

**Roberto Calleja – OIWAS, Malta**

The reason why I wanted to participate in the exchange programme was to be able to meet persons who work with asylum seekers in different countries and together share the information and practices. In this way, we could learn and improve our services and share ideas.

**Madrid**

I visited Madrid, Spain where I had the opportunity to meet persons working in one of the reception centres. I was also introduced to different NGOs who work with asylum seekers, mainly Red Cross, UNHCR and others related to legal services. I was surprised by the involvement of the NGOs in the asylum seeker process. A large percentage of the work is covered by NGOs. The reception centre I visited was very well kept and well organized and it was in the middle of a residential area, easily accessible by transport services. Another thing that surprised me was the fact that asylum seekers get an automatic work permit after 6 months and they can obtain a longer permit of residence after a few years.

**Good practices**

- Psychologist and Social worker at the centre I visited. If these persons are not available in the centre, then they are available nearby in the community;
- There is a lot of assistance and information for persons wanting to enter the employment market; A variety of support from staff together with electronic and printed information are available for asylum seekers seeking employment;
- Free Legal Aid all throughout the asylum procedure;
- NGOs are very much involved in the Asylum Seeker Issues;
- UNHCR has a strong say in the Asylum Seeker Acceptance Process which guarantees more quality and fairness to the asylum seekers.

**Challenges**

- I feel that there are benefits if the Medical Assessment would be done earlier in the asylum seeker's process and not after the person has already been in the country for approximately more than 2 weeks;
- I believe it would help if the staff is more aware of and would start tackling mental health and trauma issues from the initial stages of asylum seeking process.

In Malta, we are working to improve the network of organizations working with asylum seekers so that there will be a more efficient nationwide service and minimize overlapping. We are also working to have electronic and printed information regarding employment and other useful issues available for asylum seekers living in our residential homes and in the community.

**ENARO**

There is a wealth of information in different countries about asylum seekers and the services related to them in each country. ENARO has started this process of sharing this information and I feel that it is extremely helpful. This information sharing and the opportunity for workers from one country to visit others and see how the system works offers a great learning experience, more than reading reports, and should be assisted as much as possible. It is also good to keep in mind that each country has its own realities, resources and limitations and these should be kept in mind when working together on different issues and when drafting policy within the EU.