

THE POWER OF OLDER REFUGEES

Who cares?



Final report of A European activating survey,
building on good practice in the Netherlands



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"Old people ought to be looked after by their family."









Preface

Older refugees seem to be a forgotten and invisible group. Once they have completed their asylum application process, most of them are lost out of sight.

In their daily life, they are confronted with a triple task of aging:

They have to deal with the loss of physical functions and the loss of relatives that ageing involves.

Like everybody else, they also have to fit their past into their present life;

They have to find their way in a culturally unfamiliar environment that ascribes different meanings to the concept of old and in which the elderly are treated differently than they are used to;

They have to find a way to come to terms with the often traumatic experiences they have endured before and during the flight, and sometimes during the asylum application process as well - traumas which will often only be revealed later in life.

This does however not imply that older refugees must be seen as pitiful people.

The participants of the European Conference The Power of Older Refugees, come to the conclusion that it is a wrong approach to regard older refugees merely as victims and people who need help. They might need support, but they are also powerful people who have a lot of life experience and knowledge they want to apply in society.

To make sure the capacities of older refugees are being recognised, and that they can take responsibility for their own life, it is important that they get the opportunity to tell their life stories, (re)discover their talents and are being heard.

We thank all our partners who have been working with us on the European project the Power of Older refugees. Not only have they done a great job in showing the capacities of older refugees and asking attention for their circumstances, they also have inspired us to make a special final publication which shows a site of older refugees, that many have never seen before. 🙌

On behalf of the Foundation for the Promotion of Social participation,

Wim Budding

Director

Amsterdam, February 2009



1. The Power of Older Refugees

"If I will grow old in Africa, I will be like an opinion leader. I will be like a consultant within the village. Now here that doesn't apply. So, it looks my growing old is a sort of a waste of all I have acquired, because I will not be able to pass it into the use of a generation who will come."
(A man of 61 years, from Uganda, has lived in London for 20 years).

"I cannot live without my children! I don't know why, but I cannot be without them. They are already grown, and they can manage on their own, but I cannot without them. With them I feel stronger, I don't know how to explain, but alone I couldn't... I would not have the power to live without them."
(Bosnian woman, 47 years old, has lived in Berlin for 15 years).

"I don't understand why Belgium doesn't use the capacities of the people who come new into the country. I get social support, but that makes me feel ashamed. I would prefer to teach in the university or use my experience in the world of theatre. I teach on a voluntary basis in the Centrale, that gives me some satisfaction... It is amazing how hard it is to even get a permission to sell stuff on the market. I am trying for four years to get this permission, but it is easier to win the Nobel price, than to get a permission to sell second hand stuff in Ghent."
(57 year old man from Iraq, has lived in Ghent for 7 years).

I am a human being, not something created from heaven. In Austria you can say this in the open, but in Iran you cannot. I don't believe in heaven, it doesn't come from heaven, but from this earth, I am a human being on the earth... I don't expect anything from heaven, friends, backwards and forwards, and that is my power, everything comes from me (my own effort)"
(An Iranian man, 55 years old, has lived in Vienna for 18 years).

These are just some quotes of older refugees living in European cities. They show, in a nutshell, some of the major questions older refugees face in their new country.

1.1. Project: Power of Older Refugees

When reflecting on the position of refugees in Europe, the asylum policy and the necessity to harmonise European asylum policies come to mind. Only few people realise that there is a growing group of older refugees in various European countries for whom issues such as social exclusion, care and social participation are at least as important as for example admission procedures and the right to international protection. Older refugees in Europe come from countries such as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Congo, Vietnam, Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also from countries within Europe, such as Bosnia and Albania.

The studies that have been published so far concerning the position of older refugees especially focus on definitions and numbers. There is little attention to the experiences and the needs of older refugees. From 2000 till 2005, BMP foundation (Foundation for the promotion of social participation) has developed a programme, in cooperation with several partners¹ in the Netherlands.

The programme concentrated on mapping the experiences and the issues of older refugees on the one hand, and on the other challenges older refugees to show others who they are by participating in programmes that focus on life stories and expression (so called LOV programmes).

Questions on a European level

The experiences in the Netherlands with empowerment programmes for older refugees lead to the following questions on a European level:

1. What do we know about the social position of older refugees in other European countries, and how can we exchange information, experiences and possible (policy) actions?
2. What other methods have been developed in other countries to break through the social isolation of older refugees? How can we learn from these examples?
3. Can the method and the programmes that have been developed in the Netherlands be of interest to NGOs, refugees community organisations or professional institutions in other countries?
4. What can we learn from the implementation of the LOV method in other countries?

To find an answer to these questions the BMP Foundation and the Dutch Council for Refugees started the European project The Power of Older Refugees, in 2006. The objective of this project is:

Objective

1. To survey what is known about older refugees within the member states of the European Union, and which programmes and methods have been developed to improve their position;
2. To make an active contribution aimed at making organisations of/for refugees, local authorities, care institutions, churches and other organisations in Europe aware of the issues and the power of older refugees;
3. To implement the method and formats, which have been developed in the empowerment project in the Netherlands in close collaboration with local and national organisations on site, in three other European countries;
4. The development of town twinning exchange programmes between local departments of The Dutch Council for Refugees which have experience with empowerment programmes and local organisations in other European countries that want to set up such a project;
To ensure the transfer of knowledge with regard to the position of older refugees in Europe, and to develop new action perspectives for policy makers, professionals and interest groups.
- 5.

In order to achieve these objectives the project has six separate tracks which reinforce each other:

1. Organising individual and group interviews with older refugees in four European cities[□], in order to gain insight in the questions refugees face when growing older in a country that is not their own.
2. Organising an urban conference in the same four cities, about the position of older refugees and the role local governments, organisations and institutions can play to reinforce this position.

3. Organising a local empowerment programme for older refugees in Berlin, Ghent, London and Vienna, based on the method and the format that was developed in the Dutch empowerment project Levensloop Oudere Vluchtelingen (LOV).
4. Executing a panel study in accordance with the Delphi method (future oriented research), in twelve European countries, among professionals who deal with older refugees, representatives of self-help organisations of refugees and policymakers on local and national level.
5. Organising a European conference in Amsterdam on the position of older refugees in Europe, where the results of the different parts of the project *The Power of Older Refugees* will be presented and discussed.
6. Organising a twinning programme for local branches of The Dutch Council for Refugees and the four main partners, to get acquainted and create opportunities for further partnership.

In this paper we will first give a short description of the set up of the four basic elements of the project POR. Next we will further examine who older refugees are.

The interviews

The main partners in Berlin, Ghent, London, and Vienna, each interviewed about ten older refugees from different backgrounds about their personal history, their perception of age, their social relations, their education and job experiences, their personal strength and their ideas about the future.

The objective of the interviews was to obtain more knowledge about the personal perspectives of older refugees; to see where their strength lies and to give them the feeling they are being heard. The interviews were also meant to gather input for the urban conferences in the four cities.

The interviews all took several hours and had the character of an open conversation rather than a strict interview. In addition to the personal interviews, the partners organised two group interviews in which the participating refugees could discuss their experiences and answers with each other. The second paragraph of this introduction paper we present some statements and conclusions from the interviews.

Urban conferences

Between January and May 2008 four urban conferences were organised in the cities of Berlin, Ghent, London, and Vienna. The aim of these conferences was to raise awareness about the position of older refugees in the cities, and to develop new action perspectives for the participating organisations and institutions. In three of the four urban conferences the Meta-plan method was used. This method makes it easy to make a quick inventory of the existing knowledge within a group and to develop new action plans based on this shared insight.

The conference in London was held in the City Hall of the Greater London Authority on 9 January 2008, and it was organised by the British Refugee Council, Age Concern and The Association of Greater London Women.. There were approximately one hundred participants: representatives of organisations for the elderly; local



governments; charities; refugee organisations; Metropolitan Police; and others. The main topic of the conference was breaking the isolation of older refugees and seeking possibilities to promote their integration. During the conference there was much input from a two year, joint project on older refugees, that had been organised by the British Refugee Council and care organisation Age Concern. The conference led to several follow-up actions, such as a meeting with the Metropolitan Police to discuss the safety of older refugees.

The conference in Ghent took place on 10 April 2008 and was attended by nine representatives of local services: for refugees; for the elderly; social security; intercultural activities; and others. It was the first time the issues of older refugees were addressed on a local level in Ghent. The participants used the Meta-plan method to analyse the social position of older refugees. At the end they formulated future actions in the field of participation and language support.

