

APPOGG

Għat-Tfal, Familji, u l-Komunità

The integration of asylum seekers into Maltese society

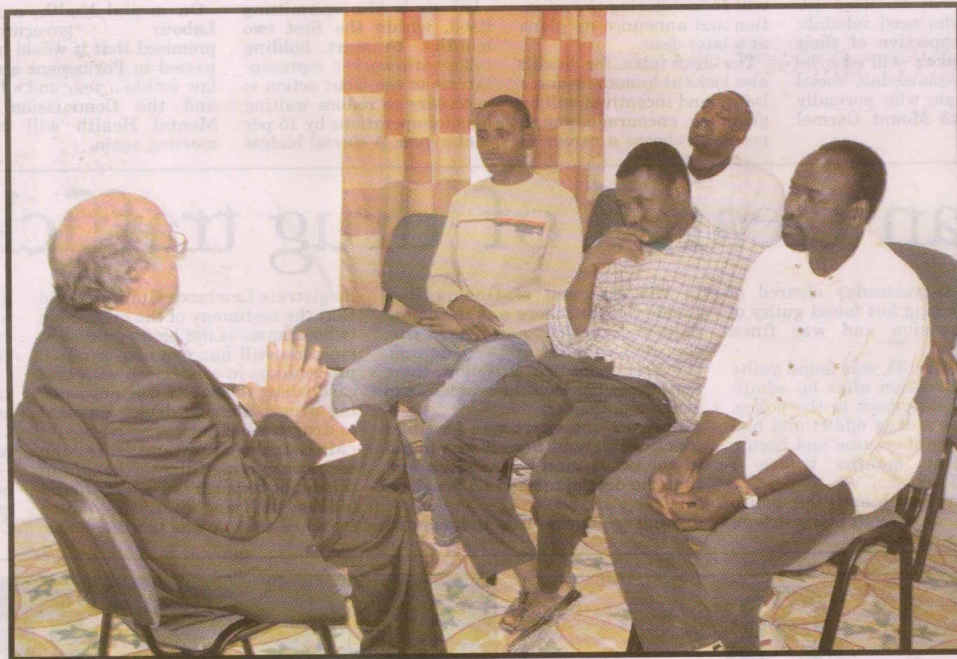
STEPHEN C. VELLA

"Integration of Asylum Seekers into Maltese Society" is an EQUAL project which is being part-financed by the European Union - European Social Fund. Its project leader is *Agenzija Appogg*, an agency within the Foundation for Social Services. *Appogg* already offers some services to asylum seekers, which cover both the basic needs and the social needs of these individuals in order to help them meet their needs with dignity and respect, and enhance their quality of life.

This project, however, goes beyond the provision of food, shelter and social work interventions. Its aim is, in fact, to provide training to asylum seekers on various topics, together with vocational training, while offering them the necessary support and guidance. This is being done to help asylum seekers to empower themselves to become self-sufficient and independent, prepare them for employment in Malta (and not only), and to build a sense of community between asylum seekers themselves as well as with the Maltese society.

This multi-pronged project, as one might rightly expect, is a very delicate one. The needs of the asylum seekers vary, and the current situation necessitates the following objectives, which were identified as the main goals of the project.

- To improve the personal situation and labour market prospects of asylum seekers - in the context of domestic legislation;
- Develop training to enable asylum seekers to access mainstream support for training and employment;
- Support asylum seekers to play a role in society and manage their own lives;
- Prepare asylum seekers for social and vocational integration;
- Develop support for asylum seekers to improve labour market integration in Malta and reintegration in their country of origin;
- Improve access to education and employment within the scope of domestic policy;



- Develop an employment strategy which is appropriate to the needs of asylum seekers and those allowed to live and work in Malta.

