation Report offers more detailed participant comment on the project process itself.

The writing is consciously non-jargonistic in order to allow the widest accessibility to the findings contained here and to demonstrate the process of their development. It was apparent throughout the project that jargon, used in social policy and in the host society cultural traditions, had to be constantly unpacked within the groups. Refugees are doubly excluded from access to the meaning of Jargon. Jargon relates to a language of power and the accessibility of the rules governing that power. The host country languages were not the mother tongue of any of the refugee participants.

**FIGURE 1.2 Methodology**



	<b>January</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>April</b>
<b>UK</b>	25: PROJECT COMMENCES		1st NEWSLETTER & NETWORK MEETING	
	Liase with partner agencies	21 & 25 : Men's Focus Group meetings	1: Women's Focus Group meets	11: Focus Group meeting
	Form Focus Groups	23: Women's Focus Group meeting 9 & 16: Agency staff focus group meetings	14: Focus Groups meet jointly  23: 'Integration of Refugees in Ireland' Conference, Trinity College Dublin 24: 1st International Network Meeting Dublin, Ireland. Hosted by Access Ireland 2 Representatives of Focus groups 2 Agency staff Network Co-ordinator Reseacher (University of Sunderland)	
<b>Ireland</b>	25: PROJECT COMMENCES		HOSTING 1ST NETWORK MEETING	
	Form Focus Groups		3 & 14: Focus Group meetings 13 : Agency Staff meeting	17: Focus Group meeting
			23: 'Integration of Refugees in Ireland' Conference, Trinity College Dublin 24: 1st International Network Meeting Dublin, Ireland. Hosted by Access Ireland Focus Group & Agency staff ECRE & Multi-Cultural Resource Centre, NI	
<b>Italy</b>	25: PROJECT COMMENCES		1ST NETWORK MEETING	
	Form Focus Groups	11, 15 & 28 : Focus Group meetings (Rieti & Rome)	15 & 17 : Focus Group meetings	
			23: 'Integration of Refugees in Ireland' Conference, Trinity College Dublin 24: 1st International Network Meeting Dublin, Ireland. Hosted by Access Ireland 1 Focus Group representative 1 Agency staff	

May	June	July
NEWSLETTER 2 & IN-COUNTRY WORKSHOP	INTERIM REPORT	2ND INTERNATIONAL NETWORK SEMINAR
9 & 16: Focus Group meetings	5 & 19: Focus Group meetings	17: Focus Group meeting
24: In-country Interface Workshop Focus Group. Research team. 4 National & regional policy makers	13: Focus Group representative speaks to Peace & Justice Committee, Newcastle upon Tyne	27 - 30: 2nd International Network Seminar Rieti, Italy. Hosted by ARI 4 representatives from Focus Group 1 Agency staff Network Co-ordinator 2 research / evaluation team (BoW & Univ., S'land) NASS policy officer (Refugee Integration Section)
26-28: "European Conference on Refugee Participation in Local Policy Making and Political Life" Nurnburg, Germany (ECRE) Focus Group representative		IN-COUNTRY WORKSHOP & 2ND NETWORK SEMINAR
2: Focus Group meeting		19: In-Country Interface Workshop 9 Focus group, 4 agency staff, & 13 policy makers/ service providers
26-28: "European Conference on Refugee Participation in Local Policy Making and Political Life" Nurnburg, Germany (ECRE) Focus Group representative		27 - 30: 2nd International Network Seminar Rieti, Italy. Hosted by ARI 2 representatives of Focus Group 2 Agency staff Eastern Regional Health Board policy officer
		2ND INTERNATIONAL NETWORK SEMINAR
10: Focus Group meeting		27 - 30: 2nd International Network Seminar Rieti, Italy. Hosted by ARI Focus Group Agency staff (& volunteers) 8 Policy makers from national, regional & local level
26-28: "European Conference on Refugee Participation in Local Policy Making and Political Life" Nurnburg, Germany (ECRE) Focus Group representative		

August	September	October
	EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRES	
21: Focus Group meeting	11 & 18 & 25: Focus Group meetings  7: Focus Group representatives speak to Sunderland Education Authority  27: Focus group representative speaks to Select Committee on Community & Housing (Newcastle City Council)	9 & 23: Focus Group meetings 19: Focus Group representative gives presentation on Network findings to 'Refugee Awareness Training Workshop' for 65 regional service providers/policy makers 31: Focus Group representative invited to attend Refugee Integration: The European Context' Conference in London (EU Network on Integration)  Focus group forming itself as 'ReACT' (Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside)
	EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRES	
	5: Focus Group & policy makers lunch	
	EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRES	

		SUBMISSION OF FINAL REPORT
20: Focus Group/ReACT meeting		PUBLICATION & DISSEMINATION
23: Focus Group representative gives presentation on Network findings to 'Refugee Awareness Training Workshop' for 70 regional service providers/policy makers	1&2: 3 members of ReACT attend 4th European Conference on the Integration of Refugees in Europe (Athens) funded by The Millfield House Foundation	6: ReACT planning day& training ReACT writing Constitution & Application for support grant
ReACT secures funding from The Millfield House Foundation for representation at 4th European Conference on Integration of Refugees in Europe (Athens 1&2 Dec)	11: ReACT members report back on conference to full group and to funder	22: ReACT meet with Regional Refugee Forum
		DISSEMINATION FINAL REPORT
		DISSEMINATION FINAL REPORT

## Chapter 2

### WHY IS INTEGRATION IMPORTANT?

#### 2.1 Official Statements

It was the aim of the Network throughout to examine and compare the member state policy frameworks on integration in relation to refugee and agency experience. Chapter 2 details how refugee participants examined UK, Irish and Italian policy documents in order to establish the importance of integration, not just for refugees themselves, but for society as a whole.

At the outset of the project, the members of the refugee focus groups considered official statements on integration contained in the following documents:

UK: A Consultation Paper on the Integration of Recognised Refugees in the UK, Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate. November 1999

Ireland: Integration : A Two Way Process. Report to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform by the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Integration of Refugees in Ireland. March 2000

##### 2.1.1 UK

###### For those offered international protection in the UK:

- 'The aim of integration is to provide the opportunity for all refugees to be fully included in society and the opportunity to develop their full potential in their new host communities.'
- 'Social justice and human rights concerns demand that refugees should be able to live in dignity while receiving the surrogate protection of and being in the position to contribute to the host country.'
- 'Once a refugee is granted permission to stay, there is a need to invest early in integration to promote a quick move from dependency to self-value and sufficiency through work and inclusion in community and society.'
- 'The aim of integration policy in its broadest sense, involves refugees being "included" in society and obtaining the same status as other members of the community. The way this aim can be met is for refugees to maximise their potential and obtain jobs, housing, education and other services to a standard as high as those obtained by other members of the community.'
- 'Refugees need to be given every encouragement to become active members of society and play a full part in their respective communities.'

###### For the host society:

- 'Integration is not only essential for refugees themselves, but also in the wider context of the Government's policies on social inclusion generally, community and race relations.'
- 'Britain has become and benefited from being a multi-cultural society. Inclusion in our society does not mean that a refugee is required to assimilate.'
- 'It is in all our interests that refugees are able to rebuild their lives and develop their own and their families' full potential. This is most likely to minimise social exclusion and

promote good race relations and generate a valuable contribution to the cultural and economic life of the country.'

- ☐ 'The existence of poor and excluded refugee communities can be threatening to community relations.'

### 2.1.2 Ireland

#### For refugees in Ireland:

- ☐ '(Integration) is particularly important in the case of refugees, many of whom, it must be remembered, fled their homes in fear of persecution and seek the protection of this State. If they are to settle in Irish society, it is important that barriers or impediments to their integration are identified and removed. It is critical that Irish society accepts this and is involved in the process.'
- ☐ 'The benefits of successful integration will be evident through the increased contribution and participation of refugees in society. Afforded the appropriate support and opportunities, refugees will be enabled to demonstrate their talent, skills, enthusiasm and culture and to contribute to the social fabric of Ireland.'
- ☐ 'Integration policy must aim to empower refugees to act independently in Irish society as soon as possible. Integration activities should seek to enable refugees to use their own skills, knowledge and qualifications to represent themselves and achieve self-sufficiency.'
- ☐ 'Refugees for their part must be encouraged to recognise that integration is a two way process to which they need to be committed and in which they have an intrinsic role to play.'

#### For the Irish:

- ☐ 'Ireland (is) a multi-cultural society, now and in the future. People from different backgrounds and cultures can enrich the society around them and contribute to the continued development of Ireland. They can do so by participating in the activities of the community and society, drawing on their own experiences, culture and background – just as Irish emigrants have done down through the years in other countries.'
- ☐ 'Recruiting from a diverse population brings new perspectives, experience, language skills, links with and understanding of the countries of origin into the workforce. These attributes are particularly important for employers competing in ethnically and culturally diverse markets in Europe and globally.'
- ☐ 'The task of transforming the social environment in Ireland into a country which welcomes refugees and embraces cultural diversity must be shared by the government of Ireland and its people. Each citizen has a responsibility for contributing to the development of a tolerant society.'

### 2.1.3 Italy

We attempted to obtain the national policy framework for Italy, but were unable to locate any source. We did, however, learn at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Network Seminar held in Rieti, Italy in July 2000 that the national policy framework is still in the process of being developed. We were therefore unable to compare and contrast the Italian context.

### 2.1.4 Refugee Participants Views

Participants were in general agreement with the statements contained in the policy documents examined. However there was some important variation and discussion of emphasis, which are summarised as follows:

- Integration relates to social justice and human rights for those individuals recognised as being in need of international protection. While it is recognised that public opinion and attitudes can be positively affected by the emphasis on the economic benefits that refugees can bring to a host country, this humanitarian aspect under international obligations needs to be as strongly supported/re-stated as a commitment by leaders of public opinion
- Integration should not be seen as asking for anything more than other Citizens, that is the opportunity to become full, equal and active Citizens, allowing refugees to live in dignity, security, with respect and self-respect. As such refugees are not asking for special treatment, but that it be recognised that, like other marginalized or excluded groups in any society, refugees need support to achieve inclusion.
- Integration cannot mean assimilation
- Integration requires an attitude greater than tolerance
- The possibility of integration begins with the conditions of and attitudes towards arrival and immediate settlement of those seeking asylum, and whilst they are awaiting decision on their status. Therefore integration strategies will be more effective if they include these initial stages
- Integration must be a Two Way process *in practice*, with intrinsic roles and responsibilities for both refugees and the host community. It is critical that real involvement of both refugees and the host society is engaged
- Where integration does not happen it has acknowledged consequences for race and community relations, which impact heavily on the refugees themselves and threatens the very security and protection they sought in the host country. The issue of racism both as cause and consequence of non-integration is central
- Integration is important even for those who eventually repatriate. It means that one will return with positive attitudes to the host country and also that one's own skills have been allowed to develop. This can contribute to reconstruction efforts and reintegration in ones own country and to harmonised global relations. There is a need to think long term about the benefits of integration.

While there are some areas of agreed meaning about the importance of integration, there are also some areas of difference. These differences would be further explored in the process of the project.

## Chapter 3

### DEFINING 'INTEGRATION' / 'INTEGRAZIONE':

Having established the importance of integration, the Network focused next on establishing an understanding of what integration really means, and who and what it involves from the perspective of refugees themselves.

In that the integration of refugees has been recognised as essential/desirable and its promotion is the target of European government strategies, it requires that 'Integration' be accurately and fully understood. That understanding, and the use of the term in policy and practice, should encompass the meanings attributed to integration by all parties to the two way process. That is, it should include as integral the meaning of integration as defined by refugees themselves.

Arriving at a self-definition of Integration from the perspective of refugees themselves was the next objective of the Focus Groups. Each focus group met a number of times to discuss the concept of integration, how it translated into different languages, and to establish the feelings and ideas that were embodied in it. The groups also considered the context required in order for integration to be possible, how integration happens, when it happens, who and what it must involve in order for it to be successful. The outputs were collated as a report and fed back into the focus groups in each country for consideration.

The groups did not feel it was possible to reduce these set of ideas and feelings that, together, define integration by formulating a summary sentence/s. Instead, the self-identified meaning of integration is expressed here through the following figures:

**Figure 3.1** Unpacks the concept of integration from the perspective of refugees and shows how refugees said/hoped they would feel if they were integrated successfully. **Figure 3.2** shows the settlement context required in order for integration to be a possibility. These are the factors that refugees felt needed to be present in the context in which they settle, in order for integration, as defined in Figure 3.1, to be a possibility. **Figure 3.3** details the elements on the route to integration. **Figures 3.4 and 3.5** show who integration involves and when integration happens.

**Figure 3.1: Unpacking the concept of integration from the perspective of refugees**



**Figure 3.2: The settlement context required for integration to be a possibility**



**Figure 3.4: Who integration involves**

**Integration is something that requires the participation and engagement of *both* refugees and the host society. It is a two way, dynamic process**

**Integration involves a commitment/willingness from the person who is a refugee**

**Integration involves a commitment/willingness by the host community, at the national, regional, neighbourhood, and individual levels**

**Integration cannot happen on its own: it involves intervention by policy makers and service providers. As such it must be policy driven.**

**Integration takes place within the wider context of the specific legal framework of the host country and also that of the European Union. For integration to be a possibility, it is a precondition that the integration is *allowed* to take place.**

**Figure 3.3: Elements on the route to Integration**



**Figure 3.5: When integration happens**

**For those who believe they will never be able to repatriate, integration as an aspiration and the need for and determination for a new life begins the moment they first arrive**

**For others, the hope that the conditions that forced them into seeking refuge will soon change means that the need, desire and determination to integrate will grow as time passes – as that ‘one day’ never comes**

**Individuals integrate at different speeds, depending on the factors that forced them into exile, their own personal background, abilities and skills, and the specific locality of settlement**

**It is a journey/process which takes place over time, but cannot be measured in time**

**The process/journey of integration does not even end with Citizenship or ‘Naturalisation’**

**The foundations of successful integration rests on the conditions of arrival and immediate settlement**

## Chapter 4

### INTEGRATION: “MECHANICAL” AND “ORGANIC”

Refugee participants in each country met to re-evaluate the self-definition of integration established and to identify how the meanings produced translated into operational realities in the process of integration. Two parallel themes emerged : that integration involves both what we are terming mechanical and organic aspects.

- Mechanical integration relates to an insertion or incorporation of incomers into host systems and structures.
- Organic integration relates to inclusion in community, which is the basis of the sense of belonging at the core of the idea of integration.

Findings from the network activities to date were collated and disseminated back to the groups as a Newsletter prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> International Network Meeting in Dublin, hosted by Access Ireland, and became the focus of that Network meeting.

#### 4.1 Mechanical integration

Some of the factors identified by the groups in figures 3.2 and 3.3 relate to the need for instrumental intervention. For example:

- the need for information and knowledge about structures, systems, entitlements and rights
- the need for language learning
- the need for appropriate and accessible services
- the need for status recognition, with a legislative framework of rights
- the need for re-qualification and recognition of prior skills and experience
- the need for housing, health services, and welfare support until able to be self-sufficient
- the need for access to employment opportunities, training and education
- the need for support to overcome trauma induced from conditions of exile

The groups examined these factors in detail. Their findings match those that have been widely acknowledged through integration studies and research that has been conducted across the EU into identifying needs and identifying barriers to integration faced by refugees<sup>1</sup>. Where it has been the intention of host states to develop strategies to promote integration, it is this mechanical integration that is the target of policies, involving issues of access to services, types of service available and legislative frameworks. These are recognised as factors that refugees cannot put in place themselves, cannot happen on their own, and therefore are aspects of integration that need to be facilitated by the host state.

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<sup>1</sup> See ECRE Task Force on Integration Good Practice Guides on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union and ECRE Position on the Integration of Refugees in Europe (1999) and policy documents from Ireland and UK as before.

In this mechanical sense, individuals integrate *into* the host society in what is essentially a one way assisted process.

## 4.2 Organic Integration

Another set of factors self-identified in figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 relate to the importance of what we are calling Organic integration. These factors change a place of refuge into a home and existence into a life. For example:

- the opportunities for meeting and mixing with other members of the community, which allow for mutual understanding, trust and respect
- inclusion in the sense of belonging in and to the community
- equality of identity and maintaining one's own identity
- developing one's own identity and character within the host society rather than losing it

In addressing these aspects, the groups realised that mechanical or instrumental measures alone cannot, in themselves, ensure integration in the full sense of the definition they established. 'Mechanical' measures alone, while addressing many of the requirements identified in order for integration to happen, cannot in themselves make refugees feel integrated. Whilst most existing measures and resources to promote integration are targeted at the instrumental level, these cannot be successful without attention being given to the promotion of belonging in the social and individual sense. Indeed, as individual stories of integration presented by the group members reveal, the feeling that integration has not happened remains both with those individuals who benefited from the existence of specialist services in the host country and those to whom none were available on arrival. While instrumental measures certainly promote and speed up the process of integration, they offer no guarantee that the individual will feel more fully integrated. Beyond incorporating or inserting the individual into 'the system', a second aspect of integration exists relating to the need for a more organic sense of inclusion and belonging in the community, and a feeling that one's individual identity could be given the chance of a full life. It is only in this sense that integration, as opposed to an independent and functional life, can be achieved fully.

However, these organic aspects seemed not to have attracted the attention of policy makers in that they are seen as outside a legislative or structural framework. There is little activity in terms of policy or resources aimed at promoting integration in the organic sense. Yet, again, the experience of refugees is that this organic integration does not happen on its own, nor is it possible through the individual or collective efforts of refugees themselves. In that these factors relate to attitudes or perceptions (ie: the need for a social context of willingness, acceptance, non-discrimination, anti-racism), they require integration to be a two way process. While attitudes cannot be legislated for, any commitment to promoting integration in the sense that encompasses refugees' own self-definition identified here will only be effective if it includes a strategy for social inclusion, that is, addressing attitudes, raising awareness, combating prejudice and promoting meeting points that could help to unburden refugees from the categoric label that stigmatises them.

In this organic sense, individuals integrate *with* the host society in what must necessarily be a two way process that involves communities and individuals. While it is certainly possible to improve and co-ordinate measures to promote integration, we cannot rely on instrumental means alone. In that such measures seek to assist refugees to integrate into 'the system', they are directed at refugees themselves and do little to address the fact that integration is recognised to be a two way process – involving refugees and host communities.

In that official integration strategies focus on the mechanical aspects of integration, this was felt to be a reduction of the definition and aim of integration to that of economic inclusion ie: integration in the sense that of becoming economically independent and productive units at the earliest possible stage, while paying less attention to the integration of refugees in the sense of social inclusion. It was felt that this reductionist tendency might be born of political imperative to respond to underlying prejudicial attitudes and notions of economic 'burden' prevalent in host societies.

### **4.3 1<sup>st</sup> International Network Meeting. Dublin, Ireland. March 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> 2000**

These concerns formed the basis of discussion at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Network Meeting in Dublin, Ireland, hosted by Access Ireland. This meeting provided the first opportunity for representatives of the refugee focus groups in each country and agency partners to meet and examine the data collated from the initial stages of the project. Participants also took part in and gave presentations at the 'Conference on the Integration of Refugees in Ireland'<sup>2</sup>, held at Trinity College, Dublin on March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Three major themes dominated the discussions at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Network Meeting. A report on the Network Meeting was fed back to the refugee focus groups for further re-evaluation of these themes, contributing to the findings detailed in this chapter.

Themes:

- 1) the economic contribution of refugees to host societies versus the perceived 'economic burden' of support for immediate settlement of asylum seekers and longer term integration
- 2) the context of immediate settlement of asylum seekers and its linkage to integration
- 3) unpacking the notion of integration as a Two Way process

#### **4.3.1. The economics of integration and economic integration**

The prevalent perception of the 'economic burden' to hosting refugees is one that must be and can be addressed by leaders of public opinion. If, in order to counter this cost/burden accusation, it is politically imperative that refugees are seen as being of potential economic benefit to the host society, then why are not Governments themselves promoting positive stories about the reality of achievements and contribution of refugees?. This would reformulate thinking away from the present conceptualisation of 'the problem of refugees' (ie: the problem that refugees are seen to present to host societies) to 'the problems that refugees have in integrating' – that is the problems refugees have in becoming socially and economically active members of the society.

"Facts about the scale of economic contribution made by refugees to the host society should be made known. For example, in the UK, a refugee from Russia had established a major company, Marks & Spencer which has outlets throughout Europe, the USA and the Middle East. Its current value, even in a depressed stock market, is around £6 billion and it contributes annual profits of around £1 billion. The annual expenditure of UK Government on support for asylum seekers is around £300 million. One can calculate that it will take over three years for the UK Government to spend as much public money on supporting asylum seekers as this single refugee founded company contributes to the UK economy every single year. And this is just one example. Furthermore, UK central government spending on the new dispersal and

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<sup>2</sup> This conference was organised by Access Ireland and the Refugee Agency (Government agency under Department of Foreign Affairs).

support system for asylum seekers amounts to a massive injection of money, £30-£40 million annually, into the North East region. This had directly created two hundred new jobs in the region, with money being paid in rent for accommodation to both the private and public sectors, and vouchers into the regional retail economy. Only £10 per week was actually paid to each asylum seeker in cash. This investment is boosting the regional economy which is already the target of regeneration initiatives. If the Government regionalises its asylum operations then there will be around 1000 jobs created in the region. This should be compared to UK Government spending of £850 million in public money to subsidise the survival of a major overseas owned company in the North East in the attempt to save a thousand jobs, and it closed within a year.”