The urban conference in Berlin was held on 16 May. The programme of the conference lasted from 9.30 till 16.00 hrs. There was an introduction to the project POR; a lecture about the psychosocial situation of older refugees; a summary of the interviews; a discussion about the intercultural opening of the care institutions in Berlin; and a discussion using the Meta-plan method, about the way older refugees can be better supported and taken care of. There were about thirty-five participants in this conference. Later the conference led to an article about older refugees in a magazine and to further plans to open a special centre for older refugees.

In Vienna, 19 participants took part in the conference, which was held on 25 April. After assign the major issues in relation to the social position of older refugees, they divided themselves into two working groups, one looking at labour and participation and one discussing necessary measures in the care system. The conference ended with some agreements on further cooperation between the representatives of the organisations and the (local) government.

The Delphi research

The Delphi research was carried out among partners in 11 countries, amongst representatives of refugee organisations, local and national governments, universities, and other relevant organisations.

The objective of the research was to obtain more knowledge about the position of older refugees in Europe; to see whether and how many differences there are between the European countries; and to develop possible policy strategies to improve the (life) situation of older refugees.

The people who participated were invited to express their own opinions and experiences, rather than to produce figures and statistical data.

Three (open) questionnaires were sent and returned by e-mail. Each round led to a report, on which the questions of the next round were based. The participants were known to the researchers but remained anonymous to each other.

Two categories of partners took part in the Delphi research. In countries with relatively few older refugees there was one partner organisation. The representative of this organisation completed the questionnaires

based on personal knowledge and experience. In countries with relatively many older refugees, a maximum of four respondents from different organisations cooperated in the survey. In total 24 respondents participated in the Delphi research.

They can be divided in the following categories:

University	2
Organisation for refugees	5
Centre for torture victims	2
Reception centre for Newcomers	1
Health Centre for migration	1
Ministry / state representative	2
Social centre	1
Red Cross	2
Organisation for elderly people	2
Women's organisation	1
Organisation for intercultural relations	2
Centre for a specific group of refugees	3

The Delphi survey lead to many interesting conclusions and possible future actions on a local, national and European level. The main conclusion was the necessity to develop a two-track policy on older refugees which focuses on their skills and capacities and their need for empowerment and participation on the one hand, and the development of programmes for the intercultural opening of mainstream institutions and structures in the fields of labour care and so on, on the other hand. In the separate papers for the working groups we will go deeper into the outcomes of this survey.

Local empowerment programme (LOV)

The main partners were asked to organise a local empowerment programme within their city for a mixed group of 10 to 15 older refugees, based on the format developed in the Dutch LOV projects (Life Stories of Older Refugees).

The local empowerment pilots were set up to break the isolation and loneliness of older refugees, by focussing on their power and skills. The intention was also to see if relatively short programmes with mixed groups of refugees, that ended in a final presentation for an audience, could be successful in different European cities. The partners were free to choose the kind of expression method they wanted to use to tell the life stories of the participating older refugees: theatre, music, art or photography, for example. The groups were supposed to meet 5 to 8 times to tell their stories and prepare a final presentation. The partner organisation received a budget to contract an artist/teacher to assist the group on an artistic level. In the pilots the process within the groups and the final products were considered to be equally important. The final presentation was meant for an audience of relatives, friends, and representatives of various organisations.

Between June and the beginning of August 2008, three presentations took place in Ghent, Berlin and London. All three were visited by employees of BMP Foundation.

In Vienna the project leader and teacher decided they needed more time to complete the project, and postponed their presentation to the spring of 2009.

In Ghent a performance with the title: "*I remember a land of milk and honey*" was given in the Theatre hall of the intercultural centre De Centrale on Friday 27 June. Before an audience of about sixty people a group of older refugees told, in a powerful and vulnerable way, their life stories by speech, singing, dance and painting. In Berlin a group of older and one young refugee played the piece "Café Morning red" during the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Zentrum für Flüchtlingshilfe und Migrationsdienste, for an audience of about hundred people. The piece was composed by the players themselves and contained both sketches and singing.

In London a group of approximately 20 older Ethiopians told stories and poems and sang verses and lyrics about their situation, accompanied by a troubadour. During the event a video was shown of one of the group interviews and some pictures and texts were shown highlighting the historical ties between Ethiopia and Great Britain and the factors that force Ethiopians to flee their country. The event took place in the centre of the Ethiopian Community in Britain.

In Vienna the participants of the empowerment programme showed the progress in their theatrical work to two representatives of BMP Foundation and one representative of The Amsterdam branch of Dutch Council for Refugees in October 2008.

The experiences with the four pilots lead to the conclusion that the basic format of the empowerment programmes works rather positively, in the sense that the participants really enjoyed the programmes, felt much appreciated by the project leaders, the teachers, and the audience, and are encouraged to engage in further activities where they can meet other people. They have discovered new talents and have discovered new topics to discuss with their relatives and friends. The circumstances of the partner organisations in the other European cities have led to some adjustments in the basic format, or, to be more precise, to some alternative possibilities of use.

The twinning part of the project POR led to more contacts and cooperation between the Amsterdam and the Hague branches of the Dutch Council for Refugees and the parties in Berlin and Vienna.

1.2. The situation of older refugees

Above we described the basic principles and the set up of the project Power of Older Refugees. In the following paragraph we want to analyse the personal perspectives and the general position of older refugees, as they came forward in the interviews, the urban conferences and the Delphi survey.

Older refugees in Europe come from many different countries, both in- and outside Europe. The people who were interviewed within the project POR came from countries such as: Afghanistan, Argentina, Bosnia, Burundi, Congo, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Kosovo, Palestine, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Ukraine. . Not only do they differ in country of origin and cultural backgrounds, but also in age and level of education. Additionally, there also is a great variety in the length of their stay in the receiving country. Currently, it is difficult to give an estimated figure about the amount of older refugees living in Europe, due to lack of data. What we do know is that their number is increasing and that many European cities face the challenge of growing diversity amongst their elderly population.

At what age is a refugee old?

When we talk about older refugee, the first question asked is at what age refugees can be seen as old.

In the interviews we asked the participating older refugees at what age a person can be considered old, and if they themselves feel old. Based on their responses we can conclude that this varies from country to country. Some quotes:

"In Afghanistan you are old when you are 45.

In Rwanda you are old when you are over 60.

In Burundi you are old when you are 45.

In Sudan you are old when you are 70 years or more. From this age on they don't wear bright colours any more.

In Congo you are old when you have grandchildren. This is true in the village; in the city it is mostly your physical condition that counts."

According to the interviewed refugees there are three important factors which determine whether someone is old:

1. Personal character
2. Cultural background
3. Health and psychological condition

There was a different outcome of the same question when asked to the Delphi respondents, who are mostly not refugees themselves. They think that the age at which a refugee is considered to be old, is mostly determined by his or her relation to labour market, whereas the personal character of the refugees was not especially named as an important factor in the survey

The interviewed refugees not only think that someone's character influences his perception of age, they also notice a difference in perception between refugees who entered the receiving country at a relatively young

age and are now getting older, and refugees who came when they were older. People who entered the host country at a relative early age, often feel rather young, because they still have the feeling they are working hard to make a new start. To them old age is sometimes a frightening perspective, because they are afraid to fall into insecurity again.

Refugees who came to the new country when they were already older, mostly feel old, because they feel isolated from their origin and personal history, and because they find it difficult to learn a new language and find their way in a completely different society.

Individual statements about old age and getting older

To give an impression of the diversity in the answers of older refugees to the question what it means to get older, we quote some of their statements:

- *I have lived through so many experiences it seems to me as if I have already lived 100 years.*
- *I don't feel old, not on the outside and not on the inside, but I notice my body gets older. My legs already hurt a bit.*
- *Getting older in itself is beautiful, but when you don't have any savings, when you are always depending on others and you are afraid to lose everything again, then it is not pleasant.*
- *Loneliness is the biggest problem. I miss my family.*
- *Here it is no good getting older, people don't move. In Rwanda you never are alone. Homes for the elderly seem horrible to me. In Rwanda there are a lot of orphans, you can always take a young woman who is alone, into your house.*
- *I am older than I am inside, because of what I have gone through in a strange land. 50 + is too old to integrate.*
- *Getting older means you have more experience, you are better educated, you can handle responsibilities.*
- *Getting older depends on the society you live in, depends on the freedom to speak and from the energy you have. If you can't speak up, there will be a blockage. As long as you can express everything that is inside your head, you don't feel old. When society doesn't accept you expressing yourself, then you lose your energy.*
- *Getting older is becoming wiser, not so angry anymore... The important issue of getting older is the difference I as a woman, have made to my African community.*
- *I like to go back home before I die. So I am afraid that I may die before I go home. That is my fear.*
- *I am in the hands of this good government, you see. They take care of old people when they go to care homes, but I don't like to reach that stage.*

Some statements about power

We also asked the older refugees what they consider to be their power. In their answers they often related to their personal character:

- *My power is my optimism and my humour.*
- *I get comfort and power from my children, but I don't want to lean on them.*
- *My intellectualism and the fact that I can write my book are giving me strength.*

- *My power are my man and child, my faith, life itself and the fruits of labour.*
- *My power is the fact that I stand with both legs on the earth, and of course my family.*
- *What gives me power is to see others who have found their way and who have managed to learn this language.*
- *My power is God and the knowledge there are people of good will. I have an intellectual capacity, which I want to use for society, but I don't have any work.*
- *My power is my inner spirit, my love for people, my love for my God, my love for my community, for my family, particularly for my boys. I have plans to develop a women's centre where women could come in and use the skills and that God given talent and potential to make themselves better citizens.*

Some general qualifications to the position of older refugees

Although the interviews and also the Delphi survey show many differences in the circumstances and the perceptions of older refugees, the material collected in the project enables us to give some general qualifications about the position of older refugees in Europe.

