HANDBOOK

Collaborating with community-based organizations in an information project on return and reintegration possibilities.

An Issues Handbook

THE CASE OF THE "COUNTRY OF RETURN INFORMATION AND VULNERABLE GROUPS PROJECT"

The aim of this handbook is to share the experiences, good practices, capabilities and potentials of community based organizations, within the context of information transfer on reintegration possibilities for potential returnees among migrant communities in Europe.

It introduces key issues of collaboration with migrant communities. Therefore, this handbook addresses both grass-roots organizations as well as organizations aiming to build up partnerships with them.

2009

Introduction

Ask anyone who has experience of great collaborative working and what it was like and they will use words and phrases like "inclusive, strategic, effective, trust, openness, well-managed, more than just a talking shop, action focused, synergy, energy and commitment." Agreeing on the characteristics of productive collaboration is not difficult. Far more difficult is to see what practices or disciplines we must adopt to create effective and productive collaborations that deliver real results. This is even more important when working with marginalised groups and communities and there is an imbalance of power between the collaborators in relation to the financial and human resources available for those involved in the collaboration.

The Country of Return Information and Vulnerable Groups Project had at the core of its delivery mechanism established civil society organisations working with grass roots organisations that work with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This approach is vital in collaborative working if civil society organisations want to reach and provide information to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. It is often the experience that grassroots organisations are networked into communities and know where the access points are and have knowledge about appropriate ways of passing on information. There has to be recognition by civil society organisations that the grassroots organisation they want to collaborate with are mostly small organisations, typically run by volunteers on shoestring budgets that have existed alongside the larger and better funded refugee support agencies with whom they have at times struggled to compete not only for resources but for wider recognition and influence at higher strategic policy levels.

Managing expectations can be a real challenge in collaborations where there is an imbalance of 'power'. Grassroots organisations develop due to a perceived need not being met and such organisations frequently have no paid staff depending on volunteers. Expecting such organisations to have the same organisational capacity as an established civil society organisations is unrealistic. This can lead to conflict in relation to time commitment and prioritisation of collaboration or partnership.

The key to understanding collaborative working is to recognise the difference between 'control' and 'influence'. It may seem obvious but in a genuine collaboration no one has full control. No doubt some collaborators will have more power than others, but as soon as they try to use that power without the support of the collaborators then trust disappears and relationships are weakened. Collaboration is about operating through influence rather than control. Unfortunately, the experience of grassroots organisations in collaborations or partnerships can frequently be difficult and challenging, particularly if the more powerful and well funded civil society organisations expect the grassroots organisations to coalesce around their project, initiative or issue. Many grassroots organisation complain that in collaborations they get used as a delivery mechanism to reach 'hard to reach groups' but are not provided with enough resources or with large amounts of funding going to the established civil society organisation. It is critical in collaborations that grassroots organisations are involved at the development stage of a project where their needs are taken into account and resourced.

Grassroots organisations have their roots in the communities they serve, helping to give a collective voice to individuals and playing a key role in linking individuals and families to access resources and information. Mainstream civil society organisations seeking to work in collaboration with grassroots organisations need to be mindful of the fact that in order to stretch their reach to communities, they need to support the development and capacity of grassroots organisations and help to sustain such organisations.

Tahera Aanchawan

The choice to collaborate with community-based organizations

It is clear that influencing streams like migrants return is not a short-term, low-investment process.

Making a difference requires a sustained, cohesive partnership capable of mobilizing and analysing information, making that information available to key actors, and mobilizing many sources of influence.

For any project, there are multiple contexts which can be used to strengthen the project results.

An important part of the CRI-project is to give information to the migrant communities. We wanted to raise the effectiveness of our information transfer by seeking collaboration with initiatives from within the migrant community.[1]

The current multicultural structure of the social tissue has replaced the former hierarchical cultural and social configuration by a network structure. Specific interventions and actions can form the embryo for the development of new networks or the strengthening of existing networks.

Frequently, these networks are porous and have an unstable structure, based on occasional contacts. By setting up common activities, we want to reinforce the sustainability of these networks. Our common action supports the development of a network on return information.

We want the project literally to become a crossing point where different segments of our target group meet. In that sense network development in itself already creates communication and sustainability.[2][3]

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1 If we assume that an information offer on return possibilities is relevant for certain target groups, the question that follows is how this offer can be best organised. We distinguish roughly 3 models: the network model, the one-stop shop model and the hallway model.
In the network model several organizations examine in mutual consultation which information questions emerge and how they can answer upon them.
In the one-stop shop model, one location is created where potential returnees can go to with the questions they might have.
The hallway model is the most outreaching. The offer is created within organizations or institutions where the target group already comes. As a result, information questions on return can already be detected at an early stage and the possible threshold towards the project is reduced. Therefore, our choice to work closely together with community-based organizations.