Many asylum seekers are arriving with valuable prior qualifications, skills and experience. But the investment by government in supporting immediate settlement is wasted because of restrictions on the rights of asylum seekers to work. For example, it costs the UK over one million pounds in education and training to produce a single doctor. But the cost of allowing one refugee/asylum seeker doctor to work in the UK is only around £1000 (the cost of exam fees and access to literature). In 1998 the African Refugee Network (ARN) in Ireland had conducted a needs analysis which highlighted that around 80% of asylum seekers and refugees had skills that matched the requirements of the job market in Ireland. Barriers in applying those skills meant that asylum seekers and refugees could not fill immediate job vacancies.

“I have been a nurse for 26 years. I trained as a midwife, but I am here redundant. Hospitals are looking for nurses but I am not allowed to work. There are so many people who are wasting away, very skilled people. It just makes us depend on the state. I don't want to die with my knowledge. If you want us into your system make us go for additional courses by the time we finish the one year course we will know where we are. That is why I worked as a volunteer night duty nurse (salvation army night duties). But they don't pay your transport fare or anything. Now I work in the toilet in a nightclub.

Give the refugees a chance to stand on own feet and the opportunity to work hard. So that they can earn their living and pay taxes.”

“I know of 4 refugee doctors who work in an all night pizza parlour.”

At present, however, the messages are contradictory. There is increasing attention on securing the impermeability of Fortress Europe rather than on promoting the achievements and contributions of refugees. Seen in the way presented above, there is no ‘problem’ in upholding the UK’s commitment to and international responsibilities under the Geneva Convention and humanitarian considerations. The only way to stem the flow of those seeking asylum from coming to Europe<sup>3</sup> is to address the causes of exile: to address the West’s global policies, apologise for its colonial past, and take measures to stop the global arms trade. Policy makers only ask the question “What are we doing to solve the refugee problem?”. But refugees also ask, “What is the host country doing to meet its international commitments to human rights and social justice?”.

This undermining of international commitments and humanitarian responses to exile has consequences for integration. The host society increasingly looks to the benefits that Refugees can bring to society in terms of skills for the workplace. This can be seen as using Refugees to serve their own economic interests. This could lead to the situation of ‘guest workers’ in Germany, invited into the country during periods of labour shortage, but expected to leave when they are no longer needed to support the economy. This category of ‘guest worker’ is given lesser rights to European and Host Country citizenship. Therefore policy that promotes integration through an emphasis on access to the job market is motivated by what

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<sup>3</sup> See Refugees in Europe ‘The Hostile New Agenda’, Minority Rights Group Report, 1997

Refugees can contribute to the economy rather than fulfilling humanitarian and international obligations. Without acceptance to this commitment, then those refugees who need a longer time or more support in order to overcome traumas related to the conditions in which they were forced into exile, along with those whose past skills and experience are not as transferable, or easily transferable into the European economic context (for example, where ownership of land for agriculture was the basis of skills, or capital is required for business investment), will be socially excluded in the race to harness refugees as productive economic units.

There is another problem in Refugee access to the labour market which is one of psychology<sup>4</sup>. The background to becoming a refugee can involve trauma which means it is harder for a refugee to enter work than for a national. Therefore refugees must initially be able to resolve psychological problems before other problems can be tackled.

“A refugee who has experienced a particularly traumatic exile is like a tree which has been violently ripped out of the ground. Such a person is unlike a national, who is like a plant that has been nurtured and grown up in its own soil, or a refugee who has been replanted delicately. Access to work can therefore be a secondary issue in the period of recovery.”

“If a refugee with young children is asked to settle in an area where that host community is having problems – where children hang about on the streets and get into trouble without their parents seeming to care, where there is a lot of crime – then I cannot think about going out to work because I must look after my children and make sure they do not get into harm or trouble and that they are safe. And seeing this environment where parents do not seem to care about their children, how can I feel confident about trusting the care of my child to a child minder. I don’t know how they treat children. I must look after them myself.”

Furthermore, it was re-emphasised that employment alone is not synonymous with integration. From the host community’s perspective, if a refugee has their children at school, and both parents have a job – it looks as if you are very well integrated. However, in the Irish context, because the presence of refugees (‘foreigners’) is something new, even when economic integration is achieved a refugee can still meet coldness from people in the street. The negative associations of the ‘categoric’ label of refugee still operate in community attitudes, and intolerance of difference still block integration in the social, organic sense.

“Irish emigrants have contributed significantly to education and health services in Nigeria. If we could accept them, then they should be able to accept us here. They need to understand that we are one people.”

Therefore, while actions to promote economic opportunity/independence are welcomed and acknowledged to tackle some of the barriers identified by the focus groups, such an emphasis and expectation on economic integration without complimentary/parallel attention to social inclusion (social and cultural support) and support for overcoming the effects of the circumstances of exile will leave some refugees without a route to integration as self-defined. Furthermore, refugees may be settled in areas where the whole community faces a context

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<sup>4</sup> See A Shattered World ‘Mental Health needs of Refugees and Newly Arrived Communities’, CVS Consultants and Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum, 1999

of high unemployment. Employment cannot be seen as the primary factor in integration. Integration must be also addressed through means other than employment.

### 4.3.2 The context of immediate settlement and linkage to integration

All focus group members emphasised that the foundations for long term settlement lie in the conditions of immediate settlement – that is, the possibility of integration starts from day one.

So participants looked at the context for integration as it is forming in the North East of England and in Ireland under the recently introduced planned dispersal and immediate settlement policies for asylum seekers, and within the wider national contexts of race relations and the national legal framework. Italy does not operate a planned dispersal policy.

**Figure 4.1** relates to the immediate settlement context for asylum seekers arriving into the UK. One can see that the essential need for meeting points, for mixing, for active community involvement, the opportunity to become known as individual human beings (as opposed to the negative associations of the categoric label 'refugee') and to make a contribution, which are all self-identified factors in organic integration, are actively precluded. How can this produce a sense of community or belonging?

For example:

- The use of hostel accommodation produces social exclusion and does not allow reciprocal relations to be established. Hostel residents are not 'neighbours' in the community, while some hostels disallow the opportunity to invite visitors.
- A process of reinforcing stigma takes place daily in the retail outlets accepting vouchers. Asylum seekers detail routine examples of humiliation and discriminatory behaviour towards them at the point of utilising their vouchers.
- Welfare benefits are set at lower level than host community, creating an impoverished class of residents
- Without cash for entrance to social venues, asylum seekers belong only in the streets, which is seen as threatening by community residents. As the majority of asylum seekers are young men, they create a visible presence at their street meeting points, which feeds into people's fears or prejudices and perceptions of criminality. They become the target of local excluded young men, who hold prior claim to those streets.
- Enforced inactivity for the first 6 months or until a decision on status is made reinforces notions of 'scroungers' and non-contributors to the community.
- The majority of asylum seekers are being located in areas which have significant social exclusion problems of their own, where community is itself the target of regeneration initiatives.

In addition this has taken place within a wider background of hostility and negative opinion towards asylum seekers portrayed in high profile through the media and through the recent election politics<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, in Ireland and in England, several hostels have become the target

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<sup>5</sup> See Institute of Race Relations 'European Race Audit 2000 . <http://www.irr.org.uk>

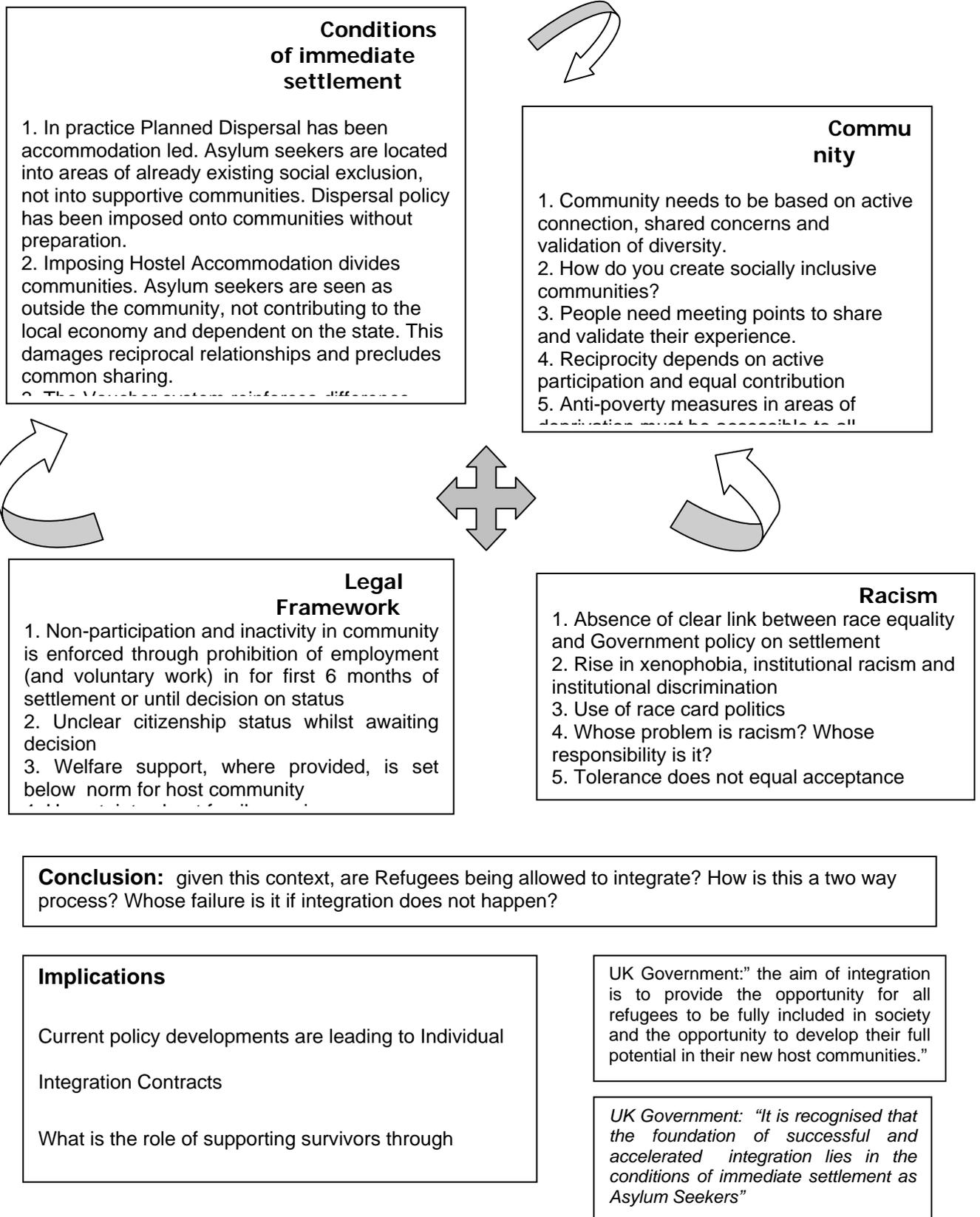
of attacks, and the extreme nationalist groups actively pursuing leafleting campaigns. Meanwhile the asylum seekers resident in the hostels have shown already the psychological effects created by the conditions imposed on them.

Given this context where integration is effectively being disallowed or mitigated against, this led us to a very serious concern with an interest in Individual Contracts of Integration that are already in use in some European countries<sup>6</sup>, where refugees are obliged to enter into contracts at the end of which they must have proven to be somehow integrated. In some contexts, non-compliance results in punitive measures. The failure of Government initiatives to tackle social and economic exclusion amongst the host community itself suggests that impossible demands may be being placed on refugees. Aside from the fact that these initiatives can be viewed as, effectively, enforced assimilation – it denies the fact that integration has to be a two way process. It cannot be achieved by the refugee themselves in this context. It cannot be a one way process. That is why we have asked the question, whose fault will the failure to integrate actually be?.

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<sup>6</sup> Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands

**Figure 4.1 UK: The context of immediate settlement for asylum seekers**



### **4.3.3 Integration as a Two Way Process**

The discussion led on to a closer examination of that part of the definition of integration that describes it as a two way, dynamic process – i.e. that integration cannot be achieved by refugees alone (it is not a one way process) but only in conjunction with aspects of change within the host community itself. Their participation is implicit in the notion of integration. This refers to the ideas in figure 3.2 and 3.4, for example, a willingness, acceptance, awareness, understanding, trust, and recognition of equality of identity on the part of the host community. It is also vital for the sense of security identified by refugees as a defining factor in integration.

The discussions focused on unpicking the assumptions and structural realities of the phrase, 'a two way process'.

On first arrival, integration would appear to be a one-way process, in that it requires a context of welcoming attitudes, reception services and a willingness to support the refugee's own commitment to integration. This is a pre-condition for enabling refugees themselves to play their part in the process of integration. If, in their first days in the new country, refugees are met with discrimination, racism and hostility – that is rejection - then their own willingness to integrate will not survive long.

There must, therefore, be a clear commitment on the part of the host society that there is a space for refugees amongst them, where refugees have the potential to lead full and equal lives – that is, that they can belong to the society. This in itself is the only thing that can allow integration to be a possibility.

Evidence of refugees 'not being willing to integrate', that is, not learning the host language or seeking to move on to another country, should therefore be seen as evidence that those refugees have realised that a context which allows the possibility of integration is not present in that place.

#### **i) The Influence of Geographical Context on Integration**

The European Commission is seeking to encourage the establishment of best practice in integration strategies across the European Union. However, when refugees arrive into host societies they enter into processes of social marginalisation that are specific to that country and that particular region. It is important to identify and recognise these differential processes, as they must be taken into account in policies which seek to promote the integration of refugees.

Refugees settled in the UK, Italy and Ireland can themselves offer an analysis of the integration context of the regions in which they have settled.

The following questions need to be addressed:

- Q** How different or comparable is the process of social exclusion or marginalisation experienced by refugees in each of these European states/contexts?. What relationship between the macro (national & regional) and micro (local: borough/ward/neighbourhood) levels is there?.
- Q** What does local community mean from the perspective of refugees themselves in each of the contexts of settlement?. What is the structure of community relations in each context, or the one being promoted by Governments?. Where do refugees see themselves as 'fitting in' to this structure?.

Q What is meant by Citizenship?. What is its relationship to belonging?. Is it possible to feel at home in or belong to two places/communities?. What does being a Citizen mean in terms of identity and integration?.

ii) Feelings about Prejudice: stigma of refugee label and racism

“Being black makes you more conspicuous. The colour alone to them is disgusting. Even children call me a black monkey.”

“If you are black you have to work twice as hard to prove yourself as a white refugee, and 4 times as hard as an Italian.”

“If you are black, or if you telephone to find out if a house is still for rent, and they hear you have a foreign accent, then they say no. if I get my white Irish friend to do it then they say yes.”

“Even if you are white, if you speak their language with a different accent, and they hear your name is foreign, they still discriminate. You are still seen as foreigners here.”

“We were called Bosnian bastards. People used to kick our door. And one time they stuck a screwdriver through it. Imagine what would have happened if someone was standing near. The police said they could not protect us. We worry about defending ourselves or our rights, or making charges as it might end up with the IND (immigration and nationality department).”

If you listen to the radio phone-ins, you find that asylum seekers and refugees are the main topic. They say we are trying to impregnate their girls, AIDS is everywhere now, they want to marry our girls. They are riding around in cars with mobile phones and wear good clothes, as though we should always be poor.”

“The word refugee to them is like a strange infectious disease. I don't say I am a refugee to them because it is a very hard word. Why can't they see we are normal people.”

“Even when you get refugee status its doesn't mean you are accepted or can integrate. They still consider you as a refugee. They still consider you as black. The stigma is still there.”

“In Italy there is no distinction made either at Government level or public opinion between refugees and immigrants. Individual identities and backgrounds of refugees are collapsed into categories of deep prejudice. All black refugees are perceived as Moroccan, all whites as Albanian, all women as prostitutes. The covering term 'extra-comunitari' defines people who are treated as having less rights and as lesser beings.”

“Before I had a child no-one wanted to talk to me. Everyone reacts positively to my baby, and the fact that I am a mother, but not to the fact that I am a refugee. People can accept foreign food – its everywhere, like pizza and cappuccino – then why can't they accept the people?. How can we remove the stigma and be recognised as people?”

“If you are made to feel welcome by the society then you can leave behind some of the problems that made you into a refugee, all the emotional trauma and stress. Integration in this sense, happening as soon as possible, prevents longer term problems, like the tendency to become depressed and stressed. Otherwise you could end up being a psychiatric patient and become a lengthy burden to the government. It takes very little to trigger this off.”

“We should talk about racism because there is racism behind so many things. People are afraid to say that there is racism and we need to stop this.”

‘In Italy in terms of employment there are examples which show you may be able to get a job, but you would be on a different level of pay and treated differently with no rights. Colonisation and racism, where does it come from?. Why are people in Western Europe afraid of foreigners?. When they colonised countries in Africa or Asia they did not seem to be very frightened. They just seemed to go there and assumed that they owned the country.’

“This two way process is really a one way process. The refugee is the recipient of racism and he suffers from it when he is expected to be responsible to try and deal with it. That is not logical and it is also not going to work.”

This context of racism, prejudice, discrimination and non-tolerance is the responsibility of the host society and of host governments to tackle if they are committed to promoting successful integration. It is a problem for refugees, yet too often they are seen as the problem. If people are rejected in this way, then whose responsibility will failure to integrate be?

### **iii) Feelings about community and belonging**

Integration, as self-defined by the groups, involves social inclusion, becoming part of and active in a community; that is, belonging to it. But what exactly is the community with which a refugee can integrate?. Defining the ‘local community’ must also be addressed, in that the concept and reality of community is problematic.

The self-definition of Integration also requires that one’s own (cultural) identity is still an integral part of one’s life. A refugee must be able to develop their character and identity in the community rather than lose it, as would happen with assimilation, where difference is not accepted.

### **Defining ‘community’**

If Integration involves becoming part of a community, we need to understand what exactly that community is. What are the common points that exist between residents of a locality in order for community to exist?. What do refugees themselves, coming from different cultural contexts, identify as indicators of an existing successful/functioning community?.

**So the refugee participants addressed the questions of ‘What is community?’, ‘What makes community’, ‘What do I need a community for?’ and ‘What links community to settlement?’.**

For community to exist there needs to be some connecting relationship between people based on commonalities. This may be family, age group, background, culture, interests and

locality, all of which may be overlapping in terms of membership. Also critical are active links between people and a feeling that these links matter.

In many societies the idea of 'community' has no history. In the Middle East, for example, there is no term for community. Instead people feel part of family, extended family, lineage grouping, or a neighbourhood.

So is there a specific European, or a British, or Irish, or Italian idea of community?. In both the UK and Ireland there is much investment in 'mythical communities', as 'old communities' themselves have disappeared. In the context of integration in the North East of England, this is a particularly relevant question. UK Government social and economic regeneration policies are directed at re-building local communities in the North East, where people are suffering social and economic exclusion. This requires that they also have a definition of what is meant by the 'local community'. Implicit in the UK's recently introduced planned dispersal policy for asylum seekers is the hope that those granted leave to remain will remain in the areas to which they are dispersed. What place is there, then, for refugees in this vision of regenerated communities?.

Is it possible that in western society the concept of community – within civil society - has emerged to fill the gap left by the decline of the extended family structure, and that initiatives aimed at recreating new communities or regenerating 'existing' communities is an attempt at social engineering?.

The groups understood that organic integration was not just about refugees integrating with a community, but that everyone in that 'community' was interacting in the way defined above. Refugees are asking, is there even a community there to integrate with?. There was a feeling that government and policy makers have a very fixed view of what integration into community might mean without really being very clear about what integration meant. For example, in North East England, some of the areas into which asylum seekers are dispersed (areas which are in themselves targets of community regeneration policy) are areas of transience. Yet refugees are dispersed into this area with the assumption that people would integrate into the community, but actually there is nothing there for them to integrate into/with. As such, while refugees might be assisted in integrating into society (mechanically) they do not have the opportunity to integrate in the organic sense of community integration.

Local community is what makes organic integration possible. Integration happens first in local communities because this is where people are living. Local communities should be the focus of initiatives to promote integration in the organic sense.

## **Barriers identified to integration in the community**

### Non-acceptance by the host community:

The receptivity of host community is vital. Non-acceptance in the community is evident everywhere and everyday: in how people treat you in the street and in the pub, how your neighbours treat you, how children are treated at school. While status recognition creates a legal acceptance, social acceptance by the local community is still necessary from local people in order to even be allowed to integrate and feel integrated. The power of acceptance lies with the host community.

When refugees leave their own countries their priority is find safety. But Refugees also recognise their responsibility to contribute equally to the society and community in which they find that safety, but they need to be accepted in order be able to do so. If they feel welcomed by the host community then they would feel more confident about their ability to function as equals in the host society. If, on the first day you are not welcome, and feel there is no possibility in being accepted the way you are, then confidence and willingness to try are not

nurtured. Unless there is a possibility of a place for refugees in that community, then the refugee cannot envisage long term settlement in that locality.

“We need people to accept us totally, without holding anything back. We need to feel we have the right to sit down in the pub and have a drink.”

“I feel accepted because my neighbours are friendly, and if I have a problem I can talk to them. We chat across the fence. It felt really good that my neighbour showed an interest in me.”