One of the most striking elements is the fact that older refugees are in many ways an invisible group. There are several causes for this:

- Older refugees often belong to a rather small community;
- Many refugees do not have family structures to rely upon;
- Their personal history of fleeing combined with all the sad memories, can cause deep depressions (which often lead to isolation);
- Suffering from the long lasting uncertainty about their appeal for a legal status, especially in Germany (a waiting period of several years is no exception, which keeps them living apart from society).
- Severe health problems as a result of the circumstances in which they had to survive;
- Difficulties in learning the new language, therefore they cannot apply their knowledge and experience.
- Dependence on their children, especially the women
- The constant struggle with the question whether it would not be better, if possible, to return to the country of origin;
- Little or no insight in the functioning of the society if the host country in general and the care system in particular ;
- In many cases, but certainly not all, a fear for care homes for the elderly.
- In many cases a very bad financial position and bad housing situation.

Strength and talents

Yet many of the older refugees who have been interviewed in the project POR, also show us a different image. Not only are they tremendous survivors with great inner strength, they are also people with very rich personal life histories, many unused talents and life experience.

The interviews show that:

- Many older refugees are grateful for the safety and support they receive in the host country.
- Most of the interviewed people are well to highly educated, but find it hard to get a job. Even when they are only fifty, they are considered too old to work.



- Almost everyone interviewed thinks their family and their community will take care of them when they are no longer able to look after themselves. Some hope they can return to their country before this happens. Some are happy with the care system in the host country and do not want to be a burden to their children.
- Most of the interviewed refugees are very, very proud of their children. They are happy their children took the opportunities the new country offered, and say their bond with their children is deep and profound. Some admit the relationship with the children can be a bit difficult, because the children don't show respect to their parents in the way they respected their own parents. But mostly they realise that circumstances are quite different in the new society.
- Many of the interviewed regret they cannot contribute to society in the way they want to, but many find some way or another to feel useful. They show a great desire to use their experience, knowledge and talents within the own community and in a wider perspective.

Comparable circumstances in different European cities

Both the interviews and the Delphi survey lead to the conclusion that in general, despite the cultural and structural differences within the various Member States, it doesn't seem to make a large difference whether you are an older refugee in Berlin, Ghent, London or Vienna,. Closer reading of the interview reports makes clear that there are some slight differences in the position of older refugees that were interviewed in the four cities.

The older refugees in Ghent seem more lonely and more isolated, because they often have no family, the refugee communities are small, or do not exist at all, they are relatively new in the country and they experience Belgian society as a rather closed one.

The interviewed refugees in Berlin were mostly of former Yugoslavian origin. Many of them have severe trauma's and health problems. Most remarkable about their situation are the strong ties with their children and the little contact they have with Germans. One lady said she often looked at the television to see how German women behave.

The Ethiopian refugees who were mostly interviewed in London, showed very rich life stories, most remarkable in their interviews was their self awareness and at the same time, the great loss of status they have to face. Although many of them live in London for quite a long time, most of their social contacts seem to take place within their own community.

The refugees who were interviewed in Vienna are well aware there are some racist tendencies in this country but also see a lot of positive things in Austrian society.

Some conclusions

The material gathered in the project the Power of Older Refugees shows to be very rich. It gives an impression about the way older refugees from various countries look at themselves, how they experience the fact that they are growing older and what they hope for the future. Based on all the collected information, experiences, opinions and thoughts of all the people who participated in the various parts of the project we can draw the following general conclusions.

Four parts of project POR seem to be successful

The interviews brought many interesting life stories and knowledge about the individual perspectives of older refugees. They show various individual differences, but also the characteristics of a shared social position. The interviewing helped the partners to gain the confidence of older refugees and to select the participants for the local empowerment programmes.

The urban conferences were attended by the representatives of organisations and services they were meant for. As hoped, they helped to raise awareness about the vulnerable position of many older refugees. At the same time it strengthened the conclusion that older refugees themselves are an important source of knowledge to those who want to promote the integration of older refugees in society as well as in the structures and institutions of the European Member States.

When we look at the results of the urban conferences and the **Delphi survey** we notice that a large emphasis is laid on the importance of special programmes for the participation and empowerment of older refugees, which focus on their skills, resilience, strength, capacities to build a new life, and their eagerness to contribute to society in one way or another. Another important conclusion in which the urban conferences and the Delphi survey reinforce each other, is the importance of the introduction of intercultural approaches in the fields of elderly care, mental care, labour and housing. Training of staff and other employees, and involvement of older refugees with the design of the services provided are considered to be important elements in the intercultural opening that should be supported both on local and a national level.

The **local empowerment programmes** in which life stories were combined with various expression methods, seem to be successful in the area of empowerment. The pilots lead to several new applications of the method developed in the Netherlands, which makes the scopes of these programmes even broader.

Different perspectives on age

First we want look at the question when a refugee can be considered to be old. Our conclusion is that there is not one specific age we can use to define the group of older refugees. In terms of pension and finances, older refugees are confronted with the same age regulations as other people in the host country. (The only problem is they mostly did not have the opportunity to build up any financial reserves).

In terms of labour, they often face more age discrimination than native inhabitants, or a combination of ethnic and age discrimination.

When it comes to housing and (medical) care, they are relatively younger than other people when they are in need of special attention.

The age at which older refugees consider themselves to be old, varies depending on their character, cultural background, experiences in life and the opportunities they have to speak out and be recognized as a valuable member of society.

Older migrants are not the same

On other conclusions which we can derive from the material collected in the project is that there is a firm difference between older migrants and older refugees. Not only because older refugees didn't choose to leave their country, looking for better opportunities, but had to leave by force, but also because their families in many cases live spread all over the world. Another difference is that they often have to integrate in a new society at an age, at which other people start to rethink their past and the relevance of their experiences.

Strong communities in London

Although there seem to be considerable differences in the integration policies of countries such as Austria and Germany, and Great Britain for instance, the actual social situation of older refugees seems very similar. When we compare the results of the interviews and the Delphi questionnaires there seems to be one relevant difference in the social position of older refugees in the four cities: The existence of relatively strong refugee communities in London that play an important role in the integration policy. In the other cities the main focus of the policy seems to lie more in opening up mainstream institutions and structures to improve their access for older refugees and migrants.

Special attention for the relationship between older and younger refugees

In the interviews the older refugees often mention the relationship with their children to be of great importance. Many of the interviewed people tell us they are very proud of the achievements of their children. The Delphi survey on the other hand shows that within organisations and institutions that deal with refugee issues, the relationship between parents and children is an item of great concern. This, what seems to be a contradiction, is an issue to be worked out during the conference.

Local and European level

Both in the urban conferences and in the Delphi survey, the local level is seen as very important for the integration and participation of older refugees. It is on this level, that empowerment programmes and new developments in the fields of care, housing and labour are created.

The national and European levels are mostly seen as important in creating the (legal) conditions for local governments, refugee organisations and institutions to meet the needs of older refugees. A special point of attention on the European level is the legal status of older refugees in the various Member States and the policy on family reunification, which often makes it hard for older refugees to stay with their relatives. The EU is thought to play an important role in this matter. To make sure the special group of older refugees does not remain invisible and living in isolation, it is very important to include refugees in the integration policy of the EU and to make sure Refugee Organisations can be part of the European Integration Forum.✎

“if my childhood was for sale, i’d buy it...”





2. The position of older refugees on a local level, future actions

Although older refugees depend strongly on decisions made at a national level, when it comes to their legal status and their financial position, decision making at the local level is extremely important for them when it comes to their daily life. At this level arrangements for housing, care and participation in society are made and at which individual older refugees aim to fulfil, at least part of, their ambitions and dreams.