2 In that light, it is interesting to look at the different goals of the network and its achievements.
The different objectives of the established network are:
  1. Up-grading: to upgrade the performance of each member, through collective action, sharing of information
     As a result, the network makes it possible to organize an effective information transfer on the existence of the project, as well as on reintegration possibilities for potential returnees towards the broader target community. It is also offers a great opportunity to evaluate the relevance of our information on reintegration possibilities.
  2. Up-streaming: the search for alternative approaches, new ways of understanding and intervening
     As a result, the network makes it possible to adopt existing activities of community-based organizations and transform them into strong information actions. Also, new concepts on communication and communication tools are developed. People also start to think as both an individual and a group on what real return opportunities are and on their position towards a possible return.
  3. Up-shifting: the need to be heard at a higher level, to influence national and global decisions
     As a result, from within the migrant community come policy recommendations for further actions on return information and return management.

3 Under Annex I you can read upon our partnership selection criteria for community-based organizations.

Some characteristics of community-based organizations

When working with community based organizations, "identity" plays a significant role in what or who groups organize around (e.g. ethnicity, charity, etc.). People get organized to advance their shared interests, coalescing around a common cause. This can happen in both a formal and an informal way. The distinction between those two is relevant when setting up a collaboration.

Some characteristics of both type of organizations are or may be[1]:

	Informal organization	Formal organization
Facilities and contact	operating from private homes	operating from their own office
Finances	financially dependent from the contribution of their members or from fundraising events	financially dependent from grants as well as self-funding
Professionalism	mostly, they do not have paid staff and their members may work during the day time and thus not available for communication	mostly, people have half or full time employment within their organization
Beneficiaries	often extensions of themselves, such as relatives or ethnic members in the country of origin or in Europe	internal and external to the group
Ideology and mission	mostly apolitical and aimed at the members' welfare and cultural needs	often aimed at empowerment or skills transfer

This typology shows us immediately were difficulties may occur. This does not mean that those difficulties are unique to grass roots organisations. But rather the way those organizations are structured makes them more vulnerable to some organisational difficulties which should be taken into account when setting up a professional cooperation.

It is striking that grass roots organisations are created usually on one's own initiative and are not established on the initiative of the government or a social institution. Maybe therefore, one characteristic of most of those organisations still is their lack of professionalism: much work is performed by very motivated volunteers but with little professional experience on the matter. Although their excellent knowledge

1 A survey of African Organizations in London: An Agenda for AFFORD's Action; London, Afford, 1996

of the situation in the country of origin proves to be a considerable advantage, in many cases their lack of knowledge about running a professional organisation in their country of residence hampers a sound functioning. They often lack the necessary knowledge on laws and legislation to find public funding and they act alone.

Also, their internal organisation sometimes is missing the necessary knowledge and experience in the field of administration and project management, necessary to guarantee a smooth internal functioning and its survival in the long run. Regular rotations in governing boards and employee files make that built up knowledge frequently goes lost. However, the focus should rather be on the fact that even when organizations may have a weak profile, individual members possess expertise and skills which they can apply for the benefit of their organization or project.

Time investment can be another constraint. Voluntary employees possibly have a paid job, follow a training or have a busy family life. Only a limited number of hours per week can be invested in their organisation, and that goes at the cost of the necessary continuity.

Another obstacle for cooperation is that many community-based organisations have poor external communication and public relations. Although young organisations are frequently better equipped to do PR and build strategic communication, a majority spends little time on their public reputation.

Many of the difficulties above often are not the result of incompetence, since a lot has to do with the effort it costs to get structural or project wise financial support. Fundraising frequently has high thresholds, difficult to overcome by grassroots organisations. And even if external financing is found, it is mostly dedicated for temporary projects with absolutely no guarantee for continuity of the activities.[1]

1 When setting up a small-scale partnership with grass roots organizations, some kind of remuneration for services can be an important pull-factor. But, however important financing is, it is not the sole key to convince organizations into a partnership.

Setting up partnerships with community-based organizations

THE CHALLENGE OF WORKING WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: "OWNERSHIP", AS A KEY TO SUCCESS

Networking is emancipating for community-based organizations, on condition that there exists a shared ownership of the project and its results. This condition also acts as a guiding principle, determinative for the success of the communication action on voluntary return and reintegration possibilities.

The concept of "ownership" is quite common in the development discourse, referring to the capacity, power or influence stakeholders have to set and take responsibility for the project's agenda, and to sustain support for that.

Ownership is high when:

- the intended beneficiaries substantially influence the conception, design and implementation of the project strategies;
- the implementing actors are rooted in the target community and represent the interests of ordinary citizens;
- there is transparency and accountability among the various stakeholders.

Some questions to build up ownership are:

1. What is the problem and how do we define it?
2. What are the solutions we propose?
3. Why are these solutions in the best interest of all?
4. What values and issues of identity are at stake?