“Certain places accept you – like the refugee agency and the colleges. They make you feel welcome and accept you. You have a sense of belonging. But the welcome you receive from some fellow students is something entirely different. The other day I wore my African dress to college, and the moment they saw me they started laughing at me. I felt humiliated and embarrassed. I couldn’t concentrate that day. I went home. I couldn’t say anything. The day after I started wearing my normal clothes, my jeans to college. But people won’t admit their feelings openly when challenged. So when you try to say what’s happening they say you’re being unfair and labelling them. So integration can be like needing to adapt in order to be accepted. Then I feel if you don’t want to accept me, then leave me the way I am. When you hear the word ‘integration’ you have mixed feelings.”

“I don’t want to be accepted if its on the basis of pity – if its just because the community feels sorry for me. I want to be integrated as me. You can still give to the community and remain proud of your background. You are not forcing them to do anything. Why should I? I am who I am. I will compromise up to a point.”

#### Lack of opportunities for getting to know each other through mixing and meeting places

Acceptance can be fostered through leadership of public opinion at one level, and through the opportunities for personal contact at the local community level. How you are treated in the locality of settlement relates to the opportunities that exist for refugees and local community members to get to know each other as people/individuals. However, a massive barrier was identified between the two sides. This barrier relates to the problems identified above in those communities where asylum seekers/refugee have been settled. I.e. a lack of active relationships within the existing community itself, which are the basis for opportunities for active engagements. It is only through refugees and local community residents interacting that mutual understandings can be achieved.

Communication is the key:

“The community itself should be a part of integration; they need to be involved and take the opportunity to get to know us and our culture (s). People don’t know how to treat me because I am different. Even though the host culture is different, we can be part of that culture and let others know and enjoy our own culture. We want to mix with people to explain to them who we are. We need to meet people and bring them to the table to eat and drink.”

“Refugees themselves do not always know how to get accepted. We also need to have the chance to understand the host culture, otherwise a lot of misunderstandings can arise. It is very important for us to learn about society and their culture. We Need a friend to walk through the streets with them and show us around. This will help us to integrate.”

“We need to learn from each other.”

“Communities need to offer help to refugees who are their neighbours not because they have to but because they want to. They have to want to welcome you. This would also allow them to get to know you, and in so doing you begin to understand each other, who you are, understanding your culture.”

“Language is very important because people cannot accept you if you cannot speak their language. I want to explain what we have in our own country, our traditions, habits, cultures, everything - that we have education in our country, but in a different language. But you need to know people to have the chance to learn how to converse fully in their language – its different to just knowing enough to ask directions “

“Nobody is giving local communities any information about asylum seekers arriving into their communities, and who they are - for example, about hostels opening in their area. “

“People need to understand why we are here, what happened to us.”

“Schools are a good place for mixing and meeting. Schools are the place where children share social and physical closeness by working in the same space together. They can be taught about difference and acceptance. The education authorities (Gateshead) are reporting that refugee children are like a breath of fresh air in the local schools. They are committed to learning.”

### **Collapsing the Categorical identity ‘Refugee’ with individual identities**

Part of the problem in acceptance are the negative associations attached to the categorical identity ‘Refugee’, and the way in which the definition collapses individual identities. The impression held by local people is that the label/identity ‘Refugee’ seems to relate to some common identity that people had and shared before they actually became refugees, rather than that they are fellow human beings and individuals whose lives have been changed by events. ‘Refugee’ as a term only describes a situation into which people are forced. It is therefore a category describing people who share a common experience of dislocation and the necessity of constructing new lives (‘integration’), but it should be recognised that it does not describe a common identity. Refugees are not a homogenous group: they are all individuals. It is not just a question of understanding who refugees are, but who each person is, each with their different cultures, backgrounds and experiences. Many people in the host community do not have sufficient awareness of this difference. An essential part of integration is the chance to develop one’s own identity rather than lose it.

“If people don’t know you they bother you. Otherwise it’s OK if they know you. There are many neighbours who are friendly. When they were informed that some people were moving in, the first three months were OK. Then we had rocks thrown at us. It was during the time when there was a match between Germany and England. I was walking with a friend and we were speaking our language. Some boys on the street heard us and started shouting that we were Germans and started throwing rocks at us. Now they are used to us, so they do not bother us. They look after me!”

“One can achieve normal things, just live one’s life, work like an equal if you don’t tell everyone you are a refugee.”

## Homogeneity and lack of multi-culturalism in the host community

### **Ireland / Dublin:**

“The arrival of asylum seekers and refugees is a new experience for the Irish. In Ireland the host society is so homogenous, it is hard for refugees not to feel that integration demands assimilation. In the absence of cultural diversity in society the pressure to reduce difference is extreme. Someone wearing the distinctive dress of their culture feels themselves to be the object of ridicule and humiliation. “

“It is not so long ago that Irish people started seeing coloured people. Having foreigners here is like a revolution for Ireland. It has started changes of course. We need to give time to the Irish people to accommodate us, to get used to the idea of having foreigners here. And we should involve them in our culture. It is selfish to expect them to involve us if we don't involve them. We can show them that we come from countries with music, with culture, with literature. We are not people from the moon. We have to show the way to Irish people and involve them in our friendship. It is for us to accommodate them and for them to accommodate us, so we can make a whole being.”

“I have mixed feelings to the word integration. If you are same colour as the Irish then you can be happy.”

“The True Colours festival<sup>7</sup> was like air.”

### **UK / North East:**

“When I arrived I was 19. I was the only Kurdish person in the whole North East for 10 years, so I was forced to be with English people the whole time, but this didn't help. It didn't made me feel part of the community. I didn't feel a member of anyone. Even though I had no language barrier to contend with, I still felt totally isolated from the first second I arrived in Newcastle. I was in a world of my own, a total stranger, different, a complete foreigner. I don't know if this was something to do with myself or something about the area, about Newcastle. Nobody knew who I was or understood my background. Local people didn't even know the difference between Iran and Iraq, at least until the Gulf War happened. Even the fact that I had a different hair colour was so important. I was attacked several times in the street during my first year. After 5 years I went to London, and it was as if someone had opened the doors to heaven. I felt at home there. It was so cosmopolitan. No-one cared where I came from. I found Kurdish people, Kurdish shops, Kurdish organisations and Iranian societies. It was a different world. But when I returned to Newcastle, the feeling of isolation continued until just this last year, when the first Kurdish people were sent to the region (through dispersal). That changed my life. Something like a veil lifted from me, some chain was broken. I got involved in helping them. It opened up something in myself. Now I feel more comfortable. Its comforting”.

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<sup>7</sup> An event organised to celebrate multi-culturalism

“Now there are more asylum seekers and refugees in the area. Local people see different faces more often, they are more aware of foreigners, and so get used to the idea after a while. There is a feeling that the whole community is changing. People are more flexible, more receptive, more willing to try and accept refugees that they had before. At least, in those who have a willingness to accept others, this feeling is growing stronger. But in those who have negative tendencies there is a danger that these people will feel even more strongly negative, hateful.”

“The NE is becoming more cosmopolitan, so there is an increased possibility of integration. But we are at the very early stages of dispersal.”

“The way English people look at the world is a problem for refugees and for integration. Lots of English people cannot conceive of living as part of a bigger world or the whole world. To them it is not just asylum seekers and refugees who are foreign, but the whole of the rest of the world are foreigners. This has to be challenged.”

“London is ghettoised. People have lived in their own communities for 20 years with no language development, no English person as a friend. They are locked into a ghetto system from the first moment. They have been marginalised and isolated because in those 20 years the system did not give them any support or make them feel that they could become part of their local community or the mainstream community. Their priority was safety, but they didn’t find a space where they could function equally. They are integrated only into their own communities but not into society or local community. We need a multi-cultural society not a multi-ghettoised one.”

### **Italy / Rieti province**

“I have been a refugee in a town in Rieti Province for 10 years now. My family is the only black family living there, and everybody knows us – people can ask ‘Where is Filipe?’ and everybody knows where I am. I was trained as a pharmacologist. But the only work I have ever been offered is as temporary work in building. I have done so much voluntary work, and with the Church. But I have still never had a permanent or full time job. My children go to a local school, and sometimes come home so upset at what has been said to them, and I don’t know what to say. They will be affected for ever by it.”

### The absence refugee / co-national communities: maintaining ones cultural identity

As well as integration with local communities, Refugees also need the support of their co-national/ethnic communities and from people who as refugees share some of the experiences of exile and settlement.

“For a sense of well-being we need to be brought together as Refugees.”

“We feel that we are different, and other people always see you as different all the time and it is painful. I have been to social events and knew they were trying to make me feel welcome. But whatever I do I always feel different. Even when they like me. Inside it hurts.”

“We need support from each other emotionally. If we don’t come together and talk about social problems then we feel our heart is tied and we want to talk to someone.”

“I feel more secure here than in my home country, but I don’t feel settled. I want to be able to speak in my own language, and to communicate with my own people. There are no proper contacts with other people from my country; no proper communication with your own language and culture. Language has to be constantly used to be remembered. We can forget expressions in our own language. When new people arrive we don’t understand the current jokes. It’s heartbreaking.”

“You get pressure from your children to be equal, and not different here. But still you want them to know their own culture. Meeting other people from the same country helped to maintain their roots, and reminded the younger ones of their culture and country of origin, even if they felt incorporated here at the same time.”

“Refugees do prefer to go to areas where there are some existing communities, so that they don’t feel total strangers. Important to have a sense of community to settle, to feel comfortable.”

“I was the only Kurdish person in the whole North East for 10 years. My feeling of isolation continued until just this last year, when the first Kurdish people were sent to the region (dispersed), and I got involved in helping them. That changed my life. Something like a veil lifted from me, some chain was broken. It opened up something in myself. Now I feel more comfortable. Its comforting.”

“Refugees settling in another country need to and try to rebuild the same model of community as existed in their own country, which are mostly based on family, or extended family. But where they have no family here, they try to identify commonalities as a way of filling the gap left by the distance of separation. At least co-nationals or co-ethnic people have points of commonality. So you try to replace members of your own family with members of one’s own national community.”

“When we were speaking about community support here in Ireland, I think we are speaking about the Irish community. I do not think that refugee communities or ethnic communities were identified strongly within the focus groups as a support to integration within the wider community and I think that it has to do with the fact that the ethnic communities in Ireland are very small and not as well established as in England. It is not a multi-cultural society and those sorts of links don’t exist, where peoples own co-communities support them into integrating into the whole system and society.”

(Agency Worker)

“In England there is such a history of immigration and of the way that patterns have developed and the way that communities have stayed together at the beginning and gradually moved on and moved out. As an Irish person living in Newcastle, as an immigrant, at first we lived around and amongst the Irish people for years and we went to the Irish centre. We spent a lot of time with Irish people and whilst we gradually got to know other people this focus was important as just being with other Irish people was making up for the loss of your extended family which had been the focus of your life. Although you might not have had anything in common with them had you still been living in Dublin.

But others from your community replaced the extended family at the beginning of the process of integration began. Now the Irish centre is not the centre of our existence.”

(Agency Worker)

“If there is an integration model then it is a community one.”

“Refugees do not know many things that they are entitled to and it is important to have someone using the same language to explain these things for accuracy. This is what the new Iranian Centre is providing.”

“If we knew at the beginning what we know now, it would have helped us, and it would have been much easier for us to integrate.”

However, the particular divisive circumstances of exile, the events that caused people to seek refuge from their countries, mean that refugees need the opportunity to re-establish relations of trust with other co-nationals. Sometimes they are afraid that others may be spying on them, or that uncovering their identities will endanger their families remaining behind in the country of origin. If co-community cannot find the reassurance to unite itself then refugees are divided against each other and the host community.

#### **4.3.4 The Two way process as roles and responsibilities**

It is clear from the above discussion that if integration is to happen, in both the mechanical and organic senses of the self-definition arrived at, then it involves the participation of the host Governments/authorities, the local communities of settlement, and Refugees themselves. They are integral to the two way process of integration, implying roles and responsibilities on both sides.

“Reflecting on this journey, the process of change and movement was not about myself as an individual, it was more to do with the support received, at the right time, from one’s own community, and also from the host community.”

So what exactly are these roles and responsibilities?. What can the host government, society and community do?. What Refugees can do?. What they can do together? What support is being given in order to perform them?

##### **i) Special support services (mechanical integration):**

There needs to be a clear legal and structural framework for integration:

- Clear legislative framework of rights and entitlements
- Specialist support and advisory services at location of immediate settlement
- Promoting access to housing, welfare support, health services, education, training and employment
- Language learning opportunities
- Orientation programmes: the vital need to know host systems and structures
- Services to overcome isolation of women and the elderly

- Programmes of activity to engage young people

These services need to be appropriately designed and delivered.

## **ii) Building a receptive environment (organic integration)**

Supporting the process of integration through a strong legal and structural framework will help in promoting positive attitudes in the host society towards the presence of asylum seekers and refugees, as evidence of destitution, inactivity, and non-inclusion compounds prejudicial fears and attitudes.

However, a commitment to actively promote positive attitudes must also be at the heart of policy and practice. This requires the establishment of structures and systems that enable organic processes of acceptance between local people, irrespective of where they are from. Only when these systems and structures are in place can the two way process of integration begin.

Measures to combat racism and discrimination: are critical both at the institutional level and community level

- Anti-racism legislation
- Equal opportunities legislation
- Implementation of policies through training
- Programmes of education

Such measures will promote social and economic inclusion for all members of the community, including refugees. However, the different national contexts present very different environments for integration. The UK has a relatively strong legislative framework, where racism is a criminal offence and equal opportunities policies exist throughout the statutory and voluntary sector. Ireland has no specific law against racism. In Italy there appears to be little commitment to implementing anti-racism laws in practice.

### **Fostering willingness: Promoting an understanding of who Refugees are**

Non-acceptance is not only founded on racism. It can also stem from mistrust or prejudice born of confusion, ignorance and propaganda. Acceptance relates to an attitude of mind. Are refugees seen as 'the problem', or a 'resource' with a problem?; are refugees seen as a mass of difference, or as people?. Communities receive mixed messages from the Government and through the national media. Political parties portray themselves as tough on 'immigration', while simultaneously claim to be promoting a multi-cultural, multi-racial society and a commitment to promoting integration.

If the environment is negative – i.e. where the portrayal of refugees through the media, from leaders of public opinion, or one's peers amounts to negative stereotyping – then willingness to accept will be discouraged. Willingness itself needs an environment in which it can be nurtured and grow

Therefore, in order to address prejudice and ignorance around the categoric identity of Refugee, and to address the issue that local communities perceive themselves to be under threat, any integration strategy needs to

- Foster willingness and acceptance through a positive environment

- Allow local communities to gain knowledge about the circumstances in which people are forced to become refugees
- Promote knowledge about the contribution that has been made by refugees to society and communities
- Promote knowledge about historical relationships of support and assistance that other countries have provided to the host nation
- Promote opportunities for increasing awareness, understanding and trust between local communities and refugees
- Provide specific information to and consulting with local communities to allow them to prepare for settlement in their locality
- Demonstrate a commitment to tackling bias and misinformation
- Provide positive messages from leaders of public opinion
- Provide positive messages through the media
- Design education programmes and activities in schools for the next generation
- Actively re-affirm the nations commitment to international obligations and humanitarian principles, and the rights of refugees
- Actively re-affirm national commitments to multi-culturalism and responsibilities of citizenship
- Encourage a shift away from Anti-European attitudes to a wider notions of citizenship
- Demonstrate zero-tolerance of racism through effective action taken by police/authorities

### **Encouraging personal relationships: Getting to know individuals**

Communities need the opportunity to meet their new neighbours in order to remove the stigma attached to the Refugee label and recognise the individuality of refugees as people, as human beings, as equals. If this is made possible then communities will gain an awareness of the difficulties faces by refugees in the process of integration, and an appreciation of the potential and critical role of the community itself in supporting that process.

For this to be promoted it requires:

- Meeting points in the community: introductions and activities, opportunities for social/personal contact, communication and friendship
- Opportunities for personal relationships to be established between children in local schools

### **iii) What refugees can do to promote the process of integration**

By integrating, refugees have the potential to contribute to the host society through the employment of their prior skills and experience. They are doctors, midwives, engineers, vets, accountants, teachers, research scientists, pharmacists, entrepreneurs, musicians, playwrights, and so on.

**But they also have the potential to be active agents in the process of integration itself, provided they are given the opportunity to do so.**

**Provide cultural and emotional support and opportunities for developing one's own identity**

- Refugees provide a vital source of emotional, cultural, social, educational and advisory support through establishing community organisations where people who share the refugee experience and culture can meet and support each other.
- Within a very short period of time people feel stronger if they have the opportunity to meet in this way, support each other and celebrate their cultures.
- Such community groups and organisations can also provide points of contact with host community groups and afford refugees the chance to confer about local cultural rules, and give the host community a chance to understand the ways of different cultures.

### **Provide expert and regional knowledge to inform policy development**

**Refugees are the voice of experience. If these voices are heard they will identify the needs, tell of the problems created by inappropriately designed policies and will offer solutions.**

- **Refugees themselves have a focal role to play in defining what inclusion strategies are appropriate for them in relation to their self-identified needs**
- Refugees should be targeted for consultation processes to improve the effectiveness of existing services, identify gaps and develop new initiatives, thus ensuring the effectiveness of integration strategy
- **Policy making committees need to be established that include policy makers, service providers, Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Refugee community organisations (RCOs)**
- **Refugees can compare each others' experiences in integration across Europe to identify examples of good practice from other national or regional contexts**

### **Deliver practical assistance**

- **Refugees know what constitutes essential advice and the orientation problems that the particular configuration of the host system presents to people from their own countries.**
- Refugees provide interpretation, communication and cultural mediation across Information gaps and problems in access to and delivery of services.
- Refugees can deliver training to service providers in awareness and understanding, which will ensure that services are equally accessible and culturally sensitive

### **Raise awareness and understanding and promote positive attitudes in the community**

- **Having direct contact with and participation in the community – getting to know people personally and as individuals, breaking down barriers through ‘meeting places’**
- Forming social groups for interaction, organising workshops, film shows, seminars, talks and dramatic and musical events so that the host community could get to know more about refugees and their backgrounds. Social events, like barbecues, are very important—where people can eat and drink and party together
- Through school visits by refugees, and events organised so that children get to know people who are refugees
- Through representing themselves at meetings with community leaders, organisations and local authority committees
- Through talking to the media about their personal stories, achievements, and contributions

NB: The willingness to engage in this activity is limited in practice by the fear of public identification by racist elements in the community. Where the media has been willing to film or publish positive stories, or where an opportunity to speak has been offered, many refugees have felt unable to offer their own personal experience through concern that they, their family or their businesses become the target of racist attack.

## Chapter 5

# EXAMINING REFUGEE INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION

This chapter shows how findings from the initial stages of the network formed the necessary basis from which to begin addressing the substantive focus of the network. The next stage of the network activity was to examine the processes through which policy and practice centred on integration of refugees is developed, and to identify the means by which the voices of refugees themselves are heard in these processes of policy formulation and implementation.

The initial stages of the Network established:

1. a self-definition of integration based on the experience of refugees themselves
2. that an integration strategy that does not embody this definition of integration will not be effective in promoting integration
3. that integration is a process that must be promoted through both its mechanical and organic aspects
4. that integration is clearly linked to the conditions of and context of first settlement
5. that the process of integration requires the involvement of the host government, the host community and refugee communities, as well as the individual refugee themselves
6. that in order for integration to be allowed to happen / to be a possibility, there must be a clear commitment within the host society that there is a place for refugees in that society
7. that integration, therefore, has to be a two way process with essential roles and responsibilities within the host society and community as well as within the refugee community and for individual refugees
8. that refugees have a vital and integral role to play in supporting the whole integration process, that is, if given the chance. I.e. refugees are not just the target or object of integration but must be active agents in the process of their own integration

On the basis of these understandings, the refugee focus groups considered the following questions:

- 1) Are Refugee definitions of integration embodied in the concept used in official integration strategy?**
- 2) How are the experiences of Refugees sought and included in integration policy in order that it is evidence based?**
- 3) How are Refugees enabled to be active agents in the integration process though practical application of their experience, knowledge and support?**

## 5.1. Self-definition and official definitions of 'integration':

The refugee participants again referred to the policy documents considered in Chapter 2<sup>4</sup>.

### 5.1.1 Ireland:

*The report recognised that, while 'the process of integration is a very complex matter', it was 'necessary at the outset to produce a working definition of the concept of integration'. The following definition was arrived at after reference to working papers prepared by ECRE and submissions it invited from NGOs:*

- *'Integration means the ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity'*

Refugee comments:

"What you can get is this understanding of integration which is like a medicine that you take and then you, maybe, become Irish. Unless we are able to inform on that from a variety of different views, the government and policy makers will have a very fixed view of what integration might mean without really being very clear as to what integration actually means."

"Official integration definition in Ireland focuses on the individual rather than the community. It is not just refugees integrating, but the two communities interacting, which includes the host society knowing us and accepting us."

"The official definition is very individualistic. It doesn't make reference to the community. Therefore in that definition, responsibility for integration only lays with the person who is a refugee. So it means it is the person's fault if they don't integrate, and their own personal success if they do."

"Irish society is so homogenous. Hard not to feel that integration must involve assimilation. Otherwise you are always seen as different. There's so much pressure to become Irish. It would be easier if there is already more cultural diversity in society."

The general feeling was that the definition used was too individualistic and not broad enough to encompass the meanings of refugees.