In this evaluation report we will focus mostly on the outcomes of the four urban conferences the main partners in the project organised in Berlin, Ghent, London, and Vienna. Representatives of organisations in the fields of care, housing, social services, of local governments and of organisations for-and-of refugees were invited to participate in these conferences. They were asked what they consider to be the most important issues in relation to the position of older refugees and which future local actions should be taken. Many of the topics covered in the urban conferences were also mentioned by the participants in the Delphi survey. First we will describe the results of the urban conferences, then we will give some additional observations from the Delphi survey, concluding with the main questions for workshop 1.

Language and education

Participants in all four urban conferences emphasised the importance of language support and learning opportunities for older refugees. In their opinion language is the key to participation even at an older age. Yet there needs to more understanding of how older age impacts how people learn. In all cities the participants agreed that for those older people who aren't able to speak the new language well enough, the use of interpreters should be available. According to the participants it is also important to learn from bad practices, like for example the translation of written material in many languages never seems to be effective. In the Delphi survey numerous possible (future) actions on language and education were given, many of which can be implemented on a local level:

- Language courses made for older refugees, with specific methodology and learning methods, paid by the (local) government (14 x).
- Recognition of the qualifications of older refugees (4 x).
- Introduction to and familiarisation with the system and values of society (2 x).
- Possibilities for transfer of knowledge.
- Strategies for the inclusion of the refugee community in the teaching community.
- Scholarships for trainings and workshops.
- Academic training to adapt to the receiving local market, taking into account previous experience.
- Older refugees should be given the opportunity to learn new skills or to adapt their transferable skills.

Information

According to the participants in the various urban conferences older refugees have a great need for specific information, distributed through their own networks. This information should concern topics such as: pensions and financial assistance, health care, housing issues, transport and so on. The information should be spread with assistance of people from the various communities who can easily contact the older refugees. If this is impossible, the information should be given with assistance of interpreters.

Participation

According to the participants in all four urban conferences, older refugees need to be active participants in society. This means that there should be attention for their empowerment from a very early stage. Their competences, skills and experience should be recognised and they should be seen as powerful people. In order to make active participation possible, refugees community organisations should be supported in developing new forms of partnership and capacity building. For older refugees, special centres where they can meet older refugees from their own and other communities are a great necessity. In these centres they can practice their language skills, tell their stories and develop plans to reach out to society.

For some older refugees finding a paid job is a life goal. Vocational training in cooperation with employers and supporting older refugees in the process of obtaining qualification and their job search, are very important to them. For many however, access to the labour market seems rather impossible. Other activities and opportunities to use their capacities and contribute to society need be developed for those who do not participate in the labour market. In Berlin the organisation of intercultural film and theatre festivals is mentioned as a possibility to promote the participation of older refugees.

All respondents from the Delphi survey are convinced participation in society is very important for the well being of older refugees. Participation is considered to consist of three different tracks, which are equally important:

1. Access to the labour market, social services, social security and full rights;
2. Developing relationships with nationals and participating in mainstream social and cultural activities, as well as co-designing services to be provided.
3. Finding ways to express themselves, developing personal networks and contributing to the community.

Labour

- Access to the labour market in general (4 x).
- Education and training in general (4 x).
- Creation of special ethnic employment facilities is mentioned (4 x), although one of the respondents doubts whether this is a good idea, because of the vulnerability of many older refugees.
- Flexible possibilities for part-time work (community-social-work) projects where older refugees teach their mother language etc. to younger members of the community (3 x).
- Better case management in job centres, diversity training for job managers (2 x).
- Development of methods of validation of work experience (2 x).
- Positive discrimination policies for older refugees
- Monitoring the employment records of employers in relation to employment of refugees (respondent doubts if this is a good idea) but without monitoring data no benchmarks).
- Proper implementation and enforcement of the Age Equality Duty.
- The associations in the community should be supported, so they can integrate refugees with special skills and talents in an adequate working area.

Participation in a broader sense

The experiences with the local empowerment projects that were part of the project POR show that programmes which focus on the abilities of older refugees to share their life stories and to(re-) discover their talents, are a starting point for further participation on a local level, not merely in addition to existing programmes for the elderly, but in developing new programmes based on the specific needs and ambitions of older refugees. In the Delphi survey one of the respondents says:

“Older refugees should be advised to set up their own model of participation. Changing and (normally) deteriorating physical and mental capabilities should have an impact on the preferred models of participation. Therefore, it is important that the single host societies are open and flexible enough to respond to these different needs linked to the various stages of age. In my experience it is crucial that elderly people in general have a chance to live in conditions which are as stable and as oriented to continuity as possible. Concerning refugees, this is mostly combined with the need of personal exchange with persons which have been important in their biography - in their origin country as well as in their host country”

In the second Delphi round the following recommendations are made to promote the participation of older refugees:

- Including the target group in various measures of educational and social training programmes corresponding to individual knowledge and competence - specifically in connection with generation-overlapping initiatives. (4 x)
- To organise events in which older refugees can narrate their history. Via (cultural) events / empowerment programmes older refugees have the opportunity to share their life experience. (3 x)
- The promotion of voluntary activities (2 x).
- Programmes that involve cultural heritage and enable diversity, tolerance, and community cohesion (6 x)
- Life story and empowerment projects (4 X)
- “Cross-cultural intergenerational programmes can provide opportunities for older refugees to communicate and reflect on their own culture, experiences, past life, current values/views etc., as well as sharing in dialogue with other older and younger people, from different cultural backgrounds from their own.
- There may be a value and a place for cultural intergenerational programmes which are essentially ‘within’ a particular cultural group, (e.g. to pass on knowledge/experience and to share views - between the generations - about particular issues/challenges which may be affecting specific communities) and/or intergenerational programmes which explicitly aim to promote ‘cross-cultural’ dialogue and understanding. This kind of work can make an important contribution to building greater ‘community cohesion’.”
- To create and promote cultural activities related to music, dance and painting, for example, from different countries.
- “Among refugees there is usually quite a number of artists who need support since they are not able to organise and produce different kind of art events. The wider project that would aim to support artists among refugees should aim to enable refugees not only to be active as artists (production of art works) but also to keep in touch with current developments of the specific art genre they are interested and active in.”



- To create the possibility to share something about origin and experiences in schools (4 x).
- To give space and opportunities that people can meet and discuss (inter) cultural issues (2 x).
- To honour life stories publicly and create a platform for telling life stories. Try to generate respect for refugee history (2 x).
- Promote understanding between their community and the whole society, by serving as an ambassador for the history and culture of their home country (2 x)
- Promoting implementation of culture events.
- Discussing the issues in the concerned bodies on local, regional and society-based level. Politicians should listen to elderly refugees - I mean directly and not only through agents. When planning services for the elderly they should also consult elderly refugees if possible.
- Establishing a database of expertise and skills available in the group of older refugees and organise different kinds of seminars, lectures, workshops with them in different kinds of organisations and institutions in the host country. The goal is to establish an expertise centre, which would reflect on different cultures, countries and traditions, and link that centre to different institutions such as libraries, universities, high schools, but also nursing homes, etc.
- To train older, well qualified refugees as cultural mediators and trainers for fellow country men, teaching them the importance of education, learning to learn, etc..
- Experienced people could be mediators in conflicts. They can intervene in the "scene".
- Older refugees can play a very important and useful role - for someone who knows their own culture very well, and is able to communicate and establish links with the 'host community' - e.g. with other mainstream voluntary and community organisations, and/or with statutory services etc., on behalf of a group of older refugees. There is the need to ensure that this role does not become the only one for this kind of 'bridging' between different cultural groups, as it can be important to establish a range (breadth and depth) of relationships, instead of just relying on a few relationships with 'key individuals'.
- Some older refugees may have knowledge about different countries they passed through before they reached their final destination. They may be useful for a comparative studies programme.
- Promotion of communitarian associations, media, cultural activities etc.

Care and social security

In all urban conferences attention is drawn to the need to pay attention to the specific needs of older refugees in the area of care, both ambulant and stationary. Most refugees count on support and care by their families and community members, but in the event they don't have any relatives, other measures should be taken. Additional support for children who take care of their parents is one of the suggestions made. The impact of the trauma- and well being issues that many older refugees face should be recognised and special counselling should be offered on a long term base.

It is also thought to be important to invite refugees to speak about the needs they have in the field of care and also to be involved in the design of the services provided. Again refugee community organisations can play an important role in organising the participation of older refugees in these design activities.

Intercultural training of the workers in the various care institutions, as well as mediation between inhabitants of care homes with different cultural backgrounds is very important according to the participants in the urban conference. Where possible, young people from refugee communities should be approached to work in the care system.