The project consulted both the intended users and the community organizations on its relevance, taking into account their ideas on which information is useful and which are vulnerable groups among potential returnees. Community-based organizations were put in the driver's seat and set the course of how the information transfer towards the broader community was best organized and what the central focus of our message should be.

This said, ownership in practice remains a challenge. It is absolutely necessary, to raise effectiveness and - from a sustainability point of view - to renegotiate the role of migrant organizations as partners in a collective dialogue, to reshape organizational strategies and practices, to strengthen service delivery enhancing the capacity and to continue exchanging knowledge and experience.

IMPROVING PARTNERSHIPS

Menter's Partnership Development Project (East of England Black & Minority Ethnic Network) developed a framework for partnerships, named **PIISA**[1]. This framework can also be very useful to us, when defining collaboration (actions).

In short, there are 4 key factors for success in any partnership:

P clarity about **P**urpose and role

> This is really essential. Since we operate in a network and strive for a large acceptance of our goals, we must be absolutely clear on the project's objectives and desired outcome. If partners cannot find them in these, or are misinformed, collaboration will be weak. Clarity of purpose means enabling partners to express their constraints, what they want to achieve from the partnership and what they are committed to do within the network.

II ability to **I**nfluence and be **I**nfluenced

> The project should create an environment of open dialogue and meeting the needs of all partners. This should also reflect in a certain flexibility, leading to a possible redefining of the actions.

> The ability to be influenced should not only be reflected on project level, but (can) also have consequences on organisational level.

> Create an environment where people can influence the partnership and can influence the agenda. Design meetings as such that you make sure everyone can and does participate and deal with concerns, frustrations and confrontations.

S systems and **S**tructures for the purpose

> Systems and structures should be dynamic and in relation to the purpose of the partnership. This also means that they can be adapted under way.

A capacities and resources to deliver **A**ction

> Actions must be specific and clear on deadlines and responsibilities of each partner involved.

Mostly, when setting up collaborations, the focus lays on "what we do" (**S** and **A**), and much less on "how we are" (**P** and **II**). However, they are equally important.

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1 See: Building better partnerships. Guidelines for multi-agency groups working with asylum seekers and refugees in the East of England, January 2005, Refugee Council & Menter, UK

Some guiding principles

to overcome difficulties in communication towards migrants and community-based organizations when dealing with the subject of voluntary return[1]

Many difficulties met have to do with setting up partnerships with migrant organizations.[2]

One general attitude we all should adhere to lies in realizing that we all look at things in a different manner, like through tinted glasses. Do not generalize towards whole communities, like "this or that community is not organized". Question yourself why they should meet up to your norms?

DIFFICULTY 1 :

The return issue can be a difficult topic to introduce.

Activities in relation to "return" are abstract, quality instruments with a focus on return are hard to find.

Guiding principle:

For community-based organizations values often come first. Engage yourself in "positive messaging". Talking about return can be threatening, but what you really do is helping them in "making choices" between a return or a prolonged stay.[3] This is a much better and more honest way to talk about voluntary return. And once you talk about "making choices", use it consequently.

In getting the message pass, you can use different ways and settings. Take your message and develop it into multiple communication tools. Talk about the subject on occasions with no direct link to "return". Even if the public may not completely cover your target group, each person is a communication channel in itself and will spread the message to people around them whom they think are interested by what you have to say or offer.

When giving examples on the relevance of information on reintegration possibilities, try to elaborate frameworks that have a cultural resonance which easily offers recognizable social and cultural issues. When talking about return information, chose examples people can

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1 These guiding principles are the outcome of an interactive workshop held among the European project partners, by Tahera Aanchawan "Promoting information projects towards migrant communities: approaches in collaboration with grass roots organizations", Belgium, 09.10.2008

2 Although we present the guidelines as answers upon difficulties met, it should be clear that those difficulties also present opportunities, nor is the list exhaustive. The difficulties we present here are from the point of view of the NGO's collaborating with grass roots organizations. But, in many ways, they are reciprocal.

3 Cfr. Choices – Voluntary Return Conference Report, February 2005, Refugee Action, London, UK

identify with. This can be other/positive means to use the information you provide (e.g. setting up a business), or stories of people who actually returned and how they lived this experience, etc.

Length, tone and contents of your message should be adapted to your audiences. Do not assume people understand an issue the same way as you do. Build up your message around one central element.

DIFFICULTY 2 :

When addressing the audience, you have to deal with different expectations about what can be provided to returnees: e.g. apart from information people also want financial help (which is not part of the project).

Guiding principle:

In communicating on the return option as "making choices", we acknowledge it as part of a personal project. The CRI-project only engages itself for one level of that project.

Always be clear in what you offer, right from the start. If people have different expectations you cannot provide them with, see what you can do and if necessary, guide them towards other organizations/institutions who can help them further.