**This concern was compounded by the report's recommendation that the Irish Government look to the systems of Individual Integration Contracts developed by Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and Denmark, and at whether compulsory participation, incentives for compliance or penalisation for non-fulfilment of that contract is appropriate. Compulsory courses in the host language and culture, and preparation for employment in the host economy can be felt to be assimilationist,**

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<sup>4</sup> Integration: A Two Way Process. Report to the Irish Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform by the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Integration of Refugees in Ireland, March 2000 and the Consultation Paper on the Integration of Recognised Refugees in the UK, Home Office, Immigration & Nationality Directorate. November 1999

**relating more to the agenda of conformity within the host country than to ‘the ability to participate the extent that a refugee needs or wishes – as the official definition states.**

#### 5.1.2 UK:

The Government’s Consultation Paper did not attempt to provide a definition of integration. The understanding of integration lies instead within its stated aims, which are:

- ☐ ‘To include those receiving international protection as equal members of society.’
- ☐ ‘To maximise opportunities to develop their potential to the full and to contribute to the cultural and economic life of the country’
- ☐ ‘To set out a clear framework to support the integration process across the United Kingdom.’
- ☐ ‘To facilitate access to support and services to assist their integration nationally and regionally.’
- ☐ ‘To re-affirm the UK’s commitment to integration as one of the three durable solutions to refugee problems.’

The Government’s policy relates only to refugees: that is those who are persons granted indefinite leave to remain under the terms of the 1951 Convention on the Status of refugees or those given 4 years exceptional leave to remain as persons in need of international protection in accordance with obligations under ECHR and the Convention Against Torture and does not cover those asylum seekers still awaiting a decision.

However, the Consultation Paper states that:

- ☐ ‘The Government recognises that there needs to be an effective link between the arrangements for supporting recognised refugees and the support arrangements for asylum seekers.’
- ☐ ‘Once a refugee is granted permission to stay, there is a need to invest early in integration to promote a quick move from dependency to self-value and sufficiency through work and inclusion in community and society.’
- ☐ ‘There is a growing body of evidence that suggests spending more time at the beginning of the integration process could generate savings in later years as the incidence of long term problems is reduced.’

Refugee comments:

The general feelings were that:

“While admitting linkage of success in long term settlement to ‘investing early in integration’, practical implementation of official policy was still aimed only at those who have been granted recognised refugee status or 4 years ELR. In the group members’ own experience, and through relationships with asylum seekers in the region, the average waiting time for decision is currently still over 1 year.”

“In that the Consultation Paper has many references to linking the need for effective support for asylum seekers and refugees to the need to avoid upsetting community and race relations, refugees felt they were again seen as the problem rather than as people needing support in rebuilding lives.”

## 5.2. An examination of the processes whereby official Integration policy is being developed

The refugee focus groups and agencies considered what involvement they felt they had had with the development of official integration policy in their country of settlement. Through what processes were/are the understandings of refugees gained?.

### 5.2.1 Ireland

In December 1998 the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform established an interdepartmental working group to formulate a strategy for implementing the Government’s policy of responding positively to the needs of persons granted refugee status or leave to remain. The terms of reference for the group were:

- ‘To review the arrangements for integrating persons granted refugee status or permission to remain in Ireland, including the appropriate institutional structures for the delivery of these services and to make recommendations.’

The Working Group was formed of 7 government departments, and met 10 times between January and December 1999. To assist the Working Group in identifying issues facing refugees in integrating into Irish society, written submissions were invited from NGOs (Access Ireland, ARASI, Jesuit Refugee Service, Vincentian Refugee Centre), the UNHCR, the Refugee Agency, the Eastern Health Board, and the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism. The Working Group also took into account the work of ECRE, and experiences of other EU member states in developing integration policy. Access Ireland and ARASI were also invited to a half day round table discussion.

The resulting 65 page report by the Working Group, Integration: A Two Way Process published in March 2000 concluded that still more research into understanding the needs of Refugees was required for effective policy development.

- ‘In considering the issues for integration and the intervention measures necessary to assist refugees to overcome barriers to integration, the WG has been able to draw on international experience, as well as ECRE’s report, submissions from the UNHCR, and the experience of State bodies and NGOs in Ireland. However, despite the fact that there are over 100 nationalities represented in the asylum process in Ireland, the only tangible information on the specific needs of refugees living in Ireland is in relation to the Bosnian and Vietnamese communities<sup>5</sup>. **Effective integration policy can only be developed and implemented on the basis of complete information and there is a need for research into the particular needs of refugees in the ever-changing social and economic climate in Ireland today.** There is a need to carry out an analysis of what is currently being done at all levels to meet the needs of all refugees and to evaluate the opportunities to utilise existing structures, including State services, NGOs and community

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<sup>5</sup> Communities of ‘programme refugees’, who entered Ireland on Programmes co-ordinated through the UNHCR

groups, to promote the integration of refugees. **Complete information will facilitate the development of a comprehensive strategy for the future**'. (our emphasis)

- ☐ **'There may be other issues which refugees have to deal with on a daily basis which have not been identified here** and cannot be identified without developing a profile of refugees in Ireland. For example, how do they react with the local community?... ..**these questions can only be answered by refugees themselves and, although certain issues can be addressed immediately, there is a clear need for further research before comprehensive measures can be developed to counteract the difficulties encountered by refugees.**' (our emphasis)

The Working Group therefore recommended

- ☐ 'that research be carried out in order to obtain information on the specific needs of refugees, having regard to their differing backgrounds..... it is vital that research is based on a representative sample of the refugee population...and the Irish public.....(from) 3 separate locations ..... research should be commissioned immediately...**with researchers engaged...and sourced through appropriate tender procedures.** The exact costs cannot be determined until the tender process is completed.... in order to facilitate the development of the strategy for integration within an 8 month period, this research project should have a 3 – 4 months timeframe....the Purpose of research is to inform the development of a comprehensive strategy for the implementation of integration policy'. (our emphasis)

It was felt by the refugee participants and agency staff that this 'consultative process' had not been fully inclusive or sufficiently in-depth to be either a truly participatory structure or an effective process.

Neither Access Ireland nor any members of the Focus Group, many of whom are also representatives of refugee community organisations, have had any further contact with the process and are unaware of any research tender or research process underway into their needs and barriers faced.

## 5.2.2 UK

In November 1999 the Refugee Integration Section of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office issued a 19 page Consultation Paper on the Integration of Recognised Refugees in the United Kingdom. Written responses were requested by 14<sup>th</sup> December 1999 – that is within a period of 6 weeks. The document had been written with reference made to research papers and documents produced by the UNHCR, the main national NGOs (British Refugee Council and Refugee Action), 3 other nationally produced research papers, and government policy documents.

Within the consultation paper was a government proposal to form a core integration forum of interested government departments, key local government and voluntary sector representatives. Co-ordination on the ground to be focussed on stakeholder groups to take account of national, regional or local priorities and the existence of cluster area networks and partnerships.

While NERS itself had been invited to submit its comments – and did so - the group members had had no knowledge of the document or the consultative process but would have welcomed the opportunity to participate.

The group wanted to know how well this consultative process had worked and what it had produced? Had the Home Office felt the process to have been sufficient in order to develop the full integration policy, which was finally released in November 2000?.

### 5.2.3 Italy

The evidence given to us was that while, at the local level, ARI have successfully established a working relationship with the local authorities on the reception and support for asylum seekers and refugees, there is no national policy framework regarding integration.

## 5.3 What roles and responsibilities in the implementation of integration policy been outlined in official reports, consultation papers and policy documents? What role for refugees as active agents?

Policy documents reveal a clear consensus on understandings:

- That integration is a process which will not happen without specific intervention measures. Integration must be facilitated through a clear framework to support the integration process both nationally and regionally
- Lack of overall co-ordination of various initiatives, and ad-hoc nature of allocating funds, has resulted in fragmented integration measures across different sectors.
- That integration must, therefore, be policy driven. It is a central government responsibility. Need for a comprehensive and co-ordinated strategy for maximum effectiveness, necessitating an effective organisational structure for the continued development of integration policy and co-ordination of its implementation.
- That a policy will only be successful if it is evidence-based and regional specifics must be taken into account. Research into needs and barriers is required.
- That an integration strategy is most likely to be successful if it is built on partnership – with roles and responsibilities ascribed to all stakeholders in the process. I.e: The implementation of a policy should be through partnership strategy, each element having a specific role to play.
- Research and the development of partnership networks will need increased investment of resources.

In that refugees are indeed stakeholders in the process, what role has been assigned to them in official policy and what are the types of structures proposed in order to secure their involvement in the process of implementing that policy?.

### 5.3.1. The role envisaged for the voluntary sector in general

The Irish Working Group report, Integration: A Two Way Process, 'recognises and welcomes the various initiatives undertaken by NGOs and community groups...(whose) goodwill and enthusiasm must be harnessed and given direction to achieve maximum benefit for refugees and society'.

The UK Consultation Paper recognises the 'considerable contribution of the voluntary sector and that 'the voluntary sector has a demonstrated ability to develop networks of support'. It expresses a commitment to develop the capacity of the voluntary sector, as a sector capable of rapid and effective expansion, and to provide a focus for its acknowledged contribution.

**i) as a source of expert knowledge**

- 'Effective integration policy can only be developed and implemented on the basis of complete information and there is a need for research into the particular needs of refugees in the ever-changing social and economic climate in Ireland today..... There may be other issues which refugees have to deal with on a daily basis which have not been identified here..... these questions can only be answered by refugees themselves and, although certain issues can be addressed immediately, there is a clear need for further research before comprehensive measures can be developed to counteract the difficulties encountered by refugees.' (Integration: A Two Way Process)
- 'The voluntary sector contribution is seen as bringing knowledge and expertise on refugee matters.... There are benefits to the integration process as a whole if the voluntary sector is able, through local stakeholder groups, to give advice on both practical and policy issues'. (Consultation Paper).

**ii) as the source of practical assistance in service delivery, community support and promoting positive attitudes**

- 'Integration policy must aim to empower refugees to act independently in Irish society as soon as possible. Integration activities should seek to enable refugees to use their own skills, knowledge and qualifications to represent themselves and achieve self-sufficiency. Refugees for their part must be encouraged to recognise that integration is a two way process to which they need to be committed and in which they have an intrinsic role to play.' (Integration: A Two Way Process)
- 'It is important that refugees commit to integrating and they must be encouraged to become involved in intervention measures to facilitate integration. In particular, refugees and refugee groups must be involved in promoting their own culture and must be encouraged to participate in their local community and should be encouraged to use their own resources and skills to promote and represent themselves.' (Integration: A Two Way Process)
- 'In promoting a tolerant inclusive society....NGOs should be encouraged to develop opportunities for different groups in local communities to learn about others and to interact with them.....social interaction and the encouragement of initiatives by community groups ..and other voluntary groups can promote racial harmony through the active involvement of people of different cultures in their organisations....refugee groups should be encouraged to use their skills and resources to promote and represent themselves' (Integration: A Two Way Process)
- 'The participation of refugees and refugee groups in these (public awareness) initiatives will enable them to highlight the contribution they can make to society and also involve them directly in the development of a tolerant inclusive society.' (Integration: A Two Way Process)
- 'Language training could be provided at the community level and the skills of refugees and voluntary groups can be utilised to develop initiatives in this area' (Integration: A Two Way Process)
- 'Their skills can be utilised in the provision of services to refugees, such as interpretation, language training and mother tongue and cultural classes' (Integration: A Two Way Process)
- 'While most refugees have contacts with a number of statutory and voluntary agencies, the main link to the wider society is usually through their own local community groups, or

Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs). These groups are important for new arrivals and provide opportunities for association, practical help, emotional support, cultural activities, advice and acting as a stepping stone to participation in the wider society.’ (Consultation Paper)

iii) Opportunities ascribed for the voluntary sector/ refugees to be involved in structures through which integration policy will be implemented

- ‘Integration is a two way process that places real obligation on both society and the individual refugee. From the refugee’s perspective, integration requires a willingness to adapt to the lifestyle of the Irish Society without abandoning or being expected to abandon one’s own cultural identity. from the point of view of Irish society, it requires a willingness to accept refugees on the basis of equality and to take action to facilitate access to services, **resources and decision-making processes in parity with Irish nationals.**’ (Integration: A Two Way Process) (our emphasis)
- ‘The Working Group recognises and welcomes the various initiatives undertaken by NGOs and community groups to help refugees overcome barriers to integration into Irish society and to help create public awareness of the needs of refugees. However, while these projects have made a valuable contribution, a lack of overall co-ordination of the various programmes has resulted in fragmented integration measures across different sectors. The **goodwill and enthusiasm** which exists among NGOs and the wider community **must be harnessed and given direction** to achieve maximum benefit for refugees and society.’ (Integration: A Two Way Process)
- ‘To facilitate the development of cohesive and co-ordinated integration measures an organisation with appropriate power and authority must be put in place. This organisation must be able to rely on the full co-operation of other government departments and agencies, and work with NGOs and community and voluntary groups on the development of integration measures.....This organisation should also be responsible for channelling all funding for NGO initiatives. This will eliminate the ad hoc nature of allocating funds and facilitate more efficient allocation of State resources, as well as simplifying the procedures for NGOs applying for funding. This organisation should also continuously monitor integration policy and measure and conduct research.....(its) terms of reference should include.... developing initiatives in partnership with NGOs and other voluntary groups; co-ordinating the allocation of State funds to NGOs and voluntary .....assessing opportunities to obtain EU funding and advising NGOs on methods of obtaining funding; monitoring and research.’ (Integration: A Two Way Process)

In its conclusions on necessary structures for implementation of integration strategy, the Irish Working Group identified that integration initiatives were hindered in their objectives by the

- ‘**ineffectiveness of informal relations with mainstream service providers. Representation alone was not enough. Formalised structures were required that provided sufficient influence to ensure the co-operation of all service providers**’ (Integration: A Two Way Process)
- ‘The Government’s proposals rely heavily on partnership.’ (Consultation Paper)
- Enhancing the linkage between existing refugee, ethnic minority groups and RCOs in the proposed partnerships through regional stakeholder groups and delivery of assistance and advice should contribute to the understanding of the needs of refugees and to the development of practical support and appropriate help.’ (Consultation Paper)

- 'Development of partnerships should help communication generally and be linked to programmes to promote positive attitudes towards those in receipt of protection among other communities and groups. The identification of likely community leaders, who will be both male and female, within refugee groups to help to promote self-development could contribute to regional networks and assist communication within refugee communities.' (Consultation Paper)
- 'Promote the networks needed locally to enhance the appreciation of the needs of refugees within local authorities and central government services responsible for delivery of services on the ground.' ( Consultation Paper)
- 'Development of national and regional networks focussed on integration will need increased investment of resources to draw policies and best practice together.' (Consultation Paper)

#### **iv) Summary**

From the examination of these official documents, policy makers are seeking to develop the most effective integration strategies that will ensure an effective use of all resources. In order to formulate policy and design its practical implementation, policy makers and service providers need:

- To understand integration as self-defined by refugees themselves
- complete knowledge
- regional knowledge
- effective structures based on partnership working

This necessitates the development of research processes and partnership structures that are genuinely inclusive. That is they need to involve:

- contact with target group and service user group
- inclusion of those with other languages
- inclusion of those most isolated
- inclusion of people from different cultures, localities, ages etc.
- genuine partnerships and formalised relations of influence

It is clear that refugees are a vital resource in the process whereby effective integration policy and practice is developed and delivered. But:

- Who resources the resource?
- How are refugees empowered to perform these roles?
- How are refugees enabled to utilise their skills?
- What level of influence (formal relationship) exists in order for their voices to be heard and acted upon?

The refugee group members and agency partners addressed these questions, to see how, in their own experience, policy statements actually translate into practical implementation.

## **5.4 The Experience of Refugees in the process of Integration policy development and practice**

Refugee and agency partner voices from Ireland (Dublin) & Italy (Rieti):

“Setting up a refugee group and defining what you want to do, identifying our own needs, is the easy part. The problem is, how are the other organisations going to listen, and put into practice what you tell them?. It’s obvious that they are the ones who are going to get the money. There is no trust. There is no responsibility given to us. There is no respect. They won’t even call you to tell you they got the funding and are doing your idea. They won’t use you in it. They just use you as an object, when you think you are being invited to participate. When we ask for help they’re not interested. How do we stop that, being used as an object? Them using us? Refugees are always turned into the object, rather than the agent in integration. It’s never as true partners. Partnership or real participation can only result from being involved in every stage of the project, starting from the very beginning, making the decisions, and carrying this through. Rather than being invited to participate at the end – or just to listen. We don’t just want to be involved through some token, but must be involved for it to be effective at all. Refugees want a voice. We have strong structures already available.”

“We recognise the consultation fatigue of those refugees involved with other organisations. Where does it get Refugees themselves?. If they are used to assess and identify service development, are their own issues really being progressed?. We know examples of NGOs funded to do things that didn’t seem to accurately correspond to the needs of Refugees. Refugees are not actually involved in developing training.”

“The Irish Department of Justice was always sending people to dip into the Refugee Community Organisations when they had a problem that they were wanting Refugees to help solve. They are using Refugees as unpaid consultants. Consultants get paid big money, but not Refugees. They just get called in to sort out other people’s problems that arise because policy is not effective and they didn’t listen.”

“Refugees themselves are very well placed to help themselves, and they are the ones who have the community links, the direct voice. But what should the process of getting those voices heard be? There are so many conferences – but where have we got to? did we achieve something? Who says what is successful? We must also look at what has not been achieved in practice. How much of the funding goes to Refugees themselves?”

“Refugees get frustrated with research, seminars etc, people saying “we are trying to do something for you”, but nothing comes out of it. What does get done? Nobody sees anything.”

“Keeping the Refugee organisations going is becoming more and more difficult. There is a loss of motivation. Over time our expectations have not been met. All is expected to be done on a voluntary basis, with Refugees spending their own time and money. No financial resources are offered. They are listened to maybe, but nothing comes back from such meetings apart from the fact that the other organisation hijack their ideas. They manage to get funding for them because they know the contacts for it. Other organisations have managed to get funded with money, but not us. This drains our motivation.”

"I agree about partnerships. But we have wanted to be a partner, but they do not trust us as a partner. It is not an equal two way process. In reality the idea of a partnership in integration is a one way process. It is in the rhetoric but not in the attitude, not in the way Refugees are used. It is love from one side. Refugee Community Organisations get small resources to do everything. Other agencies get large resources to do a small amount of the work."

"The community groups need training in how to be self-supporting and sustainable through training in knowing how the system works, who the funders are and how to access funds."

*"We are fed up with research, meetings, conferences. Of someone else making money out of it. With no direct or real participation. There is a feeling of, why bother? What happens in the end anyway? Refugees don't trust NGOs anymore. For example, Filipe has given so much of his time for years. But this is the first time he has ever been to an international meeting."*

"I'm starting to have the same feelings. It's like a business now."

### **Refugee and agency partner voices from the North East of England:**

"We feel that this is the first time we have been involved in discussions on the actual process of integration.....There is an importance of participating in research. Unless we participate, we can't prove what is wrong, what is needed, what it is we want. If it doesn't end up to be what we wanted or needed then we must our voices heard. Trust will be built if we are heard and the services meet our needs."

"The UK has a longer history of community organisations, many being already established. But the vast majority are in London, and they are only just emerging in the regions now, so it is different for new communities there. NERS helped such groups set up in the North East of England as it had funding to pursue community development. It was a catalyst, an enabling agency. But then this funding stopped and the groups were left on their own without sufficient capacity to survive without this support in the early stages. Community groups need help with long term development and capacity building. You cannot manufacture groups, they need to develop organically, but then need sustained support for capacity building. Refugee assistance and development is not a popular environment for finding funding. This is the responsibility of local and central government."

"Despite the recognition of NERS and the work it does, it was always and still is vulnerable; its continued existence is always in doubt. It is not incorporated into the system as a permanent part. There is no real commitment from local or national government to underwrite our work. It is marginalised. Under the planned dispersal policy in the UK there is a promise to strengthen the capacity of NGOs and RCOs, but in reality the action is so slow that they let the organisations reach breaking point first."

"The governments must establish a framework for partnerships to meet refugees' needs."

“NERS has spent at least 60 days over the past 18 months advising the regional consortium<sup>6</sup> to help guide its development. Yet it was not funded to provide this developmental assistance. How could this time and effort have been resourced? Whose responsibility was it?”

Additional discussion drew attention to the fact that, in the UK, under the recently introduced compulsory dispersal system for asylum seekers and the voucher scheme asylum seekers are even more excluded from being the agents in their own integration. The ability to utilise one’s own personal skills in settlement are negated by the framework of total control, while the system effectively disallows participation in the community while creating an identifiable and stigmatised group within that community (see Figure 4.1). Similarly, the present reception strategy for asylum seekers in Ireland was felt to be based on preventing them from integrating.

It is clearly evident that refugees themselves are a valuable resource with a vital and integral role to play in supporting the integration process.

- As refugees they have expert knowledge and experience of the issues and barriers faced, and have self-identified solutions
- As refugees they have a direct role to play, for example, in supporting those newly arrived, in mediating or acting as a bridge, in raising awareness and understanding that builds trust and acceptance, and in their commitment to being active community members.

Integration Policy documents, meanwhile, give specific acknowledgement that integration must be policy driven, and that strategies must be based on complete knowledge that is both expert and regionally specific. They also advocate that structures be based on partnership between all stakeholders in the process.

There seems, then, to be an obvious agreement on both sides as to their complementary and integral roles and responsibilities in the two way process of integration. It is widely accepted that those who are the target beneficiaries of a policy must be a part of the process through which they are supposed to benefit in order for it to be effective.

This can only happen if, as stakeholders to the process, refugees are given the chance to perform these roles. They need the opportunity to be active agents in integration rather than the target or object of integration policies. In order to do this they need to be enabled, empowered and resourced.

