

Kathryn Baldacchino – OIWAS, Malta

My work with The Organisation for the Integration and Welfare of Asylum Seekers (OIWAS) largely centres around policy, practice, vulnerable persons and the dissemination of information. Therefore this ENARO/HUB-opportunity meant a great chance to learn more about how different countries within Europe are coping with irregular migration so that I have a wider breadth of information to influence my work.

I was particularly interested in this exchange because of its focus on the reception conditions for vulnerable groups of people. This is an area of my work in which, at the time, I was investing a lot of energy and it is something that I am keen to develop. In particular I was looking for different ways of assessing vulnerability and the needs attached to the different types of vulnerability.

For me it was also an opportunity to develop European contacts, which would benefit the organisation and possible pave ways for further collaboration.

Ireland

I visited Ireland, which is such a fabulous country. I experienced a number of surprises:

- I was surprised to learn that medical clearances are not a mandatory part of the irregular migration process.
- I was surprised to learn that asylum seekers are not assessed for vulnerability; rather individual needs are addressed within mainstream services without identifying the person as vulnerable.
- I was surprised to learn that asylum seekers are not permitted to work and that they are given all food and material requirements for the length of time they live in the accommodation centres, which could be up to five years.

Good practices

The Irish system emphasises the use of mainstream services for asylum seekers, which I thought, was a good practice in order to facilitate integration. This was very interesting and something that Malta practices. However it was very interesting seeing this practice in a context that has been dealing with asylum seekers for a longer period than Malta. I found the structures more established and knowledgeable on the entitlements of asylum seekers.

I also think that the initial reception arrangement is a good practice whereby new arrivals are housed at a reception centre in Dublin where they can receive medical clearances and administrative needs can be addressed. Residents have freedom of movement and have access to social services, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner and primary needs services.

Another good practice is the Dispersal Policy whereby after the period in the initial reception centre, asylum seekers are dispersed to various accommodation centres throughout Ireland in the hope that the amounts distributed around the country can be absorbed into the local community.

In my work on Malta, I have used the information about Irish return policies whereby Irish Ambassadors have visited the countries of origin in order to facilitate an agreement to provide travel documents and return. I have also used information about mainstream services to continue, support and encourage this practice in Malta.

ENARO

I think that exchanges like this are important to learn from, because it involves people from different social and political backgrounds into new contexts and the evaluation of systems and structures in place. While this is not completely objective owing to the prejudices and experiences of the participants, it does offer a more objective insight into best practices. This exchange was also beneficial insofar as I developed contacts with various agencies and stakeholders in the asylum field. I think that it is important to consider that certain practices work in Ireland due to the political and social context in which they are implemented; however certain practices are not transferable to different contexts.