Say what you mean and mean what you say. Be coherent.

Without avoiding each discussion, it is clear that you will not turn everyone into active sympathisers of your cause, but you can debunk the biases in their allegations. Seek to argue with facts and figures and not with slogans and insults. Change from criticizing your adversaries to suggesting feasible solutions that are in the public interest. Try to harness everyone's energy by agreeing as often as possible on a unified straightforward message that can be repeated again and again.

DIFFICULTY 3 :

As an outsider, it may be hard to identify "who represents who" in the community and what the reach is of community-based organizations.

Guiding principle:

Be aware that people from a community only have 2 things in common: they are migrants and they share the same nationality. It is a big misconception that migrants are a homogenous group. All the diversity (age, gender, geographical background, class, health status, ethnicity, etc.) you find in society exists also in each migrant community. There's no proper representation of the whole community possible.

- Accept this without being afraid of it. The most important thing is to be aware of this.
- Just avoid overrepresentation of one single group within the community (all male, all ethnic,...)
- Think about leadership rather than representation.

- What counts is not "who represent who" but "who can get the job done".

This said, identify different groups and take them on board, without opportunistically changing messages according audiences.

In identifying "who is who" in the community: ask to know. Leadership can reflect all the diversity of the community (culture, ethnicity, clan,…).

DIFFICULTY 4 :

How to raise awareness of another one's "culture" and ethnicity?

Guiding principle:

Again : ask to know.

It is our professional obligation to do research on culture and ethnicity when dealing with other communities. Surf on the internet, look at documentaries, read books, ask around.

Accept that your ideas, habits and attitudes have a built in bias and avoid value judgements about the way other people do things or stereotyping people. And do not let the possible language barrier put up a wall.

DIFFICULTY 5 :

When dealing with community-based organizations, you can get confronted with conflicts in migrant communities. How to keep your neutrality here?

Guiding principle:

Conflict is everywhere and in every day life. A community without conflict does not exist.

It is unrealistic to think you can be neutral. Neutrality does not exist or will inevitably be compromised.

DIFFICULTY 6 :

How to deal with the instability of stay for undocumented migrants which can lead to being unable to continue their involvement.

Guiding principle:

Another inevitability. Groups are dynamic and their composition changes all the time.

Besides, what counts for community-based organizations also counts for us. Migrant organizations can be used to work or deal with one specific person within your organization who afterwards leaves for one reason or the other (new job opportunities, vacation, sickness, etc.).

DIFFICULTY 7 :

Projects have a tight time frame which leaves insufficient time to help community-based organizations to build up capacities to deliver services on communication.

Guiding principle:

When starting a project, you accept the time frame of it.

It's important to set the expectations right. Do not promise what you can not deliver.

Every person attending an event where you present your work creates a multiplication effect for spreading your message. Even if only a small part is interested or spoken upon, they'll talk about it to others when opportunity presents itself.

DIFFICULTY 8 :

Grassroots organizations are not primarily or entirely focused on refugees, but on other areas.

Guiding principle:

The public of potential returnees is far larger than refugees.

Even when the community-based organization has a focus on integration, this is not contradictory to the return topic if you present the latter as "making choices".

Be aware of the public's opinions on (promoting) return related information. It is often counterproductive to address the public head on. A better tactic is to address the audience by communicating positively, i.e. showing how returnees can contribute to the wealth and common good in their country of origin, but also on how they are part of the community here to which they bring their diversity.

DIFFICULTY 9 :

Working with migrant organizations means working out of normal office hours.

Guiding principle:

Just remember: we are paid for this and can compensate the hours made, while people from migrant organizations do this on a voluntary basis and after a day's work.

The foundation stones of information transfer

You need to have certain conditions in place before you can effectively communicate on return and re-integration possibilities towards potential returnees.

We call these "the foundation stones of information transfer among potential returnees".

FOUNDATION STONE		
A CHOICE-BASED APPROACH	One of the greatest challenges you may face is how to raise the issue of voluntary return within your organization without creating suspicion and alarm. There may be some people who feel extremely threatened or uncomfortable by the issue of return itself. The core line of the issue, however, is building a better future. It is about making choices, whatever the outcome may be (return or stay).	In more detail, it is an approach which sees every individual as a unique and equally valuable human being, with the right not only to life and survival, but also to development of his fullest potential, offering the best understanding of anyone's situation who deserves his best interests met through adequate information.
CONSULTATION	Without adequate consultation you are at risk of making ineffective communication tools or procedures which are not based on the experience or capacities of potential returnees. On an organisational level, you do not only tell people what is planned, or offer a number of options and listen to the feedback you get. It is important to encourage others to provide additional ideas, to join in deciding the best way forward and to form a genuine partnership when carrying it out.	
OWNERSHIP	If all stakeholders do not have a sense of ownership of the communication tools or procedures, then they are unlikely to take responsibility for implementing the information transfer in their work. Without broad ownership across the organization, transferring information on return possibilities becomes too dependant on particular individuals. This runs the risk of this service being weakened or disappearing when these people leave the organisation.	