However, the experience of refugees shows they are also the weakest resourced party. They are a wasted resource through lack of practical empowerment to apply their expert knowledge and use their skills. Their experiences are more typically of objectification, exclusion, or at best marginalisation in the process, continued vulnerability and insecurity of organisations, and offers of partnerships that turn out to be neither genuine nor one’s of parity, nor empowering. This has led to frustrated efforts, exhaustion, de-motivation, and scepticism. It has been most often the case that their expertise is only resourced through its appropriation by others, while resources are wasted on ineffective initiatives before refugees are called upon to identify the problems.

That is, in the two way process of integration, refugees are hindered by:

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<sup>6</sup> In order to implement the planned dispersal policy for asylum seekers, the Home Office requested local authorities in the designated dispersal regions to form themselves into regional consortia. The regional consortia are contracted by the Home Office to offer accommodation and certain immediate settlement support services to asylum seekers dispersed to their region.

- Objectification, Marginalisation, and Exclusion
- Consultations which lead to Hijacking of ideas (i.e. expertise only resourced through its appropriation by others)
- Consultations, raising false hopes as Refugees become detached from the process or it leads to nothing
- Offers of partnerships that turn out to be neither genuine or empowering
- Resources wasted on ineffective initiatives before Refugees are called upon to identify the problems.
- Lack of knowledge of host country systems, structures, funding and rights
- Lack of funding to self-organise and deliver support
- Cashless systems
- Hidden costs of volunteering<sup>7</sup>
- Absence of influential networks
- Continued vulnerability and insecurity of refugee organisations / groups / networks
- Frustrated efforts, demotivation, exhaustion, scepticism, consultation fatigue, which reinforce isolation

In practice then, whilst refugees are seen as one half of the equation in the two way process of integration, in reality they are not practically enabled and empowered to perform their part. At the same time, the host community, which is the other half of the equation, is not partaking in the process as there is no movement being encouraged from them.

Nor can the work be done by refugees alone. It has to be done in partnership with the host community. When refugees arrive in the host country, they do not know how the host systems and structures operate or the framework of legal practices. They do not have a network of family or friends to support them through this. They do not know how to reach into those networks of influence, where decisions are made. They do not know how to offer their advice when they see things not working, or where to find support and funding so that they can organise themselves to provide support and assistance. Only by working in partnership with the host community can they reach these understandings and realise their potential role.

Integration is everywhere described as a Two Way process. Yet in reality it is an unequal process. If it really is to be a two way process in practice, we need to address how the resources of refugees and the voluntary sector are or could be resourced, and how such groups and organisations are enabled and empowered to perform their potentials and roles within an overall partnership structure. How can active citizenship be encouraged in a context of dependency and marginalisation?

Whatever the structural and legal frameworks that exist in the host society, the effectiveness of support and services made available depends on the process through which they are made available; that is, how needs are researched/identified, how policy is developed, how services are designed and delivered.

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<sup>7</sup> See NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) consultation document, *Draft Code of Practice on Volunteering and Community Action*, May 2000.

## Chapter 6

# DIALOGUE WITH POLICY MAKERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

## In-Country Workshops

The next stage of the network activity centred on the In-country Workshops which were organised in Dublin, Ireland and in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK<sup>8</sup>. These workshops were designed as an opportunity for dialogue between refugee group members and agency staff, and invited national and regional policy makers and service providers, focusing on the outputs of the network activity to date.

The aim of the Workshops was to identify ways in which the network findings could assist those tasked with promoting integration, and could promote understanding of the ways in which refugees themselves can be active agents in the process of integration. In showing a way forwards for promoting integration in the region through ensuring that all parties work together in the most effective way, this would benefit not only refugees themselves but the regional community as a whole. It is vital to identify and put into practice what works and avoid what does not.

A 10 page Newsletter on Network outputs to date was sent to invited policy makers and service providers prior to their participation in the In-Country Workshops. The Newsletter contained the following understandings and asked those attending to consider a set of questions:

### Harnessing Reciprocity in a Two Way Process

#### Understandings and Challenges

1. That in order for an integration strategy to be truly effective it must involve the participation of refugees themselves in both policy and practice.
2. Refugees are intrinsically involved in integration, and best placed to self-assess their own needs, identify solutions, and provide practical support for the integration process. However, as the weakest resourced party, they are a wasted resource in the process through lack of practical empowerment to use their skills.
3. An effective integration strategy requires complete knowledge. In that governments have recognised the necessity for research into needs, expert and regionally specific knowledge is acknowledged as having a *value*. What are the costs involved in gathering such knowledge, and where do they go?.
4. In order to participate at all, Refugees need to be resourced. Past experience shows that the expertise of refugee communities is resourced only through its appropriation by other agencies.

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<sup>8</sup> No Workshop was held in Rieti due to pressures of organising the forthcoming 2<sup>nd</sup> International Network Seminar July 2000 and difficulties of engaging policy makers in dialogue with refugees

5. Social Partnerships are an inclusive process. Participation requires that people be empowered to be agents of their own change, rather than merely actors. Those who are the target beneficiaries of a policy must be part of the process whereby they get the benefits. Equality is integral to the inclusive process, and the process by which the voices of all stakeholders are heard and included goes beyond representation and consultation. Statutory services are only at the very beginning of acknowledging or recognising reciprocity in partnerships.
6. An effective integration strategy also requires the establishment of appropriate structures, based on partnership. Development of networks will need increased investment of resources. For partnership structures to be effective they also require a relationship of influence, through the establishment of formal relations. In as much as barriers to integration have been identified to be a problem of access (e.g. to services), these questions are also about the issue of access; access to positions of sufficient influence, and access to resources to fund integration initiatives.
7. In that a role has been ascribed to Refugees in the process of integration, how can we ensure a more successful form of participation that avoids the objectification, exclusion, marginalisation and de-motivation experienced by Refugees in Rieti and Dublin?. That is, how can this region ensure that participation is based on genuine partnership and practical empowerment, leading to more effective facilitation of integration?.

Therefore, to maximise the effectiveness of Integration policy and practice in this region:

- Q How can we avoid the negative experiences of Refugees in Rieti and Dublin – the hijacking and non-inclusion?
- Q How can Refugees in the region be effectively involved in the process of policy development concerning integration?
- Q How can Refugees in the region be effectively involved in the implementation of measures to promote integration?
- Q How can Refugees in the region be involved in genuine partnerships, that are long-term relationships, with a central role, rather than add on value, for total effectiveness of actions?
- Q How do the policy makers think they can help in formalising a regional structure that will work in the region, which puts Refugees at its heart as equal partners in the promotion of integration?

## **6.1 Outputs from In-Country Workshop: Dublin, Ireland. July 19<sup>th</sup> 2000**

### **6.1.1 Participants: (see Appendix 1 for full details)**

- 9 Refugee members
- 7 National policy makers/service providers
- 6 Regional policy makers / service providers
- 4 Partner agency staff

### **6.1.2 Current context and activities in relation to integration:**

Policy makers are currently tasked with developing policies that will ensure that their services are appropriate and accessible to refugees, and will therefore play a role in promoting the integration of refugees:

FAS (the Government Employment & Training Agency) is seeking to develop strategies to facilitate people's return to work as quickly as possible, via short training courses and individual coaching and job preparation

DRASS (Government Directorate of Refugees and Asylum Seekers) is looking forward to implementing the recommendations made in the Working Group Report, in partnership with the voluntary sector

Social Work Services have key responsibilities in the welfare of refugee families in the reception centres and of unaccompanied minors

The Northern Region Health Board is currently engaged in producing a policy document that will inform health service development for refugees. It seeks to tackle the low uptake by new arrivals of medical screening, barriers of access to health and welfare services through language and cultural sensitivity, the need to develop culturally appropriate information leaflets and posters for the refugee communities. The Health Board was committed to the involvement of refugees in policy development. The Health Board is also seeking to include refugees in the delivery of its services and aims to train refugees to become health promoters within the health service. The production of an information video for refugees on their entitlements within the health and social services is currently at the planning stage and it is hoped that representatives from the refugee focus group would form part of the advisory group for the production of the video.

The Equality Authority is trying to develop an integrated policy agenda to tackle discrimination, through development and preventative strategies and lobbying on legal issues which impinge on integration

There was an acknowledgement on the part of the policy makers that they are currently undergoing a learning process in relation to refugee issues. They are aware that there is a need to develop knowledge and understanding of cultural difference and that planning should not happen without consultation with ethnic communities. Some had been involved in consultation processes, which were aimed at developing integrated and co-ordinated services for refugees.

### **6.1.3 Discussions:**

During the workshop, the policy makers / service providers listened to the difficulties group members had had with access to their services and other barriers to integration. Much related to the need for services providers to have a greater level of understanding and awareness:

- of the rights and entitlements of refugees within their own services
- for those services to be delivered in culturally sensitive ways
- the particular impact of restricted support networks
- discriminatory attitudes of staff
- the fact that refugees do not know the system and need accessible and appropriate information on it
- the need for interpreting and translation

Participants agreed that it was more constructive to share ideas and problems at such a meeting, as opposed to when people are in crisis.

Policy makers in general felt that the meeting provided a welcome opportunity for dialogue and networking with members of ethnic minority groups. There was a general agreement that the day had been a great learning experience for every one. A lot of issues had been raised and a lot of new ones identified. The discussions highlighted the extraordinary complexity of cultural difference.

The importance of creating a network between the refugee group members and agencies and policy makers was agreed , in order to:

- Exchange cultural information
- Identify barriers to service delivery and co-ordination of access
- Identify strategies for more effective service provision
- Fill gaps in the services and promotion of services

#### 6.1.4 Summary:

- It was agreed that NGOs are a valuable resource and should be used as such.
- **However, does this willingness to dialogue constitute a real involvement or partnership? If this dialogue serves to raise the awareness and understanding of policy makers and service providers – who by their own admission are facing the challenge of the issue of integration for the first time – then it will indeed have achieved something positive. But this amounts to a consultation process which is essentially about utilising the expert knowledge of refugees as informants in the planning process. This is not a genuine working partnership, as once again, without a partnership structure, continued engagement, or a part to play in decision making, then once again refugees remain marginalized in the process. There is a need for empowerment of refugees to bring about real participation**

## **6.2 Outputs from In-Country Workshop: Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. May 24<sup>th</sup> 2000**

### 6.2.1 Participants:

9 Refugee members  
2 National policy makers  
3 Regional policy makers / service providers  
5 Partner agency staff

### 6.2.2 Current context:

The Refugee Integration Section of the Home Office has been tasked with developing/advising on an Integration Policy for the UK, to be launched late 2000. The British Refugee Council and ECRE gave a detailed written response to the Consultation Paper and is actively involved in promoting recognition of needs through research activity and representations at the National and European levels.

Regional policy makers and service providers in the North East are, for the first time, being required to address issues around integration. The responsibility to examine the appropriateness and accessibility of their services, and the environment in which settlement must take place is now a significant part of their work.

The Refugee Integration Section of the Home Office, represented here by Ian Barton, exists to promote the integration of refugees across the UK. Previously, this section was part of the Race Equality Unit of the Home Office, but is now part of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. The section looks at the framework for integration, liaises with other Government departments to ensure that the needs of refugees are included and generally interfaces with the refugee assisting voluntary sector. Until now the main focus of Government attention on policy and implementation has been concentrated on asylum seekers, which has been the predominate issue. The Refugee Integration Section is a small team. Integration is just coming back on the agenda, so it is important for the section to get the views on integration nationally, regionally and locally. Integration is an increasingly important issue as the dispersal system and the commitment to faster decision making means there will be greater numbers of recognised refugees settling in areas where there is currently little support.

ECRE, represented by David Hudson of the British Refugee Council, is a European network of 8 national agencies specialising in integration issues and is funded at the European level. The network's key aim is to identify and disseminate good practice and advice on funding opportunities. As part of ECRE, The British Refugee Council leads on employment. They had felt that the Consultation Paper had raised the question of what is meant by 'integration'; that it must refer to a process that is dynamic and two way, is long term, and multi-dimensional. The issue of integration contracts operated in some European contexts was a focus of attention, as while some country programmes are well developed, others are prescriptive, ordered, short and can be insensitive. Defining what constitutes good practice and whether such practice is transferable to other European contexts is a key issue. While UK practice certainly has scope for improvement, this has to be looked at in comparison practice in other European countries.

NECASS<sup>9</sup> (the North East Consortium for Asylum Support Services), represented at this meeting by John Lee, was launched on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000 and is the first English Consortium to contract with NASS<sup>10</sup>. Its main function is to provide a co-ordinated response to the dispersal system<sup>11</sup> so that it is managed in a effective, sensitive and balanced way and to promote and develop services that will ensure the long term settlement of refugees in the North East. A key role of NECASS is to ensure that a multi-agency approach to providing support is developed in the region. A Welcome booklet was being prepared for new arrivals and an internal guide for staff to help them understand the issues and work effectively with asylum seekers.

The Newcastle & North Tyneside Health Authority, represented by David Chappel, aims to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into the services of the National Health Service

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<sup>9</sup> NECASS (the North East Consortium for Asylum Support Services) was established in May 2000 in response to the Government's planned dispersal policy for asylum seekers. It is composed of 10 local authorities in the North East.

<sup>10</sup> NASS – the National Asylum Support Service. The new government agency tasked with issues relating to asylum seekers and refugees and overseeing implementation of that policy.

<sup>11</sup> 1400 units of accommodation for asylum seekers across the region to be provided by NECASS under the NASS contract. NASS will also contract directly for accommodation provision from the private sector.

(NHS), to which they are fully entitled. This is in line with its statutory commitment to equal opportunities in mainstream service provision. Each of the regional Health Authorities have recently appointed Health Visitors with special responsibilities for asylum seekers. The Newcastle Health Authority is developing an informational 'Welcome Pack' for asylum seekers, which will be translated into the main client languages. The Health Authority is also keen to promote the employment opportunities for refugees with prior medical training and need to look at the mechanisms for securing this, such as recognition of qualifications. The Health Authority needs to ensure qualified professionals are enabled to use their skills, as the North East has a shortage of medical staff. The Health Authority is also aware of the need to develop appropriate mental health services and is seeking advice from the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture.

Local Authority operational teams are being developed to manage the dispersal and settlement. But this is the first time members of these teams have personally had to be involved in designing a response which will both fulfil their contract obligations and also meet the needs of asylum seekers. They feel they are on a very steep learning curve. They have not done this in multi-agency partnerships before or had much experience of user involvement. But they want to know what works so they can put it into practice.

### **6.2.3 When does integration begin?**

Home Office response: When integration begins is a contentious issue. Most refugees and asylum seekers would argue that it starts from day one – from initial reception. However, for the purposes of the Government it begins from the day an individual is granted permission to remain. The period of awaiting a decision is not viewed as time when integration starts to take place. From the Government's point of view, whilst 40% of asylum seekers are granted permission to remain, 60% are not.

NECASS response: It may be Government policy that integration begins from the date of granting recognised status, but NECASS would like to look at some integration from the first day an asylum seeker arrives in the region.

Refugees responded by saying that the possibility of early and successful integration lie in the conditions of arrival and first settlement. The distinction cannot be made. In addition, many people are still awaiting a decision from the Government after 5 or 6 years. Conditions of first settlement and waiting time contribute to significant levels of depression, from which it is difficult to emerge.

### **6.2.4 Process of policy development identified by policy makers and service providers**

#### At the National Level:

David Hudson stated that ECRE recognises the huge advantages of ensuring that opportunities for dialogue and exchange of information exist at all levels.

Ian Barton explained that a Consultation Paper was circulated in November 1999, based on the Home Office's own research and that of the British Refugee Council. Responses were invited, and around 60 responses were received. This was fewer than had been hoped for. The view had been expressed that the paper was rather vague and therefore difficult to comment on. That paper had now been tightened up as a result and would be tested out with national NGOs before being submitted to ministers as part of the development of the UK's national Integration Policy. Key proposals include the establishment of a National Integration Forum, involving government departments, local government association, and key

organisations in the refugee assisting voluntary sector. The aim is to develop a partnership approach. At the regional level the intention is to establish regional stakeholder groups co-ordinated by the consortia.

Refugees suggested that if the response to the Consultation Paper was judged to be poor or disappointing, then does this point to the fact that the consultation exercise itself, as a process, was not inclusive enough?. It is important to reach those suffering most from isolation or mental health problems in order to understand the difficulties that create isolation. These are the most difficult voices to hear/access. Previous research may have missed them too. How do the Government and the Consortium source representation of those people they are targeting with policy?.

Ian Barton replied that Home Office contact with the 'refugee voice' is through the voluntary sector, mainly the major, recognised, established high profile NGOs – in particular the British Refugee Council. They are seen as the 'leading players'. Perhaps there are other alternatives. In that it relies on these channels of representation, it would like to have the confidence that the major NGOs had developed their own structures to achieve a mandate for representation and they were reflecting the voices of refugees. At the regional level the Home Office is also anticipating involvement of regional refugee agencies, RCOs and voluntary sector groups in the regional stakeholder structure, which the Regional Consortia are required to establish. The involvement of refugees in these structures is vital.

David Hudson pointed out that it can be difficult for national refugee organisations to relate to the grass roots, but they should constantly strive to achieve that mandate.

But the issue is how strong the commitment is to refugee involvement in the process of designing policy?. it is without doubt easier to consult with a few large organisations as representative of the refugee voice. Going beyond this entails the dedication of time and resources. So it is a question of how much will exist and how much policy makers value the voices of refugees. Structures are vital.

#### At the Regional Level:

What are the mechanisms through which refugee participation in the proposed regional stakeholders' group be secured? How will refugee voices be heard?. What influence will refugees have in such a structure?. If refugees are to stay in the North East, it is important that NECASS and other bodies work closely with refugee agencies and the refugee community to ensure that support is appropriate and effective throughout the region, and that supportive communities are actively developed. Without this, people will move south.

NECASS has sought guidance for its development, in terms of information and advice, from NERS and will seek to maintain that working relationship. They are at the very beginning of developing the regional structure and it is a very practical question of how this inclusion will be achieved. The Consortium is new and their task is new, so there is no experience of contacting refugees and their community groups. There is a need to link this work to wider policies which relate to communities generally.

A problem identified within the structure of the consortium is that those in charge of executive decision making are all local government officials and political officers. They may never have met a refugee. The regional stakeholders group is scheduled to meet only once every 6 months. It will be difficult to sustain involvement in this way. Refugees themselves need to know about the structure of the system so as to know what is going on, where to direct their concerns and influence decision making.

**David Chappel stated that the Health Authority has a policy commitment to consult with all its users so that their views can be fed back into policy making to ensure that**

services are evidence based and user-led. However, while there has been much rhetoric within the NHS about this, in practice the implementation of this process is poor, for all users. It has proven difficult to identify processes which will achieve this effectively and it takes a long time. There is also a need to develop networks of communication with other regional health authorities to learn from good practice.

Partnership working between the statutory and voluntary sector is promoted in Government directives. But partnerships can exist in theory and not in practice; that is they may not be genuine. For example, NERS had been approached by some regional health authorities and a joint research proposal into the health needs of asylum seekers had been submitted to the NHS for funding. Funding was granted, but NERS had had no further involvement with the process. The resources went internally into the health authorities and research carried out by their staff. The research had been entirely questionnaire based. Again, what should have been an inclusive process turned out to be one of marginalisation.

Health Authorities are outside of NECASS. There is no clear partnership working yet even within the statutory sector.

#### 6.2.5 Who makes policy?

The Refugee Integration section is established to carry out Government policy. Section staff can, as civil servants, make recommendations in respect of Government policy and identify where that policy may create problems. However, changes to policy require political will.

NECASS is charged with the responsibility of implementing policy on the basis of a contractual relationship with central government.

So who are the 'real policy makers'?. How are they accessible?.

Refugees can identify poor or negative policies and practice; the challenge is how to reflect back that knowledge to where policy is made. An example was given of the dispersal of Iranian and Iraqi asylum seekers into a 150 bed hostel in Newcastle, with an ensuing riot. Refugees in the area had been called upon to assist in finding a solution. Had they been able to advise on policy at the beginning, such a situation would have been prevented. The understanding of diversity within the category of asylum seeker or refugee was not felt to be properly appreciated in policy. Refugees felt that there was little chance afforded to affect the design of policy, but more potential for influencing implementation and it is crucial that they do so.

Refugee members knew of many problems they themselves and other were having with accessing, for example, school places for their children. These problems had not been brought to John Lee's attention, but being made aware of them means he can act to ensure entitlements are provided

#### 6.2.6 Resourcing

Refugees in the region had received most assistance and support from refugee-founded services. These services barely survive from small grants and suffer through lack of capacity.

The issue of representation is an important one and relates to resourcing. The refugee voluntary sector is composed of different groups whose agendas can differ. What opportunities exist for these groups to 'converse' with each other?. What opportunities are there for individual refugees to participate in dialogue?. How can such groups be resourced to play a role in consultations or dialogue?. Most of the NGOs are service providers and funding limitations can make it very difficult to pursue a representative role without front-line service delivery suffering in the process.

**NERS has dedicated much time to assisting the Consortium to establish itself. But it received no funding to perform this role and is stretched beyond its capacity in delivering services to the rapid increase in new arrivals in the region.**

The Welcome Booklet to be issued by NECASS was based on work done by a volunteer student who had developed the information through his contact with refugees and asylum seekers. This work was unresourced

Some refugees have tried to establish community organisations to give support to others. But these have been very difficult to fund. One member had been volunteering for more than 10 years.

