

Fall Exchange 2008

September 26 - October 4, 2008

Theme "Empowerment"

Participant Data

Name(s)	Josianne Vella	
Organisation	OIWAS	
Country	Malta	
Host country	Slovak Republic	
Contactperson	Petra	
Host country & e-mail		

Itinerary (List of places and people visited)

Rohovce – Accomodation Centre

Gabcicovo – Accomodation Center

Slovak Humanitarian Council

IOM

Migration Office

INTERVIEW GUIDE

on 'Empowerment'

Empower: 'to promote self-actualisation or influence'

Describe one example of 'empowerment' practice (training, methodology or strategy) of your host organisation. Before describing the practice research the following aspects and use the headings as lay-out for your report.

My host organisation was the Migration office. At this office there is a specific service targeting integration of people granted protection and therefore can live in the Slovak Republic. Although system is different than the Maltese, the information provided to the clients, through booklets, leaflets and other means of communication is a form of empowering clients to move into the community.

1. Title of the empowerment practice

- 1) Empowerment with regards to Voluntary Return (mainly taken care of by IOM)
- 2) Empowerment in integrating in the Slovak community for people who are granted protection.

2. Give a short description (one paragraph) of the practice you selected

I have selected Empowerment with regards to return, both voluntary and forced, however specifically with regards to voluntary return. The country visited does implement forced return however much more input is given to voluntary return and the rate of persons actually opting for voluntary return is considerably high. The fact that forced return is happening, this is also serving as an empowering tool for people to opt to take voluntary return as a way returning to their country of origin. However from what I could observe the level of 'marketing' involved is also high and this in itself translates to people actually having information on which to take an informed decision.

3. Policy

Is the practice formal policy or informal practice?

Is it a common practice for all locations or restricted to certain locations?

- 1) It is a formal policy whereby the criteria are preset and people are informed about the possibility of return whilst in the reception centres, accommodation centres and also in the detention centre. It is a common practice however entitlements of asylum seekers who opt to take the voluntary return option differ from those persons who are residing in Slovakia illegally.

Persons residing illegally who opt take the voluntary return option will be given € 2000 in order to be able to start a business in their country of origin.

4. Development

Who developed the practice?

- staff members, policy makers, external institute, other?

Why was it developed, was there a specific motive/reason for it?

- 1) IOM are the entity responsible and this practice was developed also through the European Refugee Funds
- 2) It was developed in order to assist people who would want to return to their country of origin but have no means in doing so. It does not seek to force clients to return, but to allow those who want to return to actually do it.

5. Target group

Does the 'empowerment practice' relate to staff or residents?

Does the 'empowerment practice' relate to specific target groups: e.g. women, families, minors or certain staff members?

6. Timing

Does the 'empowerment practice' relate to certain phases of reception/employment? e.g. integration, return, or part of orientation/induction program

This empowerment practice does not relate to a certain phase of reception, but merely on the decision of the person concerned whether to return or not. Something which ought to be mentioned however is the fact that a person can apply more than once for asylum, the clients won't always be empowered to take on the voluntary return option. Although it is undoubtedly a good practice to listen to the claims of asylum and having them processed in due time in order to give the people the protection need, on the other hand a system which accepts claims over and over again keeps people stuck in a system for a very long time. The lack of stability brought along by the process could be very tiring on the individuals concerned.

7. Methodology

What type of methodology is used

- training, group work
- individual/guidance
- self help program
- other, (please describe)

Are there manuals, guidelines or so available? Is it used?

Group, Individual, information provision (booklets, manuals)

Yes there are manuals and guidelines. These are found all the different centres and are a means of promoting this service and empower people.

5. Implementation

Who is responsible for implementing the program?

- Own staff of the organisation; other (partner) agencies; specialised training / education services
- Are there other organisations involved?
- What role do they play? Is this a formative, reactive or informal role?

Are there specific problems encountered for implementation?

IOM is the entity responsible however such information is passed on to the people, both by IOM staff but also by they social workers present in the accommodation centres. In case of the closed centres, workers there, also seek to inform clients about this possibility.

8. Accessibility

How do participants have access to the practice?

- do they have to sign up themselves or are they selected
- is it voluntary or compulsory?
- are there enough places available?
- are the potential participants aware that the practice exists?
- do they have to pay for the services?

They can speak to the social workers in the accommodation facilities. These will guide them. Attend to the meetings called by IOM staff at the places of residence. This also includes detention centre. As the name voluntary return suggests, it is not compulsory. Information about this project is communicated in different languages. This suggests that persons who are somewhere in their asylum seeking process, are aware of this practice. For voluntary return, there is no cost involved on behalf of the client. However providing documents about country of origin, such as passport provides an easier and smoother process for the return to take place.

7. Participation

How are the participants involved in the implementation

- they have been part of the designing of the practice, or initiated it
- they play an active role in implementation or evaluation

This practice came around as means of meeting the needs of the people who wish to return back to their country of origin. Service users are the main focus throughout the whole process of voluntary return, and they may also decide to withdraw from returning back to their country of origin right before the flight leaves. This decision is solely taken by the client that is opting for voluntary return is entirely voluntary. No strings attached.

8. Holistic approach

How does the practice relate to other services provided? Is there an independency, referral system?

All the places visited knew about this option, knew who was involved and how to refer the people. The presence of IOM and other NGOs in the centres is very crucial in reaching out and identifying people who show interest in voluntary return.

9. Cultural sensitivity

How are cultural aspects integrated in the 'empowerment practice' and for what reason;

- does it have the desired effect? how do the participants feel about it?

Cultural sensitivity is integrated in this process. People are first and foremost informed about this in a language they understand. Helped out to understand whether this option is a good and valid option.

When I met with the service providers, the communication, although people pertain to different organisation both NGO or Governments is very strong and this promotes the idea that clients are being assisted in a holistic manner. Clients on the other hand have their cultural believes and traditions honoured and practiced whilst staying in the centres. With regards to this practice, IOM staff are aware of country of origin existing conflicts. They keep in line with the clients wants and wishes and together they look at the consequences returning back may have on the individuals concerned, this also as means of seeing how IOM can be of assistance.

10. Evaluation

How is the practice evaluated, how are the effects measured?

- Are there any predetermined goals established
- Are there any external evaluators involved, in- or external standards that need to be met?

What do the implementers think of the practice, what about the participants?

In the case of illegal immigrants who opt to take the voluntary return option, they are given a lump sum of 2000 euro with which they can start a small business at country of origin. IOM organises a meeting with the clients in their country of origin in order to assess the clients situation after some months. Cases of asylum seekers opting to take the voluntary return option however are not as yet followed. It is thought that having a similar option for asylum seekers like the one implemented for illegal immigrants is the way forward.

Conclusion:

What do you think of the practice you described? Do you have recommendations, remarks? Would you recommend it for your own organisation. How, or why not?

In Malta there are entities looking after voluntary return, its promotion and implementation. However I feel that we still lack its promotion in the centres we run. Seeing the way other centres function and how the information is disseminated, I felt that in this way clients could make an informed decision, as informed decisions come only when all information (not partial) is at hand.