Finally, the recommendation is made to open up not only the care system, but also the social security system in an intercultural sense. This means again, training of employees, a sensitive approach of older refugees, with the will to make exceptions in particular circumstances, the involvement of interpreters and the recognition of the desire to return to the country of origin.

In the Delphi survey almost all respondents emphasise the necessity of creating better access to care systems for older refugees and the social security structures.

Care

- Bridging contacts, multi lingual services, greater cultural awareness and sensitivity to the needs of older refugees etc. (12 x).
- Establishing specific units for traumatic disorder, and special psychological and psychotherapeutic care, paid for by health insurance companies or government (3 x)
- Socially embedded information activities (2 x)
- To improve knowledge / orientation about/ in care system (2 x)
- Homes for older people within the own community
- Promotion of community social work
- Provide free medical care to asylum seekers
- Facilitate access to social resources, such as those available to handicapped people, without any limitation related to their legal status.
- Preventative health and dental care for vulnerable groups
- Reducing the red tape (bureaucracy) in the provision of home care services.

Social service / social welfare

Two respondents in the Delphi survey mention no problems with the social system:

- "I think our social welfare system is quite developed in comparison to some European countries. Of course there is always need to create better services but I have a strong idea that in general the refugee elders are satisfied with the social- and health services in our country."
- "The social service is alright. From time to time there should be evaluations to find out necessities to change."

Others give some general advice for improvement:

- Open up to the needs of elderly refugees, better training for/of staff, translation services, information in different languages. Access to social services; adaptation of services for specific needs, bridging contacts, multilingual services. (7 x)
- More/better information and support for older refugees, and community organisations working for/ with them, to access 'mainstream' social services. Older refugees need a lot of support - e.g. information and advice, and often advocacy (IAA) support as well - to be able to effectively access social

care services that they may be entitled to. 'Navigating the system' of social care services is not easy or straightforward - much less so for older refugees - therefore providing the right kind of information and support is crucial.

- Employing staff members with a solid background and experience about the needs and characters of old refugees.
- Extra payments (social benefits) for the special needs of older refugees.
- Establish possibilities of participation and social attendance.

Housing

A last important subject on a local level concerns the housing conditions of older refugees. In all the urban conferences it was stated that older refugees often live in small houses with many relatives. Sometimes this can be seen as an advantage, because they are never lonely. But when real health problems occur, the wish for some privacy can become very urgent. Many of the older refugees who live without relatives, face great loneliness and fear their future. For them special housing projects, where they can live close to community members and some services in their own language are provided, can be of great help. People in the European cities should learn from good practices in this field.

The Delphi respondents give the following recommendations:

- Easier access to social housing, (without consideration of the legal status) (6 x)
- Offering older refugees various options they can accept or deny, living with the family or with the peer group, suitable houses that facilitate medical and psychological needs. (5 x)
- Better advice in finding and renting houses (3 x)
- Larger houses for less money (2 x).
- Create facilities for older refugees not having a family network

Specific topics mentioned in one or two conferences only

In two urban conferences (London and Vienna) special attention was asked for the position of older refugee women, who's plight is often severe. In these two cities the importance of the own community for older refugees was strongly emphasised. Within the own community there are no language barriers; people can express their emotions and they feel accepted.

In Vienna the participants suggested that the combination of an integration centre with a health care centre would be good.

In Berlin the founding of a special centre for older refugees and older migrants which has an eye for their special circumstances and needs, and offers both individual support and group activities, is strongly recommended.

In London, special attention was asked for the widening generational gap and the need to encourage an inter-generational dialogue within and between the different communities. In this city it was also strongly recommended to work with families and not just with individuals.



Main questions

The urban conference and the Delphi survey led to long lists of possible action plans and programmes to develop. The valuable suggestions are so numerous, that it is hard to decide where to start. We would like to use the discussion in the workshop to conclude which kind of issues and suggested programmes should have the most priority.

To do so, we are looking for answers to the following four questions:

- What are important issues for the position of older refugees on a local level?
- What programmes and activities should be developed to encourage the integration and participation of older refugees on a local level?
- What can we learn from each others experiences in this field?
- Who should be addressed to develop programmes on a local level?

The programme concentrated on mapping the experiences and the issues of older refugees on the one hand, and on the other challenges older refugees to show others who they are by participating in programmes that focus on life stories and expression (so called LOV programmes).✎

***“My children
are my pride.
I want to be near them”***



3. Developing a European policy on older refugees

Older refugees live in many different European countries. In some countries, like Great Britain and France, we see big populations. Their history goes back a long way. In others, for instance the new member states of the European Union (EU), the older refugee populations are rather small. Different European cities have several refugee communities of the same background. Such as Ethiopians living in London, Amsterdam and Stockholm, Bosnians in Berlin, Vienna and Amsterdam, Afghans in Berlin, Vienna, London, etc. In certain countries there are specific communities originating from special historical ties (e.g. former colonies, like the Congolese population in Belgium).

As stated in the general introduction paper, older refugees do not belong to one recognisable group. They differ according to national and cultural background, education, job experience, length of stay in the host country, personal character and flight experiences.

In this report we will give some input for the discussion about the development of a European policy on older refugees. First we will give some statements about the possible content of a European policy on older refugees in the fields of education, labour, care, housing, discrimination, financial position, legal status, social services and social welfare, as suggested by the Delphi respondents. Second, we would like to focus on the possibilities of how to stimulate the Member States to develop and implement programmes for the participation and empowerment of older refugees, based on the experiences with the POR pilots on local empowerment programmes and the outcomes of the Delphi survey. At the end of this paper we will go deeper into the call of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) to include refugees and their families in EU integration policies.

3.1. Stimulating and activating the Member States

Despite the immense differences between individual older refugees, the interviews, the urban conferences and the Delphi survey also show many similarities in the general situation of older refugees in Europe. General topics which are considered to be of importance to the position of older refugees in the different Member States of the EU are:

- Education
- Labour
- Care (medical and social)
- Housing
- Discrimination
- Financial position
- Legal status
- Social Service/ Welfare

In all these fields special programmes to make services accessible to older refugees and to give them support according to their needs are thought to be necessary. In the third round of the Delphi survey the respondents were asked to give suggestions for possible future actions. Below we will describe their suggestions for both the national and European level, intended as input for the discussion.

Education	
National	European
Initiatives raising awareness to the educational needs of older refugees	
With help of the roof-organisation of the psychosocial centres for refugees we need to raise awareness for the educational needs of older refugees.	Provide free access to education through European regulations.
Raise support for financially supported courses.	Raise support for financially supported courses.
Unbureaucratic recognition of University diploma's etc. Governments should make the process of recognition more simple.	Legal frameworks for an easier transfer of qualifications and diploma's Find common European regulations for the recognition of qualifications.
The government must continue to provide English language programmes for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) through colleges and support community based ESOL provision.	ERF (European Refugee Fund) should provide funding stream for ESOL provisions.
Finding national standards	
Create more flexible regulations improving access to education in general	Create more flexible regulations to improve access to education in general
Labour	
National	European
Create more flexible regulations to improve access to the labour market.	Create more flexible regulations to improve access to the labour market.
Abolish legal restrictions.	Unify EU law.

	Find common European regulations for better access to the labour market.
Measures to create job opportunities for unprivileged groups by the organisation.	
National network of Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) provision to share experience.	
European network of IAG provision to share experience and information (research results).	European network of IAG provision.
Less restrictive legal framework; immediate right to work.	
	Financial support
Care	
National	European
The support of the health care system.	Support older refugees financially.
Counselling care-units have to be addressed by their headquarters (e.g. DRK, Caritas, AWO).	
Creation of nationwide network of validated interpreters for information and interpretation in mother tongue.	
Create standards of services provision to older refugees and Good practice.	Create standards of services provision to older refugees and Good practice.
Continue giving financial and administrative support to model projects and initiatives as e.g. bzfo/zfm.	
Support psychological help in the regular health care system.	

In East-Germany there is a big lack of institutions working in this field, this situation really needs to be improved through political decisions.	The European network of centres working with traumatised refugees should put more pressure on the European Commission about the implementation of the EU-regulations laying down standards for traumatised refugees.
Amelioration of legal framework (in Austria competence of regions)	Amelioration of legal framework; social model
Social insurances	
Housing	
National	European
Raise awareness of political and administrative bodies.	
The entire area of housing for refugees in Germany is really problematic because the whole housing sector is private and mostly economically organised, there is very little chance to intervene. The refugees need real intensive and individual support to find possibilities for suitable housing.	idem
Sufficiency of shelters to protect the most vulnerable groups of refugees, such as children and elderly.	Financial help for special target groups, older refugees
Raise awareness of political and administrative bodies.	
Create houses adapted to older refugees' housing needs.	
Cooperation between authorities to overcome difficulties caused by bureaucracy and to facilitate housing issues of refugees.	