Ian Barton stated that at the present time there is only a small amount of funding available for promoting integration. Funding from the Home Office for refugee involvement in the process of integration is currently directed at the main national and regional refugee organisations. The Home Office is looking at whether funding could be extended to more grass roots groups.

For NECASS, a significant problem has been that, until 6 months ago, there was no dedicated funding for provision of services, whether via the local authorities or the voluntary sector, to asylum seekers. There is still not enough additional funding being offered to those statutory services that are now taking on responsibility for providing services and support to the asylum seekers dispersed to the region. There is still no dedicated funding for integration services and support, and the Government will direct integration resources at those people who have received a positive decision.

**The Health Authority policy representative stated that they were not getting any additional resources to support any initiatives specifically aimed at asylum seekers or refugees. There has been a need, therefore, to look at creative ways of obtaining additional funding and provision through other government grant schemes targeted at excluded population groups.**

Could opportunities for funding for networks of RCOs be made possible through the race equality grants aimed at tackling discrimination?. This could be a way to produce a unified and strong voice that could be heard. The discrimination suffered by asylum seekers and refugees should be linked to the wider issue of discrimination within British society.

### **6.2.7 Summary:**

- Inclusive decision making mechanisms and partnerships in delivery of services are not simple processes and are not easy to put into practice.

- Consultation processes are only as effective as the commitment to them. If they are to be genuinely effective then they require a genuine commitment, which implies a willingness to spend time and effort in developing inclusive processes. This has obvious resource implications.
- Consulting and involving customers is an integral part of all statutory service provision, but too often they are seen as an 'add on' rather than as integral to the effectiveness of policy making and therefore as a crucial aspect of Best Value<sup>12</sup>. Developing successful partnerships requires additional resources, but will ensure that the resulting policies and practice will be an effective use of resources. Additional costs at the beginning of a process are justified by the value they have in terms of effectiveness. Effective policy and practice will benefit the whole community.
- Consultative structures can also be exploitative, if the value of the participants' contributions is not acknowledged, and if they are dissociated from the policy making process as a whole. We should think about developing structures which accredit this type of involvement so that participants derive some personal qualifications in return. Organisations value the expert knowledge and experience of the 'professional consultants' they employ in designing strategies. They are paid huge fees. Refugees are expected to contribute their time and skills for no personal compensation or gain.
- Organisations claiming to represent the interests of asylum seekers and refugees must ensure that they have effective mechanisms of communication with all refugee community groups and structures in order to have a legitimate mandate.
- Those being newly tasked with the responsibility to develop and implement integration strategies in the regions need to consider the processes through which they will secure the expert knowledge and practical support skills of all stakeholders.
- The emphasis is on a partnership approach. These must be genuine partnerships that address the need for equality and parity. How is genuine partnership going to work in practice and how it is going to be resourced?.
- Refugees need resources and influence in order to take an active part in decision making processes and in the practical implementation of integration policy.
- Seeking Good Practice examples from another context is useful, but transferability is not automatic across contexts. There is still a need to have processes for assessing the appropriateness of such practice in their region/locality.

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<sup>12</sup> See Modernising Local Government: Improving local services through best value, DETR (Department of Environment, Transport and Regions) HMSO 1999, and Race Equality in Public Services, Home Office 2000.

## Chapter 7

### TRANS-NATIONAL DIALOGUE

This chapter details the outputs from the final planned Network activity. The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Network Seminar took place between the 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> July 2000, hosted by ARI in Rieti, Italy. The Seminar was designed to provide the opportunity for sharing and comparing the understandings reached through the process of the project on a trans-national basis: that is, between refugee and agency participants in the three member states, between these participants and policy makers and service providers from the three member states and for policy makers and service providers from the three member states to share understandings of how policy is being developed and how it is operationalised in each country context.

While this Seminar represented the final planned activity of the project itself, there was a consensus among refugee and agency participants and affirmation from policy makers/service providers themselves that a continuation of the process of the project would greatly benefit all participants in working towards the common aim of promoting integration.

#### 7.1 2<sup>nd</sup> International Network Seminar, Rieti, Italy. July 27<sup>th</sup> 2000

##### 7.1.1 Participants: (see Appendix 1 for full details)

From the UK:	3 members of the refugee focus group 1 Agency staff Network Co-ordinator 2 members of the research and community development advice team 1 policy maker at national level
From Ireland:	2 members of the refugee focus group 2 Agency staff 1 policy maker in regional service provision
From Italy:	7 refugees from Milan, Rome and Rieti Province Agency staff and volunteers 8 national and regional policy makers and service providers from the Ministry of Interior, UNHCR, CIR (Italian Refugee Council), regional and local authorities and the NGO, CoPIR (Conferenza Permanente Internazionale dei Rifugiati - International Permanent Conference of Refugees).

Simultaneous English-Italian interpretation was provided.

### 7.1.2 Agenda:

9.30	Welcome by the Mayor of Rieti Introduction to the day: background to the Network, outputs to date, aims of the Seminar (ARI member)
10.30	Presentations by policy makers and service providers, addressing the focus of the Network
12.00	Break
12.15	Dialogue between all present
13.30	Working lunch

### 7.1.3 Seminar aims:

A summary of the Network aims, process and findings to date was presented at the opening of the Seminar.

It was explained that all those present were, in different ways, involved in trying to progress the Integration of Refugees but shared a common goal. Each person present had a role to play in the process of integration: in developing and implementing national and regional policies aimed at promoting integration and in providing direct services to refugees and seeking to represent and further their interests. Refugees themselves had a multi-dimensional role in that they constituted a resource in the process of integration policy development and practical implementation, as well as being the target of integration strategy.

The aim of creating this opportunity for dialogue was to find out what works in integration. This was a question of how we define integration - that is how well we understand what it really means and involves - and how we work together to achieve it. By recognising complimentary roles in integration, and the different expertise and resources of those present, the Seminar could assist in identifying a way forwards for partnership working in the development and implementation of integration policies and practices that are truly effective.

The Seminar was designed as an opportunity to share the experiences of those present,; both positive (to understand what works), and negative (to understand what is going wrong or what our problems are) in each of the countries represented at the meeting. In so doing participants could learn from each other's initiatives and successes, and work together to seek solutions to problems identified. The findings of Network would be circulated throughout the member states of the European Union in order to share our ideas for promoting Good practice in promoting integration throughout the EU.

Policy makers and service providers were asked to consider the following questions:

- Q** What do you understand by the term "Integration?"
- Q** Why is it important, and to whom?
- Q** What do you hope to achieve through your own role in Integration?
- Q** By what process have your own policies on integration been developed? Did it work? How could it have worked better?
- Q** What have been your successes? (which we can all learn from)
- Q** What have been your problems? (which we can share in solving)

- Q What value do you see in involving Refugees themselves in developing integration policy? ie: in what ways has or could working in partnership with Refugees be of value to your own work?
- Q What form of practical support do you think Refugees could play in implementing an integration policy or promoting integration?
- Q What structures would need to be in place for this relationship/involvement to be effective?
- Q What resources are needed for this to happen?
- Q If integration is described as a two way process, what roles and responsibilities do each of us carry and how can we perform these roles?

Policy makers and service providers present were invited to give brief presentations focusing on these questions.

#### 7.1.4 Selected points from presentations

##### **i) Italy, national level:**

Mr Francescelli from the Ministry of Interior outlined integration as a concept that refers to the process through which immigrants access or can gradually gain access to the principal institutions of civil society. Integration will have the effect of preventing marginalisation and formation of minority groups which are excluded from the political and social contexts in which they live. Integration should not compel immigrants to abandon their beliefs, opinions or specific values of their culture. A particular aim is to construct positive relations between Italian citizens and immigrants, probably without one changing the other. This is probably the main objective, but is also the most difficult to achieve because this presupposes removal of prejudices which are always obstacles to change.

Italian policy can be seen to have passed through three phases: the 1980s saw policy directed at starting aid programmes to assist refugees. In the 1990s there was a need to focus on the spread of geographical interventions within Italy, as there was evidence that more refugees saw Italy as their final destination rather than as a transit or initial reception country. The most recent phase has seen the intention to formulate a more mature approach to integration. The vision has moved from one of basic assistance to initiatives to promote access to training, universities and schools. The current context is that there is development of policy/debate taking place at parliamentary level (a new asylum bill) to address the issue of support for asylum seekers awaiting a decision. The aim is to create a national system of co-ordinated support for asylum seekers, including access to healthcare, which could provide the basis of further integration initiatives. In particular, the proposal to formalising the structures of the regional councils on immigration, which are already established in all districts in Italy. They will certainly be the instrument through which any effective policy on integration will be implemented as they deal with the problems on the ground.

The focus of attention has been developing policy to deal with exponential rise in numbers of asylum seekers reaching/targeting Italy. I.e. 2000 at the beginning of the 1990s, 12,000 in 1998, and 15,000 in 1999. The majority of applications are judged to be unfounded claims. Funds made available since the early 1990s have risen significantly. Financial assistance for asylum seekers is currently limited to 45 days. But decision times are much longer. Asylum seekers have no right to work. Therefore asylum seekers are forced to rely on the capacity of local organisations for assistance or forced into the exploitative black market. The new asylum bill being debated in parliament will address extending the duration of a special

support package for asylum seekers to cover total period whilst awaiting decision, in parallel with speeding up the decision making process through instigating initial processing of claims regionally rather than centralised.

Ms Behr from the UNHCR and Mr Murano from CoPIR spoke about the need to concentrate on promoting the rights of refugees as enshrined in international law. From the international perspective, State responsibilities go further than ensuring protection or a humanitarian response. Protection is an initial issue, after which the problems of integration begin. Racism, xenophobia, intolerance and restricted social and economic rights relate to the problem of attitudes. Europe seems to be departing from its traditional generosity. Italy has far fewer numbers of asylum seekers and refugees in comparison to other EU states. The Italian constitution contains nothing to support the economic and social rights of refugees, excepting one article. Integration involves rights to family unity, freedom of movement, professional training and language training, recognition of prior qualifications, tolerance and non-discrimination. There needs to be a co-ordinated network and unified effort to involve human rights organisations, universities and anti-racism initiatives in order to create a legislative framework for integration and to secure a social and economic place for refugees in Italy

## **ii) Italy, regional level:**

Local service providers are at the forefront of dealing with the problems that refugees have. They have the every day link to service users in delivering practical assistance. Without clear policy framework from central Government, it is important that local service providers have the chance to meet to share and learn from each other's experiences and develop appropriate responses to the needs of refugees, as they have specific problems/needs outside the normal service provision. There is now an attempt to look beyond the crisis needs of refugees (survival) to the crisis of acceptance by the local community. Service providers need to harness the conscious recognition of the need to build a multi-ethnic community and for local services to meet the every day needs of all people.

It is recognised that ARI is establishing a very important role in assisting refugees and those most vulnerable, such as single young women. Local service providers are trying to be supportive and represent concerns to the prefecture and to government bodies. The EC is encouraging this development in the role of organisations from different sectors. By sharing their expertise and experience, the effectiveness of the work of local services in assisting refugees can be ensured. By developing projects together they can work towards breaking down those barriers, which are mostly cultural, faced by refugees and which constrain them from overcoming their problems by themselves.

Appreciation of the immediacy of the problems faced by refugees was forced on local government as a result of the Balkan crisis and the sudden rapid rise in numbers of refugees in the regions. Now there is a need to clarify and underline the role of the Area Immigration Councils (which have come into existence through government directives) and to go beyond crisis response to immediate needs and look at problems in a different way so that immigration and the reception of refugees is accepted in a more consistent and long-term manner. The issue of refugees should no longer be seen as an occasional sporadic crisis, requiring immediate assistance response, but instead there is a need for permanent structures. This is the only way in which integration can be promoted in a continuous and organised way. Partnership working between different assisting agencies must be supported so as to avoid fragmented, unco-ordinated and competitive measures. As such policy makers are aware of the need for a multi-agency forum to ensure co-ordination of efforts. This should involve not just the state services but the NGO sector, economic forces, trade unions, employers. This is the role of the Area Immigration Council, to exist as a permanent forum, under the authority of the Prefecture. This has been constituted in Rieti and they have set the task of training themselves. The first task is for every member have accurate and complete information about the activities of all members. No single organisation is competent to work

alone on this issue of integration. Working together will prove most effective. The relationship with ARI serves a good example. However small or large the number of refugees in the locality, they must all work in a consistent and united way to provide services that are not only based on direct aid (financial assistance / permits) but which will also promote the integration of refugees into society.

The experience of refugees in Rieti had, thanks the links with and activities of ARI, been a positive and largely successful one. However, successful settlement could be easier in a small town, but problematic in a city the size of Rome.

The policy makers and service providers were pleased to participate in this Seminar and hoped that this Network would be a success.

### **iii) UK: national level**

Ian Barton from the UK Home Office Refugee Integration Section outlined recent history of Government policy towards asylum seekers and measures under the new scheme of dispersal and support. He also outlined how the Government was now looking at developing policy to promote the long term settlement of refugees in the UK. Refugees have equal entitlement to statutory service provision as any UK citizen. However, in recognition of the problems that refugees experienced in gaining equality of access to these services and discriminatory practices, the government had previously provided grants to the refugee voluntary sector to assist refugees in access and to support and develop refugee communities. The new dispersal arrangements and quicker decision times have highlighted the need for a more integrative approach to settlement.

Excerpts from Mr Barton's presentation:

"It has also been recognised that if we are to build a truly inclusive society, then we need to address the reasons why refugees are unable to access mainstream services. It is also more cost effective to provide support to a refugee at the beginning of the integration process rather than have to deal with the consequences of socially marginalizing groups within our society. Additionally there is the need to address the negative stereotyping of refugees that is all too prevalent, especially in the media. There are many positive aspects that a refugee can bring to his/her country of refuge, and we believe that there is a need to make the wider UK public aware of these benefits. The Government issued a Consultation Paper in November 1999 on the Integration of Recognised Refugees. This paper outlined key areas for discussion and suggested the promotion of a policy based around a network of partnerships. The UK has active policies designed to address the broader problem of racial discrimination and disadvantage. But we want to look at policies that are wholly refugee specific. We believe that the key policy areas that must be addressed to promote successful settlement are those of accommodation, education, employment, health and community development. Our particular government department is responsible for co-ordinating policy towards refugees, and to do so we need to stay aware of initiatives across other departments. We will establish a National Forum, consisting of officials from key Government departments, the leading NGO's and the Local Government Association. The purpose of this forum will be to discuss, for example, how policies impact upon refugees, any gaps in service provision to refugees. The UK has a long history of working closely with charitable organisations and of giving money to such groups. We will continue to provide funding to NGOs working in the refugee sector. In the current year we have so far committed £2 million to be paid to the voluntary sector. But we are reviewing how we use that money to try and ensure that we are getting best value. Of course, we would like to be in the position to put more money on the table, but we also need to establish which initiatives are

likely to be successful and those which are not. In our new proposal for the integration of refugees, we would like to establish a Challenge Fund, a sum of new money set aside for innovative projects in the field of integration, especially the key areas..... “

“One of the big problems we have is ensuring that we listen to the voice of the refugee. We do work closely with the voluntary sector organisations that represent refugees and indeed, in many cases, are made up of refugee community representatives. But sometimes refugees are unaware of any organisations that are acting on their behalf and who may claim to speak for them. “

“Expertise in refugee issues lies often with the voluntary sector and the knowledge and experience of refugees themselves and not the government. It is essential that we show that we are willing to learn from the experiences of others. So we want to try to ensure that refugees have the opportunity to give their views and to influence policy makers, because, after all, the policies that we’re making are affecting their lives and futures. They are the key stakeholders. “

“I am here today to try and learn how we can become more aware of the views of Refugees in policy making and try to understand the experiences of the whole range of people who are here at today’s seminar and it is good to meet people who are working in the voluntary sector, people who are refugees, people who are involved in policy making. So I think that its important that we get the broad experience and we can try to exchange ideas. I look forwards to doing that over the next 2 or 3 days. Thank you for giving me the opportunity.”

#### **iv) Ireland, regional level**

Frank Mills of the Eastern Regional Health Board:

“I just want to start by thanking the organisers of this conference for inviting me here. I feel my role at this conference is to listen and to learn, and especially to listen to the voices of refugees.....This conference will be of great assistance to us as we develop a strategic approach to the many health and welfare needs of asylum seekers and refugees. “

Mr Mills outlined the recent statistics for new arrivals in Ireland and emphasised how for the Ireland, with its history of emigration, this was a new experience. He offered a national and regional statistical overview and detailed the entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees to health and welfare services in Ireland. The very recent rapid rise in numbers of asylum seekers in Ireland has put service deliverers under pressure to provide an adequate response, both in term of capacity and appropriateness of that service and how it is delivered. Direct provision was introduced by the Irish Government in April 2000. The consequence to health and mental well-being of from the low level of weekly welfare payments and the dangers of institutionalisation in reception centres whilst awaiting decisions are matters of concern to the Health Board. The Health Board is particularly concerned that refugees are not accessing health and welfare services to the maximum extent, and are addressing issues of barriers in accessing services. Some training of front line staff has taken place (delivering services through an interpreter and in a culturally sensitive way). However, more is required, especially in hospitals. The Health Board is planning to conduct research into the health needs of asylum seekers and refugees and into identifying the barriers in access they experience. A video has been commissioned to promote health messages and information on Irish systems and structures. It is planned that

asylum seekers and refugees will be on the advisory group and also directly involved in delivering the key messages in the video. It is also proposed to provide training for refugees to enable them to act as health educators and promoters within their own communities. However, asylum seekers are not permitted to work, so the health Board is unable to train the many who have existing medical qualifications and experience. The Health Board is committed to the involvement of asylum seekers and refugees in the planning and in the delivery of health and welfare services and it is currently examining ways in which this can be most effectively achieved. The Health Board is now moving from a stage of crisis response to proactively developing appropriate and effective service responses. This Seminar provides an important opportunity to assist the Board in developing such a strategic response.

The presentations were finally concluded at 15.00. By necessity this had to be the close of the Seminar as the policy makers and service providers had to leave in order to take the return train to Rome.

## **7.2 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> July: Workshops**

### **7.2.1 Participants:**

Abdelhakim, Admir, Amal, Amer, Anne, Daoud, Eastwood, Filipe, Frank Mills, Georgina, Giancarla, Jackson, John, Mirsad, Monica, Nouradine, Rick, Simon, Smilja, Stella, Suada.<sup>13</sup>

Interpreters provided English – Italian translations. Refugee members were also able to talk to each other in their mother tongues.

### **7.2.2 Refugee and agency participants' evaluation of Seminar**

**There was enormous disappointment and frustration that the Seminar had concluded without refugees speaking, without the voices of refugee members and agency staff being heard and dialogue engaged. It had ended up as a one way process. As a result, refugees, having gone through lengthy preparation and significant effort expended in securing entry visas for Italy, felt they had been talked at rather than listened to. This suggested to participants that some policy makers and service providers did not recognise the value of hearing the voices of refugees. They had not capitalised on the opportunity that the Seminar afforded to listen, share, and learn through dialogue with all stakeholders in the two way process of integration. However, there is evidence from the evaluation comments of policy makers who attended the Seminar that they too were frustrated by the lack of opportunity for dialogue (see Evaluation Report). This suggests that more time is needed for dialogue, and that the opportunities are rare.**

**A further significant barrier had been evident through the use of two host country languages. The language barrier is of course a defining experience for refugees, and this meeting had presented the same problems. The need for accurate translations of**

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<sup>13</sup> Ian Barton, much to our disappointment and his own, was unfortunately confined to his hotel through illness.

**the presentations had enforced a passivity on the participants. Unfortunately, the interpreting service was only partially successful.**

It was also noted that policy makers had found it a useful opportunity to speak to each other on the need for partnership working, resourcing and stronger legislative frameworks to underpin their work, suggesting that these opportunities are also limited trans-nationally. A similar opportunity for refugees themselves to highlight their own lack of resources was not afforded.

The Seminar had provided an overview of the general context of integration in Italy. Refugee participants did not accept the description, used several times, 'the refugee problem' and associated concerns about the 'cost' of responding to the 'problem'. Instead, thinking should be framed in terms of the rights of refugees and in tackling the problems that refugees have in realising their full potential to participate in and contribute to the host society. Representative from Italy and Ireland acknowledged that they are countries characterised by emigration. Britain had built a huge colonial empire. These three countries had sent their citizens to other parts of the world, but have problems in accepting others in their turn. Italy has a significant lack of a legislative framework to support integration through absence of a framework of social and economic rights of refugees. They suffer from prevalent negative attitudes to 'clandestine' immigration and the notion of 'extra-communitarians'. This is in contrast to the existence of a stronger legislative framework of rights, equal opportunities and anti-discrimination practice in the UK and Ireland. Furthermore, the UK has developed structures and funding for community group actions. Empowerment is a contextual issue.

Attention to promoting the integration of refugees has typically been overshadowed by European preoccupation with controlling the numbers of asylum seekers reaching their shores, where the majority of asylum seekers are considered to have unfounded claims. Legality and illegality are conflated in the process, with the consequence that the stage of reception and immediate settlement is not linked in official policy to the need to see them as foundations of successful integration. This is the framing of the 'Refugee problem' for Europe and it paralyses debate on integration itself.