CONFIDENTIALITY	Potential returnees asking for information need to be reassured that any sensitive information in their personal records is treated with respect and kept confidentially. This also means that such information is only accessible to the minimum number of people necessary. Actual information in particular cases (e.g. names and incidences) should be kept confidential; accessible only to those who need to know.[1]
TRANSPARENCY	Information passed at potential returnees needs to be properly recorded, signed and dated, clearly marked as either opinion or fact. Transparency is about having a clear and standardized information gathering process in place.

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1 We should also be aware of the possible perverse use of information by certain bodies evaluating asylum claims, e.g. information on access to health care, were specific information risks to be generalized.

Good communication practices

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

In general, we distinguish 4 basis characteristics of good communication practices:

1. multiplier impact

- by the integration of the activity in a broader project where several actors take part of
- by the combination of different communication resources and/or animation tools

2. sustainability

- by the image of the project in time and space (spread unchecked effect)
- by their repetition in time and space (duplicity)

3. participation

- by the active involvement of target groups in the preparation and the implementation of the activity
- by the possible interaction with the public during the activity

4. innovation

- by the planned approach and the animation and communication methods
- by the selection of the target group
- by presenting an issue outside the scoop of return, but of which the relevance for a possible return is clear (e.g. "setting up business oriented projects")

Specific, for communication on return and reintegration possibilities, a main characteristic of good practice is that it goes beyond the taboo of return, by making it a valid option.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Within the CRI-project we gathered some good examples of communication activities on return information.[1]

Generally, we can divide those good practices into 4 categories:

- cultural events/informal activities;
- workshops;
- mass media (articles, radio interviews, newsletters);
- network activities.

1. cultural events / informal activities

Many of the activities which are organised are not communication activities "pur sang", but are rather situated in the socio-cultural field. The arguments for this are:

- the core business of most grass roots organizations is the continuation of the cultural experience and/or in supporting compatriots in finding their way in society;
- Cultural activities are identity strengthening and image building. The nature of the activities themselves and the strengthening of a cultural identity play a growing central role in establishing positive dynamics among the community, thus facilitating a good communication;
- Cultural activities can be strongly mobilising and attract or address a wide scale of (different segments of) target publics.

2. workshops

A workshop is an (in-)group meeting, with a supervisor, where a particular theme is being explored. The personal meaning and/or experience of each participant is central. Both theoretical explanations and practical exercises have their place. A workshop must lead to a common understanding and approach among participants.

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1 The reason for documenting good practices is that we want to :
- preserve experiences
  - organisational approach
  - methodological approach and tools
  - contents
  - critical success factors / conditions
- make publicity and promotion: giving incentives to valorise the expertise and capacity of community-based organizations
- justify what happens with public funding
- comment on the plus value of collaborating with community-based organizations and making their work more visible

3. mass media

Most examples touch the mass media.

A short overview:

Publications

A newsletter, a magazine,… can be a good way to make your voice heard. However one should take the costs into account in terms of resources, time and people. Do not produce an unprofessional or unfocused sheet that might blur the project image with outsiders.

Website

A website can be a very interesting and easily accessible communication tool towards the target groups, if it is logically organized so people can quickly find answers to their queries.

Blogging and SMSing

Blogs, moblogs, SMS, have demonstrated their growing capacity to inform and mobilize large-scale collective action.

Interviews

Interviews are the ultimate test. You can reach a whole public who otherwise stays inaccessible to you.

Their success lays in a good preparation. Know exactly the context of the interview (who is the interviewer, for what programme, how long, live or taped, etc.). Define carefully your core message in advance and select concrete examples to support your statement. Make sure not to be distracted from your core message during the interview and prepare answers to uncomfortable questions.

Debates

Debates offer good opportunities to present your views. As for interviews, they need to be well-prepared: who takes part and which message you want to tell.

4. network activities

Grass roots organizations do not act alone. Often they are part of a larger network or member of an umbrella organization.

Those collaborations often have a common objective: to enhance participation of ethnic minorities in policy making and community development. The basic idea of such a network is to rally support for joint action.

As a member, grass roots organizations can make use of those networks to facilitate the communication towards the larger community, by using their communication channels.

Those networks can be place-oriented, community-oriented, language-oriented, or whatsoever.