How it will be addressed by the Project

This EQUAL project will offer asylum seekers the necessary support, training, guidance and possibly work placements or apprenticeships within the limitations of the current legislation. Also, the training courses offered to participants will cover topics for both social and, at a later stage, vocational integration. Courses are in English, so that participants will not be limited to integration only in Malta but also in other European countries - if there is no possibility of reintegration in their country of origin. Also, if possible, access to further education and

vocational training will be provided to participants.

With the implementation of this project, and the mainstreaming activities, it is envisaged that the needs of asylum seekers will be addressed and then an appropriate policy will be developed. One of the tangible deliverables of this project will be the development of a database that can record the skills, qualifications and training undergone by asylum seekers in order to facilitate their work placement.

The innovative element of this project is primarily that the activities will all be targeted towards asylum seekers and are tailored specifically for this target group. Also, this will be the first time that local partners are collaborating on this type of project and for this target group.

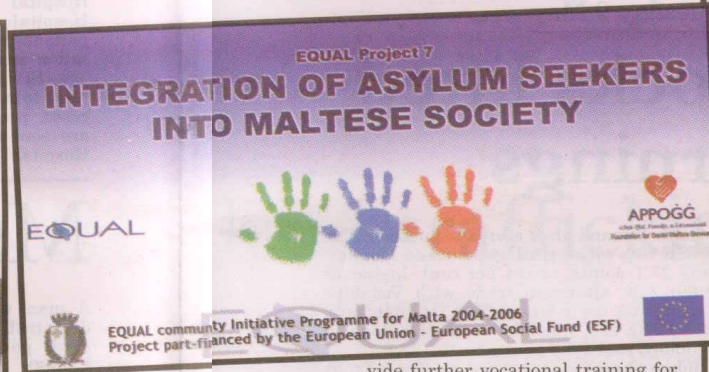
Another innovative element will be

the transnational collaboration of the local partner with the foreign partners (Italy, Germany, Greece and Portugal) participating in EQUAL. From this exchange, local partners are sharing experiences and "best practices" used in each other's countries.

Empowerment

The empowerment principle will be fulfilled at two levels. The first level is the target group, which are, in this case, asylum seekers. The second level is the Development Partners and the other participants in the Thematic Network.

At the first level, the participants will be empowered in various ways. The most frequent method will be by evaluation and feedback on each course, which should also be taken into consideration in the design



and implementation of the subsequent courses. The participants can also be self-empowered by identifying their strengths and their training needs. The participants will be encouraged to work towards building a career, whether locally or abroad, and to work towards their inclusion in society.

At the second level, that of Development Partners, each partner will be jointly responsible in the implementation and running of the project, responsibilities, such as monitoring and evaluation, or transnational collaboration, could also be totally delegated to one or more development partners, thus ensuring their empowerment.

Activities

The activities within this first phase of the project consist of training courses for asylum seekers, such as English language courses so that participants can obtain working knowledge of the English language, and life skills courses covering various subjects such as communication, health and hygiene, nutrition, culture, and decision-making. Also, courses for employment preparation, curriculum vitae and on how to prepare for an interview will be conducted. A second phase of the project, after the first one is completed, will pro-

vide further vocational training for participants, in order for them to seek employment. The choice of courses offered, this time, will be dependent on the skills available, and at this stage, it is important to emphasise both to the employee and the employer that a traineeship will not necessarily lead to a fixed job. A case in point would be if the trainee is not granted asylum, and therefore he/she will not be eligible to remain in the country.

Stephen C. Vella is EQUAL Project Leader within the Foundation for Social Welfare Services. Appogg Agency is one of the three welfare agencies falling within the Foundation for Social Welfare Services. It has, within its areas of operations, a service specifically designed to provide social work to refugees. Support is primarily given to children and their mothers, although not exclusively. The agency also manages shelter services at Hal Far for asylum seekers, and is heavily engaged in networking with other agencies in an effort to provide an integrated service.

For further information about any service within Agenzija Appogg, the public is encouraged to call APPOGG Supportline 179, to visit the website www.appogg.gov.mt or the website of the Family and Social Solidarity Ministry, www.mfss.gov.mt.