Discrimination	
National	European
Cooperation in human rights' networks etc.	It's necessary to put more pressure on the member states in this area, like in Germany the anti-discriminations acts do not really implement the EU-Regulations.
Design of welfare structures that supports equal rights for underprivileged groups.	Implementation of effective anti-discrimination regulations, also in the area of age discrimination.
Campaign for better policy that protects older refugees from discrimination.	Campaign for policy that protects older refugees from discrimination.
Exchange of best practices and cooperation.	Awareness campaigns
Awareness campaigns are relatively ineffective, more important would be to put an end to the double-tongued discourse in Austria.	Special awareness within institutions that deal with anti-discrimination.
More understanding of the inter-relationship between different forms of discrimination.	Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of equal opportunities legislations & regulations.
Financial position	
National	European
Basic income, basic financial security needed	
Introducing new windows of financial support as per the needs of older refugees.	
Ministry should start an information policy on subsidies for community organisations, social work.	EU projects

Social administrations on local and national levels . Therefore also an of the social administration is needed.	
Refugees must obtain information about and access to all possible benefits and rights provided by the specific society.	
Subsidies for community organisations, community social work and to promote cultural diversity	
To collate info in order to better lobby with funders to fund projects benefiting older refugees on national level.	ERF to fund project benefiting older refugees on national level.
To lobby with funders to fund projects benefiting older refugees on a national level.	
Legal status	
National	European
Right of abode (no need for permission to enter the country)	Equal standarts
Faster and fair decisions on family matters	Special policy to be made for unaccompanied old refugees to reunite with family members.
Easier access to national and /or double citizenship. (Not taking labour income as a criterion)	Refugee agencies should increase level of lobby towards government for policy changes on behalf of refugees, to allow family reunification.
Provide secure residence title after a five year stay in the country at the latest, give opportunity to work three months after arrival at the latest.	

Due to their age and their mental and physical condition, elderly refugees generally should be given a legal status which ensures quality of life that can be accepted by older refugees as a real basis for their future life.	Due to their age and their mental and physical condition, elderly refugees generally should be given a legal status which ensures a quality of life that can be accepted by older refugees as a real basis for their future life.
Right to participate in voluntary sector etc.	
Support for Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's)	
Contribute to maintain a Federal-wide lawyers' network - in cooperation with UNHCR and other welfare agencies.	
Education in intercultural matters for decision makers.	Establish similar asylum standards in EU Currently Greece / Sweden have different standards.
The asylum-procedure depends mainly on the national legislations. Together with other refugee organisations and the refugee council, we achieved through political initiatives improvements on local and national level for different groups, this has to be continued.	The implementation of the existing EU-directions should be better controlled by the EU-Commission.
Creation of nationwide network of validated interpreters to secure accuracy and objectivity in legal matters.	
Policy specifically designed for older refugees' asylum application and fast track.	
Some people are not aware of the legal value of the refugee status in Spain. Need for programmes of public awareness of refugees rights and obligations.	
Support for resettlement programmes for refugees.	

Financial support for access to lawyers.	
The national organisation of the refugee-councils (Pro Asyl) should support the local organisations better by giving more professional information about this field.	
Social Service / welfare	
National	European
The cross-cultural opening of the social services should be improved on both national and local level.	Amelioration of legal framework; social model of EU.
To gather accurate information about the socio-economic situation and needs of refugees policy planning based on this information.	
More/better information and support for older refugees, and community organisations working for/with them, in accessing 'mainstream' social services. Older refugees need a lot of support - e.g. Information & Advice and often Advocacy support as well - to be able to effectively access social care services that they may be entitled to. 'Navigating the system' of social care services is not easy or straightforward - much less so for older refugees - so providing the right kind of information and support is crucial.	

3.2. Participation and empowerment

To improve the situation of older refugees one should not only focus on the intercultural opening of systems and structures in the field of education, labour and care, but also on the possibilities for older refugees themselves to participate in society and feel recognised as human beings. To make this possible recommendations have been made to develop special programmes that enable older refugees to:

- Use their skills and life experience within their communities and in society
- To play an active cultural role in the communities and in society
- To act as go between in the community and in society
- To recognise their role within the family

The pilots on local empowerment programmes for older refugees which were organised in Berlin, Ghent, London and Vienna prove that telling and showing life stories is an excellent and pure form of empowerment. The participating older refugees feel recognised and appreciated in their capacities and skills and are willing to engage in other activities.

One of the elements of a European policy on older refugees could be the direct and active promotion and funding of empowerment programmes and projects within the Member States, which enable older refugees to tell their stories by different means of expressions and to communicate with other people and organisations about their ideas, skills and experiences.

3.3. Call to include refugees and their families in EU integration policies

Recently the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) called upon the Ministerial Conference on Integration to include refugees and their families in mainstream EU integration policies¹.

In the June 2008 Communication *A Common Immigration Policy for Europe*, the European Commission stresses that immigrants should be provided with opportunities to participate and develop their full potential. The European Pact on Immigration and Asylum invites Member States to establish ambitious policies to promote harmonious integration of immigrants who are likely to settle permanently. And in its report to the 2008 Ministerial Conference, the European Commission calls for removing structural barriers against the empowerment of immigrants.

At the same time, EU asylum policy-making had been focusing on deterring asylum seekers, while paying little attention to the barriers these policies create for the integration of those who eventually become European citizens. In addition, once recognised as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary forms of protection, they are excluded from mainstream EU integration policies for other third country nationals such as the European Integration Fund,

The Long Term Residence Directive and the forthcoming Integration Forum.

ECRE therefore makes an urgent call to include refugees and their families in the European Integration Fund and to accept refugee organisations and refugee assisting organisations as members of the forthcoming European Integration Forum.

¹Call made on the occasion of the 2008 Ministerial Conference on integration organised by the French Presidency on 3 and 4 November in Vichy.

In ECRE's call there are two important issues which concern the position of older refugees:

Long Term Residence Directive

The Long Term Residence Directive is an important legal instrument that grants a more stable status to third-country nationals who have legally resided on the territory of a Member State for five years. ECRE believes that extending the scope of the Directive to refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary forms of protection is a crucial and necessary development that would demonstrate that EU Member States are serious about promoting the integration of refugees in their societies. However, despite ongoing negotiations, consensus on amending the Directive has still to be reached by Member States. ECRE urges the Ministers to include refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary forms of protections in the Long Term Residence Directive.

Family reunification


An other topic of major importance to older refugees is the enlargement of possibilities for family unification. It is very difficult, not to say almost impossible for older refugees to rebuild their lives without the support of their families. In the recent call to include refugees and their families in EU integration policies, ECRE notices that family reunification is a topic of great concern, since the recent call in the European Immigration Pact to regulate family migration "more effectively" doesn't seem to take Directive 2003.86 into account. This Directive sets out EU-wide hard law on conditions for family reunification and applies to all Member states, except Denmark, Ireland and the UK.

A recent report on the application of this Directive concludes that not all Member States apply the more favourable provisions for the family reunification of refugees. Some Member States even introduce or maintain certain requirements (fees, waiting periods, stable and regular resources as an economic condition and integration criteria such as language and other tests) in a too broad and excessive way, having the effect of restricting the given right to family reunification.

The following recommendations made by ECRE to the EU Ministers, are extremely important for the possibilities of older refugees to build up a new life:

1. The scope of the Family Reunification act should be extended to beneficiaries of subsidiary forms of protection
2. The concept of family unit should be extended to adult children, elderly parents and other relatives that may depend on the refugee
3. No restrictions should be imposed relating to the length of residence. Employment status, access to housing or earning capacity on the right to family reunification of refugees.

Main questions

1. What are important issues for the development of a European policy on older refugees?
2. What steps should be taken to ensure more attention on a European level to the participation and empowerment of older refugees and to the general position of older refugees?
3. Which actors should be addressed to advocate the interests of older refugees on a European level? 





4. Empowerment of older refugees strategies and methods

In the project Power of Older Refugees, four local empowerment programmes for older refugees were organised by the main project partners. The set up of these programmes was developed based on the experiences with several local empowerment programmes in the Netherlands, which combine life stories with various expression techniques. The success of the so called LOV projects in the Netherlands led to the question: to what extent would it be possible to apply the format for these kind of projects in other countries, and to which new views and experiences would this lead?

In the Netherlands over 20 projects were organised in which mixed groups of older refugees worked together during 8 to 10 weeks to share (parts of) their life stories and (childhood) memories or dreams, by means of theatre, painting, dance, video or a combination of these techniques. All projects ended with a public presentation.