Some positive and encouraging messages in terms of the focus of the Network aims had been delivered. Italy was now recognising itself as a country of permanent settlement and not just as a place of initial reception and transit. There had been acknowledgment of the need to develop a framework of social and economic rights for refugees in Italy. The need for a framework of partnership working across all sectors had been explicitly recognised, as was the value of expert knowledge and the inclusion of refugees themselves as partners in delivering support and services in the process of integration. These are important first steps; the first sign of a door opening. Ian Barton had spoken of a willingness to learn from the experience of others and the need for mechanisms that provide the opportunity for representation of refugee voices and influence on policy. He had given recognition to the issue of resources needed to enable refugees to play an active part in the process.

### **7.2.3 Participants' views on the potential achievements of the Network**

Individual refugees suffer from isolation when they do not know how or where to represent their concerns or offer solutions. They need to have the opportunity to be part of the 'conversation'. In Italy in particular, while there are many refugees, many are geographically isolated from others and have no organisation to belong to or feel confident that their voices are being represented. They do not know of existing refugee structures for association and communication, such as CoPIR, let alone any routes for contact with policy makers. Such a Network makes them feel good and optimistic. This project should be the beginning of something strong and not the end of a process.

Such a Network provides the opportunity for refugees from different European States to communicate with each other and learn to appreciate the particular social, economic and legislative context faced by refugees in each country. In order to achieve a strong and unified voice and identify what works in integration, it is important to understand the comparative integration contexts faced by refugees. Refugees in Italy face a particular context which is at a different phase of policy development around integration. The cross-fertilisation of learning from other trans-national partners and projects should help in building some of the positive developments that were evident in the presentations.

The Network can provide the opportunity to unify and strengthen the voice of refugees. By all having the chance to speak and be heard, and by listening to each other we can learn from each other's experiences and apply that understanding in progressing our own work.

Through the opportunity for communication and co-operation provided by the Network, all members can assist refugees and refugee organisations in Italy to build on the first positive signs of a door opening by supporting their campaigning efforts. Members from Ireland and the UK can contribute to these efforts by sharing their own experiences of success and initiatives from other European contexts so that, where the focus could remain fixed on problems, solutions are forthcoming and progressive movement is maintained.

Through highlighting bad practice, identifying good practice and providing a source of energy and motivational support that will empower each other's work, the Network can support movement towards improving and equalising the situation faced by refugees across Europe.

#### **7.2.4 Sharing the lessons of self-organisation**

The Network can learn from the experiences of refugee organisations from Italy, Ireland and the UK in their efforts to self-organise in order to be active agents in the process of integration. CoPIR – Conferenza Permanente Internazionale dei Rifugiati (International Permanent Conference of Refugees) based in Rome, ARI - Associazione Rieti Immigrant Provincia based in Rieti, NERS - the North of England Refugee Service, and ARN - the African Refugee Network based in Dublin, were all established by refugees with the common aim of improving the conditions of life for asylum seekers and refugees.

##### **i) CoPIR - Conferenza Permanente Internazionale dei Rifugiati, Rome**

Amal, Simon and Jackson were founder members of CoPIR and Mirsad is employee. CoPIR was established 2 years ago with funding from a patron and is the first organisation of its kind in Italy. It is the only refugee agency founded by refugees and staffed by refugees, who are from many different countries of origin and are supported by many academics, journalists, psychologists and sociologists. Access to funding is, however, limited as most UNHCR funding goes directly to CIR (Italian Refugee Council) and CIR has most influence. Italian Government funding goes mostly to the Catholic Church (CARITAS) for relief aid. CoPIR has faced exclusion both from a share of resources and structures of influence. Despite this struggle for resources to support their activities, CoPIR has campaigned for the rights and needs of refugees and has successfully made its voice heard to Government. As a result, the Italian Government will, from next year, provide a small amount of financial assistance to all refugees. CoPIR has also established a guesthouse in Civitavecchia which is a model of good practice. It is seeking to grow into a national organisation with more 'reception' centres offering a range of appropriate support services. CoPIR is the youngest organisation and wants to have an active role. It is seeking to establish dialogue with the major national NGOs in order to advise them how the significant resources they receive could be used more effectively, based on their own knowledge and experience. CoPIR would like to see refugee staffing in the national agencies raised to at least 30% in order to ensure that they reflect the proper knowledge and experience of refugees.

## ii) NERS – the North of England Refugee Service

Daoud explained that, from the beginning, NERS had taken a challenging approach. Rather than present themselves as vulnerable refugees in need of help, NERS argued that, while in need of and acknowledging gratitude for that protection, refugees were also strong, resilient and had a significant economic and cultural contribution to make to society. NERS highlighted evidence of the contribution made by refugees in the UK, and how this outweighed the prevailing arguments of the 'cost burden' for supporting asylum seekers and refugees. It also drew attention to the democratic host country's commitments to international obligations and human rights, as being principles to be proud of upholding. It seeks to remind those focused on securing the borders of Fortress Europe that the experience of seeking exile is more than 2000 years old and cannot be stopped, nor should it be. In addition, the history of asylum is intimately bound up with the history of European colonialism and the continued global arms trade.

The North East is not an easy context for settlement. It is a region of high unemployment, social exclusion problems and is not a fully developed multi-cultural area. However, NERS has adopted a constructive partnership approach in its development, working with local authorities and statutory bodies, training and enterprise councils, colleges, the voluntary sector and the regional media to ensure access to services and opportunities for its clients and promoting a positive environment. Asylum seekers and refugees are represented at all levels of the organisation, in its staffing, management and Board of Directors, working alongside British multi-ethnic colleagues. It has without doubt benefited from the British context of charitable and government grant funding for community and voluntary sector organisations, yet its long term survival is always vulnerable as this form of funding lacks constancy and security and is typically granted on an annual basis. Despite this, since its establishment in 1989, NERS has grown into an organisation with the capacity to assist the 3000 asylum seekers who have arrived into the North East in the last 16 months while continuing to offer support to refugees and promote their interests in the region. When the Government's recently introduced the One Stop Services across the country to implement and support the new dispersal policy for asylum seekers, their design reflected the way in which NERS has organised its services (NERS now operates the One Stop Service for the North East). NERS has a place on the National Refugee Forum which allows it to raise its voice at the national level.

NERS has also secured independent charitable funding to establish and service a Regional Refugee Forum. This Forum will be a place where refugees and those with the commitment and position to influence social policy can meet in parity to seek to set an evidence-based agenda that will be best for the long term settlement of refugees and for the regional community as a whole. The aim is for the Forum to achieve full independence as a structure within 3 years. It will create a regional structure whereby both parties to the process of integration can meet and dialogue, providing the chance for making the Two Way process a practical reality.

## iii) ARN – the African Refugee Network, Dublin

John was a founder member of ARN when it was established in 1997 and is currently its secretary. ARN was the first refugee run organisation in Ireland, reflecting how recent the arrival of asylum seekers in Ireland is and how, in particular, the new encounter with Africans impacted on African refugees in particular. At that time there was almost no support or services for asylum seekers and refugees, other than the programme refugees who had special support measures. ARN's successes in establishing services for asylum seekers and refugees and in promoting their interests have been the result of an immense amount of dedication, hard unpaid work, patience and persistence.

The route to securing funding has been very difficult. English language learning was identified as the first step to integration but classes were not available. ARN met with students of the University of Dublin, from which a joint project emerged. The University offered language teaching, whilst ARN agreed to organise and advertise the services and provide the space for lessons. ARN made an application to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs for funding to run the language classes but they were told it would take time to look at the proposal and reply. They had no funds, so everything was done themselves, volunteering their time and effort, using a member's car as office space. Despite this, the first English language classes were started in September 1997. ARN approached church organisations, community organisations and individuals to ask for support; they were donated computers and a church group provided tea and coffee to encourage asylum seekers to come and take up the language classes. They had to prove that they were able to do something for themselves and could demonstrate what they could achieve before anybody would take notice and trust them. They just had to get on and do it rather than wait for committees to go through lengthy processes of considering proposals and reply. It was only in November 1998 that the government department finally appeared to trust them and gave funds for computers and language classes. In 1999 they received funds for the needs analysis survey of African refugees in Ireland, which was launched by the Minister for Social and Cultural Affairs. So the whole process has been one where first they had to prove they were capable and trustworthy, and secondly that they could prove they were of value/provided things of value to policy makers. It has been very hard work. They had needed to attend almost every meeting of NGOs, persist in getting access to meetings with government departments responsible for asylum seekers and refugees, and dialogue with everybody in order to be seen, heard and understood. Now they also hold meetings to enlighten the host community, to help the community to understand who they are, their needs and problems.

ARASI – the Association of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Ireland - was formed in 1997 by ARN members. It was at the forefront of the campaign for the right of Asylum Seekers to be able to work whilst awaiting a decision and so progress integration. In April 1999 the government decided that certain asylum seekers would be allowed to work. Prior to this, ARN/ARASI members had acted as volunteers for other organisations, or been members of management committees. However, when the right to work was secured, they were still not offered employment by those groups, and were expected to continue on a voluntary basis. The situation is improving. Now some asylum seekers are employed by government agencies and in some refugee assisting organisations run by Irish nationals. In 1998 ARN carried out a needs analysis which demonstrated that skills and qualifications of the majority of asylum seekers and refugees match skills which are being sought in Ireland. However, although the right to work had been secured for some, asylum seekers still had no right to the training available for Irish nationals. This put them at a disadvantage and ARASI campaigned again. The Government Training Agency are now designing training programmes for asylum seekers and refugees.

These are all successes born of commitment, dedication and hard work. ARN and ARASI are proud of their achievements. All this has been achieved through constant effort and the willingness to participate and dialogue. It had been necessary to prove their competence to others and produce evidence that they could be an asset to the Irish community. This had been the only way to secure recognition that asylum seekers and refugees are not a 'problem' but their problem is to secure the opportunity to contribute.

#### iv) ARI – Associazione Rieti Immigrant Provincia

Eastwood explained that ARI had always focused its energies on solutions. It had not waited for policy makers or service providers to tackle the problems faced by refugees. There have been so many hundreds of seminars all over Europe addressing refugee problems, but

amidst so much talking little has changed. ARI has concentrated on using its own energies and creative thinking to secure limited resources and partnership working. It had also developed projects that included all members of the local community that shared the experience of isolation, which helped to build bridges in the community.

#### v) Individual refugee members

There is a need to reduce the isolation felt by individual refugees who are not in contact with or members of refugee community groups or refugee assisting organisations. They need to feel community organisations, refugee assisting organisations, and organisations claiming to represent the interests of refugees have an understanding of the range of individual experiences that exist in each country context. At the start of the project, the beginning of the process that had led to this Network meeting in Italy, the groups had found it important to distinguish personal identities from the categoric identity of 'refugee'. Much time in the focus groups was dedicated to listening to each other's experiences, but the patience required had afforded a valuable sense of shared understandings, trust and ownership. Refugees expect policy makers to appreciate the importance of individuality (based, for example, on background, culture, age, gender, prior skills and qualifications, traumatic experience) amongst refugees in order that strategies to promote integration encompassed all refugees. But it is also important that refugees fully understand that this is a process of mutual understanding that they must go through themselves if they are to speak with a strong and effective voice. The Network has proven this to be a time consuming and sometimes difficult process but a necessary one. It is only when refugees fully understand each other's problems that solutions can be focused on and actions taken.

### **7.2.5 Participants' reflections on the process of the Network**

It was evident that the different groups had reached different stages of understanding and unity according to the extent to which they had been involved in the process of the project. Early and sustained involvement had allowed individual members to feel confident that their own particular experience of integration had been listened to and incorporated in the general understandings reached during the process of the project. Thus an environment of trust, mutual ownership and a shared sense of direction had developed within those groups who had formed right at the beginning of the project and had had the opportunity to meet on several occasions to evaluate Network findings to date and to be central participants in the In-Country Workshops. They were ready to move forwards on that basis.

Many of the refugee participants from Italy, however, had needed to speak about their individual and organisational problems during this Network meeting. For many this was their first involvement in the project and therefore they had not had the opportunity to develop the basis of shared understanding and trust. Despite ARI's efforts, the Italian context, with its very low level of support for refugee organisational activity both in terms of financial assistance and inclusion in structures of influence, had produced less opportunities for refugees to meet, to communicate, to trust each other in an environment where scarce resources creates competition. Without a foundation of equal inclusion progress of the process is slowed.

There was some frustration, therefore, that much dialogue still centred on the need to listen and share problems, rather than move forwards to focusing on solutions and co-ordinated action. It is important to recognise, therefore, that the issue is not only that of how refugee voices can be heard by policy makers and service providers in the process of developing and implementing policy and practice on integration, but also of how individual refugees are heard by those refugee led organisations and refugee agencies who seek to act in their interest.

The project co-ordinators from the agencies had all found themselves at times over-stretched by the organisational aspect of the Network. In particular, ARI had found it difficult to participate in the Network meeting whilst also organising the logistics of hosting it. The challenges of Networking within countries and between them, through different languages, were very demanding on capacity. Similarly, focus group participants had contributed a significant amount of their often limited time in a voluntary capacity, although direct expenses had been covered. Nevertheless, refugees and those agency workers who were not themselves refugees had found that participating in and working on the project had been an important learning process and experience. It had produced understandings that showed ways forward.

It was also recognised that policy makers and service providers need to go through similar processes of developing understandings. Many are at the beginning of a learning curve. They need to be adequately briefed as to the nature of dialogue anticipated in order to feel included and to maximise the effectiveness of meetings with them.

Frank Mills (Eastern Regional Health Board, Ireland) felt privileged to be at the meeting, to hear the voices of refugees and to listen. For policy makers in Ireland this is a new experience. They do not have the answers as they are in the process of learning too. He hoped he could incorporate many of the ideas he has heard during the meeting into policy development back in Ireland.

#### 7.2.6 Participants' views on the future of the Network

"This Network was designed as a pilot project. It is a new process. Although time limited in terms of funding there is a unanimous wish to continue what has begun in this process in order to realise its full potential. While this is the final meeting of the pilot project it should also be the beginning of a dynamic network involving mutual support and development for all groups and individuals in partnership. Further funding to continue co-ordinating and developing the network should be found in the spirit of co-operation rather than competition."

"We need to continue to develop the Network based on the understandings reached through the process of the project. We can now move from problem sharing to focus on solutions, constructive action and on developing a pan-European strategy among the partners here."

"We need to organise ourselves via a committee of representatives in each country, with a nominated co-ordinator."

"NERS would be happy, if requested, to act as the umbrella co-ordinator of a network. We should aim to extend the network to have members in all European states."

"We need to develop a way to communicate with each other both within countries and between countries. We should make use of the internet (website, e-mail). We need to create a bulletin that informs each other of useful research done in each country or good practice initiatives. Not all initiatives will be transferable into different country contexts, but we still need to support each other's efforts, energy and motivation."

**"I suggest that all participants study the suggested actions drawn up during the meeting (see 7.3) and nominate representatives to co-ordinate"**

**communication within each country and between countries. Regular information exchange could be in the form of bulletins or newsletters. It would also be of great benefit to organise an exchange of training among the participants. We need to investigate funding sources to continue the Network and suggested actions.”**

“It is important to be patient because we are at the beginning of a new period and a new experience. It takes time and we need more time. The opportunity to network and meet requires resources, both in terms of time and money. And these are both scarce resources for refugees. Refugee community groups and agencies are already stretched to capacity with the little resources they so have. But we must persevere in our common aim.”

“Our experience is that policy makers do want to consult with refugees, but do not always know who represents their voices. They only know how to reach them through major NGOs. We cannot rely on them to develop more inclusive mechanisms for dialogue, but must take an active role in developing our voices and presenting them to them with the confidence that that voice is unified and truly representative of all groups, all individuals. Individual refugees do not want the process to be taken over by the organisations present. This will be a challenge to the Network to continue to develop and maintain its inclusiveness.”

“Italy is a particularly difficult context in which to achieve this. There is very limited funding available directly to refugee led organisations. This should be recognised by the European Commission so that more funding is made available to refugee led initiatives so that they may build their capacity as organisations and networks to achieve influence in policy and practice about integration. CoPIR members look forward to further opportunity for collaboration and co-operation with the refugees and refugee organisations from Ireland and the UK. This as the beginning of that co-operation.”

“It remains to be seen what effect the devolving of funds from the EC level to State level will have on the ability for refugee-led initiatives to secure funding and participate in structures of influence.”

### **7.3 Summary : A Way Forwards for the Network. Solutions/Action Identified**

Principles:

#### **1. Empower Refugees**

#### **2. Pro-active not reactive**

3. We have to:

- stop other agencies/NGOs from hijacking our ideas.
- enter into equal partnerships
- find common ground between Refugee led organisations, Refugee Community Groups and individual Refugees.

4. Co-operate and Communicate via a Network:

We needed more time at this meeting to build up knowledge/trust/understanding and develop an action plan. Meeting together both in-country and across countries is expensive and requires resources so we need to look at all means of communication:

- Exchange information and good practice achievements via the Internet website, e-mail, news bulletins / newsletters
  - Share networking
  - Video-conference
  - Exchange visits
  - Organise meetings of refugees – both in-country and across Europe
  - Refugee led seminars
  - Represent our collective strengths at other European conferences
5. Co-operate about identifying joint funding

#### Specific actions:

1. Local needs/gaps should be identified and linked to benefits that Refugees can bring to the area:

In Ireland, a skills survey of all refugees showed that 80% could immediately fill job vacancies across Ireland. A computer package tests people's skills and experience. The package also links to the job market. Italy and UK should get details of this survey and methods and seek to conduct a similar survey in each country

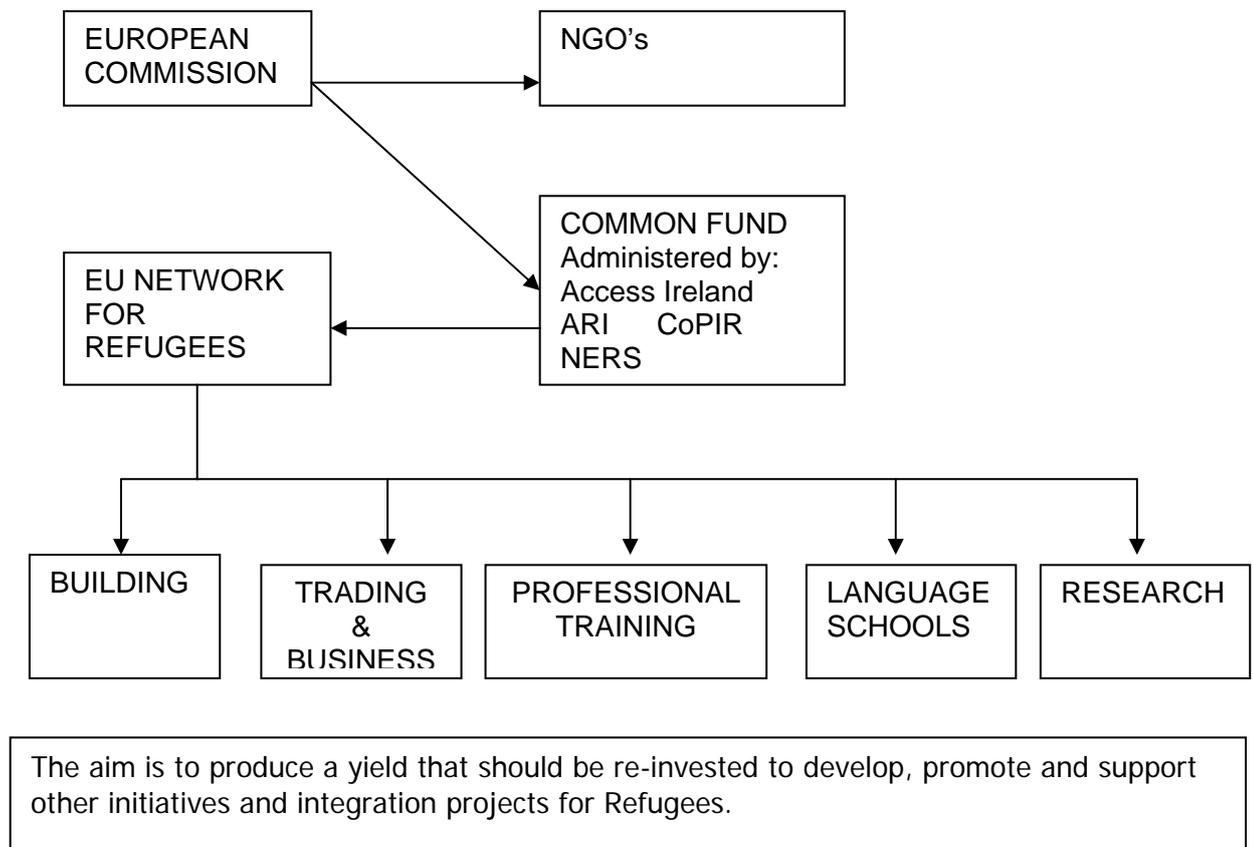
2. Refugee Pride type celebrations : rights, dignity and respect
3. Exchange of training between partners to learn from each other's initiatives
4. Practical projects to promote integration
5. Social Business / employment schemes (e.g: Filipe's proposal)
6. Translate the reports so far produced by UK and Ireland groups into Italian to share outputs with all refugee members there.

#### Structures:

1. Voice of Refugees is the most important: principle and purpose. Groups need to:
  - a) reflect on problems
  - b) form group purpose
  - c) implement actions
2. We need separate meetings:
  - a) personal – to share personal stories
  - b) group – to develop our collective purpose

3. Skills audit for each refugee group: identify strengths (human resources) and areas for development
4. Regional level self-representation: Regional Refugee Forum: stakeholder groups (Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Policy makers, NGOs, service providers and agencies, community groups)
5. Trans-national Level self-representation: Representatives from each country group to form a trans-national committee to progress the above.