SOME EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES[1]

THE ACTIVITY	A CULTURAL EVENING, WITH FOOD, LOCAL MUSIC (I.E. ORIGINATED FROM THE COMMUNITY) AND DANCE
RISK FACTORS (critical success factors)	• A location which is easy accessible • A location which is suitable both for concerts, diner and discussion • A good publicity, local and nationwide • A thoroughness in scheduling between different topics • An approach which guarantees to discuss with the community, without the interference of other groups
TARGET GROUPS	1. People within the community (nationwide): families and youngsters 2. People from outside the community (local): youngsters and sympathizers
OBJECTIVES	• to create an easily accessible platform for presentation of the CRI-project and discussion among community members in an informal setting • to make it known among the community target groups that organization X is a partner in the CRI-project, so they can act as an in-between
DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY : CULTURAL EVENT	1. A cultural evening with typical food (i.e. local dishes), local music, and dance. Hosted by a local celebrity within the community. 2. A round table with a presentation of the project, its objectives, tools and partners, followed by a discussion. 3. A press coverage of the whole activity, by a local newspaper.

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1 As selection criteria for this publication, the good practices had to be :
  1. transferable
  2. innovative
  3. inspiring
  4. writable
  5. rapidly useable without being a recipe

ROLE OF THE PARTNERS/ STAKEHOLDERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION	**The grass roots organization:** ▪ publicity and invitations ▪ logistics and setting ▪ booking artists and local celebrity ▪ contacting local press ▪ catering and bar ▪ translation of flyer in local language **The European partner organization:** ▪ printing of flyer ▪ preparation of the presentation
TOOLS USED	▪ flyers, presenting the project and its executive partners within the community ▪ a powerpoint presentation of the project outline

THE ACTIVITY	AN ICT WORKSHOP, WITH THE CRI-PROJECT AND ASYLUM LAW AS GENERAL TOPICS
RISK FACTORS (critical success factors)	- A location which is easy accessible and equipped for an IT-session (computers and internet) - A good recruitment of the participants, chosen from the target groups - An interest among the participants in asylum and return issues - A pedagogical approach of the workshop facilitator
TARGET GROUPS	People from the community (locally): starting from 18 years old, with and without legal status
OBJECTIVES	- To acquire the basics of IT and learn how to use the internet as a tool for information gathering - To inform potential returnees on the CRI-project and its tools - To inform (ex-)asylum seekers on procedures and perspectives, including the return option
DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY : WORKSHOP	- An introduction course of PC and internet tools - A practicum course, using a CRI-case (return question, active search through the project's website, use of helpdesk) - An exercise on asylum law, using public domain information on the internet
ROLE OF THE PARTNERS/ STAKEHOLDERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION	**The grass roots organization:** - publicity and recruitment of participants - logistics and setting - making of the IT-manual **The European partner organization:** - workshop facilitator - preparation of CRI-cases and asylum cases
TOOLS USED	- an IT-manual - a presentation sheet of some CRI-cases

THE ACTIVITY	A PRESS CAMPAIGN WITH THE PUBLICATION OF AN INTERVIEW IN A COMMUNITY-BASED JOURNAL, A NEWS BULLETIN AND A LOCAL COMMUNITY RADIO-INTERVIEW
RISK FACTORS (critical success factors)	• A limited time and space to present the project without any face-to-face opportunity to tackle scepticism or to answer upon case-related questions • The dissemination requires the media to be well embedded in the community • A general message to all versus a differentiated message for each target group • The translation of the message into local language must be free of interpretation
TARGET GROUPS	1. People within the community, having very basic language competences and experiencing difficulties to inter-exchange with other publics 2. People within the community (local and nationwide): men and women from age 18 up 3. People outside the target community : everybody who masters the language and who makes use of the media
OBJECTIVES	• to present the CRI-project among community members "at home", without having to participate in any activity • to inform the highest number of target people on their choices and opportunities of return • to disseminate the information of the country sheet in a more accessible way (by summarizing it) • to make it known among the community target groups that organization X is a partner in the CRI-project, so they can act as an in-between
DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY : MASS MEDIA	1. the publication in a newspaper, edited by community responsibles, of interviews with key persons from the migrant partner organizations on the project, its activities and methodology; published in the local language (i.e. red by the community) and disseminated nationwide on free basis. Enclosed, a CRI-flyer in the local language. 2. the publication of an electronic bi-monthly News Bulletin, presenting each time a different chapter/topic from the CRI country sheet on return 3. a radio-interview with the CRI project responsible and with a chairman of the grass roots partner organization, presenting the project activities and some of the questions received, on a local radio talkshow in the local language (i.e. spoken by the community)

| ROLE OF THE PARTNERS/ STAKEHOLDERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION | **The grass roots organization:**

▪ translation of the project presentation into the local language

▪ preparation and execution of the interview

▪ publishing and dissemination of the newsletter

The European partner organization:

▪ contacting and making arrangements with the editor

▪ printing of flyer

▪ summarizing the country sheet for publication

▪ preparation and execution of the interview |

THE ACTIVITY	A MEMORIAL CELEBRATION, SET UP BY A COMMUNITY UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION
RISK FACTORS (critical success factors)	• A location which is easy accessible • A location which is suitable both for concerts, diner and discussion • A good publicity, nationwide • The presence of political personalities among the key-speakers to identify with, with a risk of being easily accepted by some and being rejected by others
TARGET GROUPS	People originating from one region of the country of origin, living all over Europe
OBJECTIVES	• to inform people within and beyond the borderline of the existence of the project and the possibilities it creates for local development (directly, by returnees, or indirectly, by interventions from a distance) • to make it known among the community target groups that organization X (member of the umbrella organization) is a partner in the CRI-project, so they can act as an in-between
DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY : NETWORK ACTIVITIES	1. A cultural evening with typical food (i.e. local dishes) and concerts of local musicians. 2. A conference on regional development and the role of the diasporas in setting up local development activities. 3. A presentation of the CRI-project and the possibility of using its information when setting up small scale interventions or SME in the country of origin.
ROLE OF THE PARTNERS/ STAKEHOLDERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION	**The grass roots organization:** • invitation of the European partner organization • making of a specific CRI-flyer towards the target group **The European partner organization:** • printing of flyer • preparation of the presentation
TOOLS USED	• flyers, presenting the project and its executive partners within the community • country sheet, summary of economic chapter and guidelines in setting up SME

ANNEX I :
The selection of potential partners among the community-based organizations[1]

For the selection of potential partners, we focused on the demographics of community-based organisations and their access to, and opportunities for, information gathering and transfer. In addition, context analysis told us something about the cultural, social and political situation in the community.

Such contextual information helped us to identify obstacles to project success and improvement. It helped us to better understand what can work or what not, which outcomes could be achieved and which not.

A simple and effective way to begin this contextual analysing process is through mapping community organisations and assets, by:

- identifying existing community action groups;
- identifying existing formal, informal and potential community leaders;
- identifying community needs ands gaps in information on reintegration possibilities;
- understanding the target population in order to improve the project credibility within the community;
- creating a momentum for project activities by getting community input.

True, formal assessment of community strengths and opportunities, weaknesses and threats, can be both time-consuming and resource-intensive, that is why we choose to perform a more simplified assessment. An organisational assessment enabled us to examine the internal dynamics of both the community and the organisation in question.

Our partner organisations need to be able to address the broader community. Relevant selection criteria are:

- geographical coverage
- goals and public
- activities
- resources (e.g. staffing, organisational support, expertise, communication opportunities)
- networking (in country of residence, in Europe and in country if origin)

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1 It is not realistic to expect all conditions to be met. Especially for some communities, the choice between potential partners can be limited due to a poor representation in the host country. In other cases, the return issue can curb the will of collaboration. In any case, it is necessary to weigh one requirement to another.

When relevant, remarks and opinions complete the picture, giving information on additional questions, such as:

- What are the values of the organization and their relationship with the project?

- What is the relationship of the organisation towards official institutions related to the country of origin? How does this relationship impede project activities and outcomes?

- What is the structure and size of the organisation?

- How does the leadership and organisational structure influence its effectiveness? Does the decision-making structure impede or strengthen proposed activities?

- What are the characteristics of staff and leadership? How are members recruited? What is the organisational culture?

Besides this, mapping migrant community organisations, their needs and assets, also rendered valuable information on the relevance of project goals, and provided baseline data for outcome evaluations.

ANNEX II : Vision on voluntary return

"Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

[The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13, General Assembly of the United Nations, 1948]

"Everyone has the right to (…) receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

[The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19, General Assembly of the United Nations, 1948]

Different visions on voluntary return exist side by side within the project, especially towards the definitions used.[1] But, we all agree on one thing: a voluntary return is all about making informed choices.

Reception programmes in the host country should have the dual aim of preparing asylum seekers to integrate and fully participate in the host country (in the event of being recognised as refugees or granted other forms of international protection), or, to return to their country of origin (if their application is unsuccessful or conditions in the country of origin have changed in a way that would lead them to withdraw their asylum claim).[2]

In order to assess the potential and the righteousness of a return, candidates should have access to reliable and up-to-date information to make a voluntary choice between a return or a prolonged stay.

As a project, we respect the decision of our clients and do not try to influence them in any way. Therefore, we inform people on aspects of safety and reintegration possibilities.

In this regard, UNHCR's statement is enlightening. UNHCR strongly suggests to assess in advance the situation in the country of origin, in order to evaluate if a return can happen under conditions of "safety and dignity".