The format for these local empowerment programmes was based on the following principles:

- Breaking the isolation of older refugees is only possible when they themselves are stimulated to develop ideas and plans about the way they want to use their talents and experiences. Merely organising visits and social activities where they can meet other people is not enough to give them a sense of usefulness and the feeling to be heard.
- Programmes for older refugees should give the participants the opportunity to rethink their past, and learn lessons from their life. This means the focus should not only be on their flight-history, but also on childhood memories, experiences during their working life, their relationship with their children, future dreams and so on.
- Programmes for older refugees should also lay strong emphasis on story telling by using various techniques of creative expressions, such as pictures, singing, and so on. This way, people who don't speak the language of the host country very well, can also be involved.
- Creative expression gives the participants not only the chance to recollect memories of the past, but also to express their own feelings.
- The experiences in the Netherlands learn that working with mixed groups of older refugees is very successful. In these groups the social control from the own community is not felt as much, and the participants feel more challenged to show who they are and what they are able to, because nothing is evident from the beginning.
- Organising a public presentation at the end of a programme gives the participants a goal to work on, and challenges them to show their best. A public presentation also gives the participants the basic feeling that they are needed and appreciated and it gives them the opportunity to inform native inhabitants about their existence and their stories.
- The telling and showing of life stories can be seen as a pure form of empowerment. The "misfortune" becomes the advantage. The source of shame and sadness becomes a source of knowledge and wisdom, something to be proud of. Looking at a performance or presentation of life stories also empowers other people who have lived through similar experiences.

Based on the above, a hand-out with the following practical working principles and characteristics of local empowerment programmes was given to the partners in the cities of Berlin, Ghent, London and Vienna,.

Working principles

LOV - programs can vary in length, group composition and presentation form, but the objectives are the same. These are:

- To address older refugees as people with a lot of life experience and talent, and not as victims;
- To challenge them to portray their life stories using various expression techniques;
- To let them experience that cooperation can lead to new insights and other forms of appreciation;
- To contribute to them feeling more involved in the host society;
- To inform the society of a different way to approach the backgrounds of older refugees;
- To empower older refugees develop new strengths to be able to break through their isolation.

Characteristics

LOV programs meet the following characteristics:

- Work takes place with mixed groups of refugees of 45 years and older. Mixed means: people from various countries of origin and preferably men and women. It is possible to extend the basic group of older refugees with people from other groups such as younger refugees, older migrants and older native people;
- During the implementation of the program the main language of the country is spoken. The participants can however help each other in their own language;
In principle every older refugee who can speak the main language a little can participate in the program;
- The programs are carried out by a project leader and an expression teacher.

Based on these principles and characteristics, all four partners made their own set up, taking into account the circumstances and the possibilities of their own organisation and of the refugee communities in their home town.

4.1. Set-up of the pilots in four European cities

The Zentrum für Flüchtlingshilfe und Migrationsdienste in Berlin choose to produce a theatre play with a mixed group of refugees, that should draw a picture of their reality without falling into a desperate or accusing undertone or attitude. The choice was made to explicitly work with older refugees who experienced extreme forms of violence and who in most cases have no link to German society. The staff was well aware that the Dutch format was originally not intended for this group, but didn't fear possible complications, because of their own expertise in the psychological field. The Zentrum itself acted as producer, the teacher they found is connected to the Berlin Opera and had experience with special groups with no theatrical experience. The project leader explicitly looked for an experienced theatre teacher, who also has competencies in the musical field, since many participants did not speak the German language very well.

In Ghent the welcome bureau Kom-Pas decided to work with movement, voice and video. The goal was to allow the participating older refugees, discover their talents and the things they are good in, by means of the creative process. Another objective was to give them a voice in the outside world, so they don't hang on to their

problems. The participants were sought amongst the (ex-) clients of the bureau. This resulted in a mixed group of people from different African countries, Ukraine and Bosnia. Kom-pas didn't explicitly look for a teacher, but for people who were able to guide the process, who would do justice to everybody's qualities and could handle emotions. They also looked for facilitators who could lead the group to a final presentation. Finally two "teachers" were found. One was a singer who works a lot with voice and movement and one who had experience in the fields of dance and movement.

In London the British Refugees Council invited different Refugees Community Organisations to apply for the organisation of the Local Empowerment Programmes by letter. Out of seven applications, the Ethiopian Community in Britain (ECB) was chosen, because of its longstanding experience with programmes for the elderly and their willingness to involve people from other communities.

The ECB tried to recruit participants from different communities but didn't succeed because in London refugees are strongly organised within single community organisations. The ECB found the time too short and the budget too small to really invest in more publicity, and there was the expectation that older refugees would be reserved to express themselves in the presence of outsiders.

A group of Ethiopian elderly however showed great enthusiasm for the programme. They chose for performances of oral literature elements, especially story telling, wits, singing and riddles.

The goal of the programme was to re-stimulate the imaginative and artistic capacities of the participants, to allow them to share their life experience, dreams and wishes with each other and to build confidence, trust, friendship and dignity.

Two teachers or facilitators were found, who played the role of traditional Ethiopian Azmaris (troubadours) accompanied by Kirar, a traditional Ethiopian string instrument.

In Vienna, the staff of Asylkoordination wanted to create a programme which focused on theatrical work and which enabled them to work with the knowledge and skills of refugees in a situation where efficiency is not the first objective. "Success comes as a surprise when they feel that they feel better and stronger".

Asylkoordination looked for a teacher who was older herself and experienced in social theatre work. After some meetings in which older refugees from different backgrounds participated, the project leader and teacher decided they needed more time. They experienced it took quite some time for participants to really open up, to relate to each other and gain enough confidence to make empowerment to their personal goal. As they succeeded in getting additional funding, they decided to continue the work after the formal ending of the project POR and postpone the final presentation.

4.2. The final presentations

Three of the four pilots were completed in between June and August 2008. The pilot in Vienna started at the end of June, and is still in progress. The other pilots lasted 8 to 10 weeks and were all completed with a public presentation.

In Ghent a group of ten older refugees worked on a presentation which included, story telling, singing, movement, painting and video. There was a lot of room for improvisation. Six people actually came on stage, the others were present in the video about the working process which was part of the presentation.



The participants “played” themselves. They told about the past, the dreams they had when they were young, their experiences with war and survival and their present day dreams and hopes. It was theatre, but without fixed texts or dialogues. They sang songs from their past and from the present. They painted life on stage and translated each others stories. During the performance they showed a lot of resilience and gaiety and were really able to touch the public of about sixty friends and relatives and other inhabitants of Ghent.

In Berlin a group of about ten older refugees and one younger refugee of about 14 years old, made a play which was situated in a Berlin café. The girl played the role of the daughter of the lady who owned the café (in real life her mother). At first there were almost no customers, but in the end, with the help of some friends it turned out to be a lively, flourishing café where people from the neighbourhood came to perform, sing and dance.

The performance was part of the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Zentrum für Flüchtlingshilfe. There was an audience of about hundred people, most representatives of different Berlin organisations and institutions.

They seemed impressed and enthusiastic about the play. Many of them interviewed the participants afterwards, asking about the making of the play and the whole working process.

In London a group of about twenty older Ethiopians gave a performance for an audience of about fifteen people, in which the Amzari (troubadour) played a central role. He challenged the group to come with their own verses and lines, by singing explicit lyrics, praising and mocking, unveiling what is hidden. The group members told stories, and jokes from their past and present. The presentation was given in the Ethiopian language Amharic. Some parts were translated in English. The part with the Amzari however went too fast to translate. Although some of the people in the audience couldn’t understand what was said, they felt challenged as well to bring in some lines and verses. At the very moment they hesitated to do so, because they didn’t know whether it would be appropriate. But they made clear that the programme could also be used for groups of people with different backgrounds.

I am personally impressed by the presentation and the interviews we watched. There are some main issues which were raised during the interviews. Some of us know the issues. It was very interesting. And, about this music! I really enjoyed it. It was not easy for someone like me to get involved because of the language barrier. ... But I want to say something as well; it is catching and sensitive. I think the next step would be probably to develop the project or the continuation of this one whereby people from other communities and speaking other languages will be allowed to contribute by communicating to the musician in English and he replies (repeat & sing the verses) as well. I am very! Very impressed.

In Vienna, as said, there has not yet been a performance. In this project there is much focus on the daily life experiences of the participants and on counselling of the participants. They people meet every Monday for three hours. The first hour is reserved for talking: what was important for you during the last week in your personal life - and / or as an Austrian citizen. The second hour is dedicated to movement and voice exercise. The third hour they work on stories and scenes.