**Filipe’s Proposal for Network partnership/plan to promote the Integration of Refugees**



Attached:

1. Letter from Filipe for which he is awaiting a reply from ECRE and the Italian Ministry of Interior
2. Further explanation of above proposal
3. Press coverage of 2<sup>nd</sup> International Network Seminar, Rieti

## Chapter 8

### WAYS FORWARD

#### 8.1 Understandings produced through the Network process

- The definition of integration on which policy is founded must embody the meanings of refugees themselves.
- Integration is a process that must be promoted through both its 'organic' and 'mechanical aspects'. These aspects are mutually dependent/implicit. 'Mechanical' measures alone, while addressing many of the requirements self-identified by refugees in order for integration to happen, cannot in themselves make refugees feel integrated as they do not provide a strategy for social inclusion. 'Mechanical' measures promote integration or incorporation of refugees *into* the host society in what is essentially a one way assisted process. In the organic sense individuals integrate with host communities in what must necessarily be a two way process, involving both refugees and the host community itself. Whilst most policies and resources are targeted at the instrumental level, these cannot be successful without attention being given to the promotion of belonging in the social and individual sense<sup>14</sup>.
- The possibility of belonging must exist. In order for integration to be allowed to happen there must be a fundamental acceptance within the host society and in local communities that there is a place for refugees in that society. There needs to be a reframing of thinking away from 'the problem of refugees' to 'the problems that refugees have in integrating', both in terms of social and economic inclusion. This addresses the essential need to unburden refugees from the categoric label that stigmatises them. Successful integration is therefore a combination of acceptance of belonging alongside a rights based framework, which together provide the environment for social inclusion.
- Integration is clearly linked to conditions of immediate settlement. Where states operate a policy of planned dispersal it is typically accommodation led with settlement in areas where host communities themselves often suffer from economic and social exclusion. In this context it is particularly important that integration is addressed through means other than employment.
- Through the process of the project participants have come to understand how refugees themselves are and should be recognised as a vital resource in the

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<sup>14</sup> In the UK, integration policy was launched just after the conclusion of the Network schedule. The policy document (Full & Equal Citizens: a strategy for the integration of refugees into the United Kingdom. Home Office National Asylum Support Service, November 2000) states: "This is not a strategy to combat racism. This must be addressed on many fronts. But racism is a major barrier to refugees fulfilling their potential. Allowing refugees to be and feel truly safe in this country is key. So this strategy acknowledges that racism is one of the key issues which affects refugees".

integration process. They are a source of expert and regional knowledge to inform effective policy development; they are central to the process of building mutual understanding, awareness and trust on which full acceptance and belonging in the community depend; they can be partners in training service providers and in delivering services; they can offer practical assistance and emotional support to asylum seekers and other refugees through cultural and community organisation. All these roles are an important resource and valuable asset for any truly effective integration policy.

- However, the voiced experience of refugees shows they are also the weakest resourced party to the integration process. They are a wasted resource through lack of practical empowerment to apply their expert knowledge, use their skills and be active agents in the process of their own integration. Their experiences are more typically of objectification, exclusion, or at best marginalisation in the process, continued vulnerability and insecurity of organisations and offers of partnerships that turn out to be neither genuine nor one's of parity. This is neither enabling nor empowering. It has led to frustrated efforts, exhaustion, de-motivation and scepticism.
- The findings produced by this Network were themselves dependent on the extent to which the Network process was itself inclusive. In as far as the Network sought to make heard the voiced experience of refugees, their participation and role in the process of the project was integral.

## 8.2 Recommendations emerging from the Network

- Evidence show that those who are the target beneficiaries of a policy must be a part of the process through which they receive those benefits in order for that policy to be effective. This means that the inclusion of refugees in integration processes should be recognised as integral to Best Value rather than framed in terms of added value.
- In that it is recognised that integration is a two way process, it must be a two way process in operational reality. Refugees must be partners in research that forms the basis of evidence-based policy development and in the structures through which policy is implemented in practice. Partnerships must be genuinely inclusive (and not merely extractive) and ones of parity. Partnerships are only as effective as they are genuine
- It is, therefore, a recommendation of this Network that those who search for Good Practice in integration should recognise that **Good Practice lies in Process itself**. Inclusion derives from a process that is itself inclusive. Enabling and empowering refugees to be an integral part of the process of their own integration promotes active citizenship.

In the UK, there is hope that the findings of this Network will begin to be operationalised through the framework set out in the new integration strategy launched by the Home Office in November 2000. This policy contains the promise of greater involvement for refugees in the integration process:

- 'This strategy will evolve to meet the needs of refugees as the regional approach grows in dynamism and effectiveness. The Home Office needs to know from the communities around the country who are accepting refugees and from the refugees themselves how this strategy should be developed. We look forwards to continuing consultation and dialogue with all of those involved – other Government Departments, the voluntary sector and refugees themselves..... Taking their lead from the National Refugee Integration Forum<sup>15</sup> and assisted by NASS regional managers, every dispersal region in the country should have an integration policy in place by the end of August 2001' Full & Equal Citizens: a strategy for the integration of refugees into the United Kingdom. Home Office, National Asylum Support Service. November 2000

### 8.3 Implications for future policy on integration

- In order for refugees to take an integral and equal part in the process of integration, they need to be enabled to build capacity. Evidence from the UK Government's Social Exclusion Unit recognises the cost of involving all people who are marginalized within society in a process of active citizenship.

"This process has given me a clear and good understanding of what integration and settlement mean. I was thinking that integration is the responsibility of refugees only because they are seeking settlement. I now know after many discussions that integration means it is a two process that involves the refugees and the host country. I now know that refugees can be integrated without abandoning their own culture."

"Integration is a two way process involving two parties: refugees and the new host country. We need to develop reciprocal links between refugees and the host population which will highlight the positive contribution of refugees and the value of multi-culturalism for society."

"I feel more actively involved in the process by giving my voice and experience as a refugee living in the host country. I could be more actively involved by giving help and support to other refugees and to create awareness of refugee situations and issues."

"I participated in the project because I wanted to be an active member and do something to help refugees. Like everyone in my group, I would be more involved but without money we cannot put the theory into practice."

*"We talked about some very positive ideas and made suggestions for action during the process of the project. I believe it is time that we need to put these ideas and suggestions into practice."*

"To achieve our targets we need to develop closer working partnerships with policy makers. This would allow the idea of having regular communication to widen understanding about the rules and regulations of the host country. Refugees need information if they are to be more active participants."

(Evaluation of Network process by refugee participants)

- NGOs have a particular responsibility to identify with clarity the remit of their role as representatives of the refugee voice. This has particular resonance for NGOs as they develop as service providers. Service providers have a duty to respond to their users'

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<sup>15</sup> The National Refugee Integration Forum is a proposed structure of the new policy.

needs and recognise the rights of users to involvement in the development and delivery of those services. The Network discovered that NGOs are also a critical point in interfacing refugees into the wider society. They therefore need resourcing for the duality of this role.

“My involvement in the project has enhanced my knowledge of NGOs representing asylum seekers and refugees and has facilitated closer working relationships with them.”

“Overall we found the whole exercise to have been enormously useful and to have very important learning implications for our work.”

“We are committed to involving refugees in all aspects of our work. This project has shown us various methods for achieving our aim. The project also offered definite practical actions for partnership approaches to widening stakeholder knowledge and participation in the integration process. “

(Evaluation of Network process by agency participants)

- The Network discovered that many of the participating policy makers wanted to interface directly with refugee voices and the practices of NGOs. However, such a commitment requires additional time and resources to enable the positive lessons emerging from this Network to be actualised.

“The project has enabled me to think more deeply about some of the processes involved in successful integration and the very real barriers to integration that exist for most refugees. Any opportunity to hear the voices of refugees themselves is valuable; indeed, giving more chances for refugees to make their voices heard helps to inform policies on integration.”

“The improvement consists of having the possibility of ongoing relationships, not the occasional meeting with the agencies.”

“My aim was to involve refugees in the development and implementation of policy. as a result of this project I have discovered concrete ways of achieving this. “

(Evaluation of Network process by participating policy makers)

- Future projects focused on promoting the process of integration need to consider these critical issues of resourcing across all three areas.

“The project has provided an excellent opportunity for me to see a partnership approach in action; to see refugee groups across different nations working towards shared goals. This is especially useful to me in my work in the UK is presently developing an Integration strategy for recognised refugees. Additionally the development of the new European Refugee Fund to individual member states means that we will in future be examining bids for Integration projects and allocating funds. Seeing this project in action has helped to inform such decision making. “

(Evaluation of Network process by participating policy maker)

## **8.4 Further positive outcomes from the Network**

### 8.4.1 ReACT – The Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside

In the North East of England a strong positive outcome of the project has been the establishment of a new regional refugee organisation. Through the process of the project Consciencisation<sup>16</sup> has been developed with a strong sense of ownership of the project and its findings and their potential use. The individuals who formed the refugee focus group and the partner agencies in the UK developed a close working partnership. Whereas the original project schedule had planned for 2 meetings, 17 were held within the duration of the project and these meetings are continuing. Members<sup>17</sup> of the original focus group have formed themselves into a multi-ethnic refugee organisation which they have named 'ReACT' - The Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside. As of January 2001 ReACT has formulated an action plan and is writing a Constitution. They have applied for capacity building funds and NERS will continue to support them during this process. ReACT members have drafted the following aims and objectives:

1. To promote and support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the North East, including refugees and asylum seekers playing a full and active part in integration policy development.
2. To advise and monitor agencies working with refugees and asylum seekers on the quality of services they provide, highlighting any unmet needs and bad practice.
3. To provide a range of quality services to service providers in order for them to gain a better understanding of the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the North East.

As members of the refugee focus group and as members of ReACT, these individuals have delivered presentations of their findings and recommendations to Local Authority select committees and at Training Workshops for service providers in the region. Members have also attended national and international conferences on integration and settlement of refugees and asylum seekers (for details see **Figure 1.1** – Timetable of Network Activities).

In November 2000, NERS assisted ReACT in receiving funding from a regional charity<sup>18</sup> to send 3 representatives to the 4<sup>th</sup> European Conference on the Integration of Refugees in Europe held in Athens, December 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> 2000. This was felt to be an important opportunity to increase ReACT's understanding of the European context and the nature of involvement of refugees themselves in debate and policy making around their own integration. Their experience at this European conference confirmed the project findings concerning the marginalisation and exclusion of refugees themselves from these processes:

- Only 10 refugee participants were included among the 200 or so conference delegates. There was an absence of refugees speaking out and speaking up for themselves about their own integration.
- The only refugee to make a presentation did so in the final 10 minutes of the conference. Refugee participants stated that they felt on several occasions that non-refugee delegates were making assumptions about refugees based only on a partial understanding.
- The few refugee participants present felt themselves to be isolated. They needed to feel united themselves and supportive of each other. They did however welcome the opportunity for inclusiveness offered by the EU Networks website as it created a mechanism for direct contact with other refugee organisations.
- ReACT members were approached by other delegates and asked how they had managed to secure funding to attend. This may indicate that the model of practice developing from the Network offers one positive way forwards for inclusion of

<sup>16</sup> See Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Books 1972

<sup>17</sup> 11 members of the original focus group, representing 7 ethnic groups

<sup>18</sup> The Millfield House Foundation

refugees in the whole integration process. The model recommends that future resources are granted to projects where refugees form an integral part of the project process.

- Refugee participants saw an example of exclusionary processes in operation through the numbers of refugees voicing their concerns outside the conference venue<sup>19</sup>.
- Refugee participants felt that whenever they spoke and announced themselves as refugees, delegates appeared uncomfortable. In response the refugee participants felt compromised. This highlights the dual problem in marginalisation: that of barriers to inclusion in the dialogue to begin with and then fear of future exclusion where the power to engage and disengage does not lie with refugees. The Network findings demonstrate the necessity of bringing all stakeholders together on the basis of parity.
- Refugee participants felt excluded from established network links between major NGOs and government officials.
- Examples of integration contracts and initiatives were described as Good Practice models. However, without refugee participants there was no experiential analysis from refugees themselves to whom these models applied to highlight what worked and challenge what did not from the refugee perspective.
- It was felt the conference focused on assisting Governments in solving the problem of refugees rather than solving the problems that refugees have in integrating into European countries. This highlights the importance raised throughout the Network about the centrality of organic processes which must be combined with the instrumental to provide holistic models of integration.
- The recommendations that emerged from the conference were aimed at Government and major NGO levels. They did not address the issue of inclusion of refugees themselves as active agents in the process of integration. This echoes another Network finding which shows that a deficit model focusing on refugees as a problem denies the potential benefits that refugees bring to all host societies<sup>20</sup>.

This experience was felt to reinforce Network findings about the necessity of integration being a two way process in reality. It also highlighted the importance of refugees having the capacity to self-organise so that their strong voice can be integral in dialogue around integration and ensure that evidence forms the basis of effective policy making.

#### **8.4.2 Continuing the Network**

The intention expressed at the final Network Seminar to continue trans-national and intra-national contact between members of the original Network has been evident. One immediate aim is to foster the link between NERS and ReACT in the North East of England and ARN and ARASI in Ireland. The representative of ARN & ARASI who was a member of the focus group in Ireland is now employed by FAS (Irish Government Training Agency) and it is anticipated that he will visit England in order to share his experience and expertise in self-organisation and in training models.

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<sup>19</sup> Discussion by ReACT member with demonstrators revealed frustrated feelings of exclusion resulting from weak participatory/consultation mechanisms between refugees and NGOs.

<sup>20</sup> As evidenced by the skills of those refugees who participated in the Network (see Chapter 1.4.1).

# Appendix 1

## Network Participants

### 1. Participating individuals

Refugee Focus Groups:

**1.1 UK** (North East England) 18 individuals -11 men and 7 women - from 11 countries of origin or ethnic groups: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bosnia, Iran, Iraq, Kurdish, Kosovo, Somalia, Sudan, Former USSR, and Vietnam.

The Focus Group met 17 times

Participants included members of 'Lilja', the Bosnian Support Group, and the Iranian Society of the North East.

**1.2 Ireland** (Dublin) 11 individuals - 5 men and 6 women - from 8 countries of origin or ethnic groups: Angola, Bosnia, Iraq, Nigeria, Rwanda, Former USSR, Somalia and Zaire.

The Focus Group met 5 times

Participants included founder members of the African Refugee Network (ARN), the Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland (ARASI) and SORUSSI, a Russian Speakers support society.

**1.3 Italy** (Rieti,Rome,Milan) 16 individuals -13 men and 3 women - from 9 countries of origin or ethnic groups: Algeria, Angola, Bosnia, Ethiopia, Kosovo, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia and Tunisia

6 Focus Group meetings were held, in Rome and Rieti

Participants included founder members of CoPIR (International Permanent Conference of Refugees). Details of CoPIR are included here.

### 2. Participating Agencies:

**2.1 Associazione Rieti Immigrant Provincia (ARI)** (see information enclosed)

**2.2 ACCESS Ireland** (see information enclosed)

**2.3 The North of England Refugee Service (NERS)** (see information enclosed)

The North of England Refugee Service began as a collaboration between an Iranian refugee and an advice worker in a Citizens Advice Bureau, both of whom were concerned about the lack of awareness in the region about the rights and entitlements of refugees and the lack of a support structure. NERS was formerly established in 1989 as an independent, charitable, voluntary sector organisation with the aim of improving the condition of life of all refugees and asylum seekers in the North East region and of assisting their integration, equal participation within and contribution to British Society. Since then it has grown into a regional organisation with 4 regional offices, 40 staff and many committed volunteers who together deliver free direct services and support to around 10,000 asylum seekers and refugees in the

North East. Since 1998 NERS has provided services to over 5,000 new asylum seekers in the region. Many of the NERS' members of the Board of Management, staff and volunteers are themselves refugees and asylum Seekers.

NERS has secured independent funding to establish and service a Regional Refugee Forum. The Forum will provide a arena where refugees and those who are in the position to influence social policy can meet in dialogue and seek to set an evidence-based agenda that will be best for the long term settlement of refugees and for the regional community as a whole. It will encourage imagination and the input of ideas and research findings, both from within the region and other national and European contexts. It will assist in monitoring standards of contract compliance and in promoting access to the mainstream services.

## **2.4 University of Sunderland**

The University of Sunderland, International Centre for the Study of Violence and Abuse, School of Humanities and Social Sciences offers expertise in comparative social policy research, particularly in the fields of social division, gender, race relations and equal opportunities.

## **2.5 Banks of the Wear**

Banks of the Wear is a community based housing association and community development agency that specialises in work with the black and ethnic minority community. It offers expertise in the fields of community involvement and social action. Its specific contribution to the network is advice on strategies for self-enablement and models of inclusive decision making.

### **3. Participating policy makers and service providers**

#### **3.1 UK:**

Mr Ian Barton	Refugee Integration Section, National Asylum Support Service, Home Office
Dr David Chappel	Consultant in Public Health, Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority
Mr David Hudson Council	ECRE Task Force on Integration, British Refugee Council
Ms Pam Walton	Asylum Team, City of Sunderland Council (North East Consortium for Asylum Seeker Support)
Mr John Lee	Head of Services for Regeneration and Community Service, Newcastle City Council (North East Consortium for Asylum Support Services)

#### **3.2 Ireland:**

Mr Frank Mills	Special Services, Eastern Regional Health Authority
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Mr Frank Donnelly	FAS Asylum Seekers Unit, Tallaght (Government Employment Training Agency)
Ms Alison Keeting Siobhan O'Higgins	FAS Asylum Seekers Unit, Tallaght DRASS: Directorate for Refugee and Asylum Support Services (part of the Department of Justice, with responsibility for reception and integration services for refugees and asylum seekers)
Collette Morey Services	DRASS: Directorate for Refugee and Asylum Support Services
Marilyn Rowntree	Social Work Services, East Coast Health Board
Grainne Kinsella	Social Work Services, East Coast Health Board
Lisa Fingleton	Development Officer, Equality Authority
Marina Glennan	The Refugee Agency (Government agency under Dept. Foreign Affairs)
Alice Binchy	Tallaght Refugee Project
Liz Burns	Tallaght Refugee Project
Dr Yvon Luky	Healthwise Community Impact
Paddy Rowe	SPIRASI (organisation providing English language and computer classes for asylum seekers)
Catherine Butler	Irish Refugee Council

### 3.3 Italy:

Ms H Behr	UNHCR
Mr A M Castelli	CIR – Italian Refugee Council, Co-ordinator of Social Service division
Mr A Cicchetti	Mayor of Rieti
Ms L Cortesi	Rieti Prefecture, head of area council on immigration
Dr R Francescelli	Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs
Mr G.Murano	President of CoPIR (International Permanent Conference of Refugees)
Mr G Palumbo	Lazio Regional Authority, Family & Social Services, Civic prevention and defence of cultural identity
Mr Stefano Leoteri	Deputy Mayor of Rieti

## 4. Information about CoPIR (International Permanent Conference of Refugees)

**Proposal for welcoming refugees and asylum seekers.  
“8000 councils, 8000 refugees”  
To entrust 1 refugee to every council**

Italy is currently the President of the European Economic countries, therefore the refugees resident in Italy are demanding, more than before, to be assisted with the same criteria and model as the rest of the European Union.

Due to its geographical position, our nation also has an important strategic role both to save the Kosovans threatened with eradication and for the proximity to the troubled Middle East which is a common place for diversity of religion and culture.

Moreover the refugees resident in Italy are in need of help.

It is necessary to acknowledge that a minimum part of the fund provided by EU and A.C.N.U.R. is spent in the direct assistance of refugees, as most of the fund is assigned for indirect assistance such as research and support structures.

Now Co.P.I.R. wishes to elaborate operative proposals as follows:

1. DIRECT ASSISTENCE:

- To develop a central administration for refugees at the Ministry of Internal affairs.
- To determine the amount of a direct allowance.
- To apply a similar act to the act 763/81 and 344/91 on refugees.
- To activate the act 154/97 on council houses and the regional act 33/87.

2. VOLUNTARY SERVICES:

- To determine the services and calculate the costs.
- To develop an observatory service.
- To post up in all airports notices in different languages to inform refugees to refer to the associations of voluntary services for refugees.

3. CONTRIBUTION:

- To provide the first assistance immediately and in reasonable time soon after the refugee has been granted the right to stay.
- Every allowance must be paid within two months.
- Revision of the article 17 of the proposal bill 2425/98 – rules in subject of the right for asylum.

4. ACCOMODATION:

- Activate the announcement for the Accommodations of the Council of Rome.
- Increase the number of reception centres, and improve their capacity, time of reception and the services.
- Contact the councils outside Rome to ease the dispersal.

5. APPEAL: (after denial of the central committee)

- Limit time for discussion of the matter (maximum one year).
- Refugees must have their legal representatives as well as their own GPs.

Co.P.I.R. operates in the sector and in the interest of refugees, has put forward these proposals for the realization of the project "INTEGRA" of the European Union and to be of value also of the funds for the immigration provided by the law no. 40 of 1998.

ROME, May 1999

## **Bibliographic references and suggested further reading**

## General

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## Europe

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**Good Practice Guides on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union**. ECRE Task Force on Integration 1999

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**Bridges and Fences: Refugee Perceptions of Integration in the EU**. ECRE Report 1999  
European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) country reports

## UK

### **Immigration and Asylum Act 1999**

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ECRI UK report 26<sup>th</sup> January 1999 CRI(99)5

## Ireland

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## Italy

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Proposal bill 2425/98 (article 17)

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