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1 UNHCR states that the principle of "voluntariness" must be viewed in relation to both the conditions in the country of origin (calling for an informed decision) and the situation in the country of asylum (permitting a free choice).
" 'Voluntariness' is more than an issue of principle. (…). The requirement of voluntariness constitutes a pragmatic and sensible approach towards finding a truly durable solution.
The issue of 'voluntariness' as implying an absence of any physical, psychological, or material pressure is, however, often clouded by the fact that for many refugees a decision to return is dictated by a combination of pressures due to political factors, security problems or material needs.
As a general rule, UNHCR should be convinced that the positive pull-factors in the country of origin are an overriding element in the refugees' decision to return rather than possible push-factors in the host country (…)"; UNHCR, Handbook Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection, Geneva 1996, pg 10

2 This opinion is commonly accepted by NGO's defending the rights of asylum seekers, among which the European Council On Refugees and Exiles (ECRE).
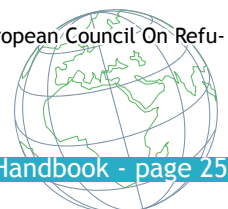
We support UNHCR's view that "only an informed decision can be a voluntary decision". Provision of adequate information is a necessary prerequisite for ensuring that a return takes place on a voluntary basis and with the full consent of the individuals concerned.[1]

Successful reintegration in the country of origin is a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of return. In order to improve the possibility of success, good and practical information beforehand is indispensible. Such information is often not public domain. To guarantee the quality of the information, it is therefore necessary to collaborate with local partners.

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1 Cfr.: ECRE *"Information should cover whether or not conditions for safe and sustainable return are in place in the country of origin and the rights are guaranteed there (…). Such information should be impartial, independently corroborated, evidence based, and open to public scrutiny."*; Position on return by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), 2003, http://www.ecre. org/files/returns.pdf. This document has been drawn upon the views of its member agencies, consisting of 74 non-governmental refugee assisting organisations in 31 European countries.

ANNEX III : project sheet

Period and starting date

Start: 01.01.2008
Duration: 18 months

Resume

We provide information on return countries and return possibilities to potential returnees, their advisors, social workers and migrant communities.

This information serves return counselling as well as return preparation.

The project gathers info on access to the territory, personal security, reintegration possibilities, accommodation and housing, work opportunities, social security items, health care, education, etc. To this end we build up a network of local partners whom we train. They give individualized information, useful when preparing a return.

The service we offer is threefold:

1. We run an information desk where potential returnees or their assistants can ask specific and individualised questions in order to decide on a return or its preparation. Special attention goes to vulnerable groups.

   We will always try to find an adequate answer through desk-research first. If the result does not prove satisfactory, the question is transferred to our local partner.

2. We provide country fact sheets with general "things you should know about..." information on the 19 target-countries of our project. These files are documented by international reports and can be consulted on www.ecoi.net.

3. We train our local partners in research methods, to assure us that the information meets high quality standards.

We also train migrant organisations in the operational European countries to be an active partner in the dissemination of information on return possibilities, thus breaking the barriers between counsellors and returnees. Since this work on empowerment is an important part of the project, we will develop a handbook, explaining the methodology as well as presenting good practices and our vision on voluntary return.

Specific objectives

1. to adjust the overall image migrants have on return, which generally is considered as a failure

2. to train migrant communities in the gathering and transfer of return information, in order to inform potential returnees timely on the reintegration possibilities

3. to actively disseminate specific country information facilitating return to counsellors and social workers

4. to develop and reinforce an operational information network on selected countries of return

5. to transfer the adapted methodology used to other organisms / institutions / migrant organisations

6. to gather and to make available specific COI on return, with a focus on specialised information for vulnerable groups

Partners

lead and coordinator: Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen vzw

6 European organisations gather information on selected countries of return, in close collaboration with local partners. These local organisations will provide detailed and correct information about return conditions.

- Asociación Comissión Católica Española de Migración (ACCEM): Morocco, Bolivia, Argentina

- Caritas Belgium: Armenia, Georgia, Serbia and Montenegro

- Consiglio Italiano Per I Rifugiati (CIR): Cameroon, Ghana and Egypt

- Coordination et Initiatives pour les Réfugiés et Étrangers (CIRE): Ecuador, Algeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo

- Danish Refugee Council: Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina

- Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen vzw: Russia, Albania and Guinea

Contacts

Belgium

Flemish Refugee Action (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen)
Gaucheretstraat, 164
B- 1030 Brussels
www.vluchtelingenwerk.be

Caritas Belgium
Liefdadigheidstraat, 43
B- 1210 Brussels
www.caritas-int.be

Coordination et Initiatives pour les Réfugiés et Étrangers (CIRE)
Rue du Vivier, 80
B- 1050 Brussels
http://www.cire.be/

Denmark

Danish Refugee Council (Dansk Flygtningehjælp)
Borgergade, 10, 3rd floor
DK- 1300 København K

Italy

Italian Refugee Council (Consiglio Italiano Per I Rifugiati - CIR)
Via del Velabro 5/A
IT- 00186 Roma
www.cir-onlus.org

Spain

Asociación Comissión Católica Española de Migración (ACCEM)
Plaza Santa María Soledad Torres Acosta, 2
ESP- 28004 Madrid
http://www.accem.es