4.3. Experiences with mixed groups

In three of the four pilots the participants were of different origin. In all groups both men and women participated. One of the challenges of a mixed group is to cope with language barriers. Most older refugees don't speak the language of the host society very well, yet this is the only language in which they can communicate with other refugees and with the teachers. In Ghent many participants spoke French, but not Flemish. In all three pilots the language problems were solved by choosing methods of expressions in which language is not the most important element, such as movement and painting, and by ensuring the participants that it is OK to make mistakes and letting participants help each other with translations. This mixed approach seemed to work out very well. In all three groups the project leaders report about a very open and confidential atmosphere in the group, where people are really interested in each others stories and can speak out openly.

"I think the contact, the conversations, the exchange with each other and with us has meant a great deal to them. Also the experience of being heard has, I think, been important to them. Especially the acknowledgement of their story and the recognition of their own story in the stories of others has been a beautiful experience to them. They really enjoyed the assignments, the play and being on stage."

"In my point of view, it was an exciting and challenging experience in which all of us have grown a little above ourselves and dared to do different things. The warm atmosphere in the group was a beautiful and positive experience. Most of the participants haven't many social contacts and possibilities to connect. Regular meetings have surely broadened the spectrum of everyday life for the participants"

In London there were no language difficulties. *"So, the facilitators' performance as an Azmari resulted most excited response and active participation from group members by overcoming the initial problem of being shy and reserved towards each other. Gradually the participants were encouraged and stimulated to share wits, stories & quizzes and give extemporised verses to be sung/performed by the facilitators. The community (ECB) has also provided refreshments to the participants throughout the programme. The contact between all parties of the programme, i.e the participants, the facilitators and the project leader proceeded very smoothly and effectively."*

Positive impact on the participants

The project leaders tell us different stories about the impact of the programmes on individual participants.

"There was a couple from Kosovo in the group, both of them are severely burdened by the war incidents they had to experience. The husband is suffering from a head injury and consequently has communicational and expressional disorders. As far as we know also from their children, the relationship between wife and husband is at times problematic. After the rehearsals both of them came home in a friendly and uplifted mood, laughing together a lot and talking about the play, etc. Their children also told us that it was the first time after a long time that both of them did something together and enjoyed it. Especially the husband who is suffering from severe health restrictions was very dedicated to the play, had a lot of courage and was learning so many new things. His wife was telling us that she never before had experienced him in such a way. About herself she told us that in adolescent days she used to dream about becoming an actress once and that this was the first time of her life that she could practice and try to be an actress."

"A. fled from Iran where he worked as a photographer. His German is quite fluent but was not always easy to understand, since his face was rather expressionless and he did not articulate very well. For quite some time he was very shy, talking little and giving up quickly, when interrupted. All this has changed a lot, he fully takes his space now, works on his pronunciation, he often comes with new creative ideas and his face is now sometimes glowing with playfulness. Although in the beginning he was quite suspicious towards acting, he now enjoys playing different roles and characters and has even developed a clownish sense when improvising."

"L. her motivation is mostly her need for social contacts. Her biggest problem in her current situation is her loneliness, although in fact she is a very social person. She has always worked in her homeland Congo and was/is very much socially engaged. At first the project was not quite clear to her: what were we going to do and why? When we were halfway, she started feeling really comfortable.

To her, being a Congolese woman, in the beginning it was not so obvious to be in a project with Rwandese participants. The political situation in her country leads to hostility between the tribe of Kabila and the Rwandese and her own tribe. This situation was the reason why she had to flee. But she is someone with great openness and she thinks it is important that we are all people together....

She, and by the way, the Rwandese participants as well, have really handled this situation extremely well... The most beautiful experience for L. was that people listened to her. I chose her story because to me she was a very strong figure within the group and on stage as well: someone who has so much to tell."

Wish to continue

All four partner organisations tell us organising the pilot has been a rather intensive but very exciting and stimulating experience to them and helps them to see older refugees not just as victims, but simply as individuals with a very rich personal history and many (hidden) talents. All partners have the intention to continue their activities for older refugees in one way or another. The ECB in London has, at request of the participants decided to continue the work with the group of older Ethiopians and make sure they can meet on a regular basis.

The Zentrum für Flüchtlingshilfe in Berlin will integrate the creative methods from the empowerment programme in its regular work and will establish a special centre for the reception and support of older refugees. For Kom-pas in Ghent the organisation of empowerment programmes is not a core of their business, so the bureau has no possibilities to continue the work with the empowerment programme itself. The staff is looking for another organisation who will take over this important work. The methods of the empowerment project however, will be included in the programmes the centre develops for "new comers".

Asylkoordination in Vienna has already found money to extend the work with the group of older refugees.

Changes to the format

The pilots were organised to investigate whether the approach developed in the Netherlands, which lays much emphasis on positive life stories and creative expression, works in other European cities and with other producers and refugee communities.



miko

The pilot in Ghent was organised according to the original format. In Berlin, London, and Vienna, the partners made some changes in the set up of their pilot:

1. In Berlin the older refugees participating were rather traumatised by their experiences during and after their flight.
2. In Vienna the experiences of the project leader and the teacher led to a joint conclusion to lengthen the programme and work more profoundly and deeply with a small group.
3. In London the participants all came from the same refugee community.

The reasons for these changes vary from partner to partner. The Centre in Berlin wanted to see if the empowerment method would work for the most vulnerable groups as well. An additional reason was that it was quite easy to reach possible participants, because they were already present in the Centre.

The decision to extend the programme in Vienna was made based on the working methods of the theatre teacher, who has much experience with the methods developed by for example the Dutch Werktheater and comparable theatre groups, and on the personal experience of the project leader, that refugees need time to finally open up.

The alteration to the format in London was made because of the lack of response of other refugee communities. The way the refugee communities are organised in this city seems to make intercultural activities difficult sometimes.

Contribution to empowerment of older refugees

Based on the experiences in the four cities we can draw the following conclusions about the effects of the local empowerment programmes of the project POR.

- After finishing the local empowerment programmes, the participants look at themselves with different eyes. They feel recognised as human beings, as people whom it is worth listening to, and they have discovered many unknown talents. They feel encouraged to move on and engage in other activities. All projects have directly contributed to the empowerment of the participants.
- Telling and showing stories from their past gives the participants the feeling their (cultural) background is important and valued. This is an important counterpoint to the pressure to forget your own language and culture and to assimilate with the mainstream culture.
- Working with a group makes the participants experience (again) that working together can be great fun and other people can be trusted.
- The fact that the group were of mixed composition in three of the pilots, confronted the participants with opinions and discussions, which would never have taken place within their own community, without leading to conflicts.
- The participation in the pilots led to new social contacts for many participants.
- The organisation of the pilots has been of great value to the partner organisations. They are glad they did not merely have to focus on the problems of the refugees, but could also engage in a joyful activity which showed them a different side of the people involved.
- The pilots learn that a programme on life stories and creative expression can also be of use in the work with traumatised refugees.

- The experience in London shows that a programme which is carried out within one community also has great value, because it makes the participants feel at home and gives them new ways of interpreting their past. The appreciation of the presentation by outsiders who didn't even speak the language has convinced the project leader and the participants that cooperation with older people from other communities might really work out.
- The relatively short period in which three of the four pilots were organised contributed to a feeling of amazement and excitement with project leaders and participants about their achievements.
- At this moment it is not yet possible to describe the results of the pilot in Vienna, except that the participants, the project leader, and the teacher have developed very close relationships and the participants who remained involved in the programme are exited about their experiences with story telling and rehearsing.
- The success of the presentations in Ghent and Berlin lead to more public attention for the situation of older refugees and their skills and power.

Main questions

The local empowerment programmes of the project POR represent one way of encouraging older refugees to use their power and to participate in and outside their community. Questions for the workshop are:

- What do you think is important in the empowerment of older refugees?
- What lessons can be learned from the way the pilots were organised?
- What opportunities do you see to work (further) with the developed format?
- What other possibilities do you see for the empowerment of older refugees?👏

"your stories and ideas can change the future"





5. Relationship between older and younger refugees in the various refugees communities

In the material from the project POR the relationship between older and younger refugees is treated in two different ways. In the interviews with older refugees the most important aspect is the relationship with their children. In the Delphi survey both the relationship between older refugees and their children and the role of the older generation within the communities and in intergenerational perspective is evaluated. In this discussion paper we will first give some quotes from the personal interviews, which show how proud the parents are of the achievements of their children, and the fulfilment to which this leads. We also give some statements about the possible tensions between the two generations. Next we will further examine the outcomes of the Delphi survey about the relationship between older refugees and their children, which in some way are in contradiction with the interviews.

In the second paragraph we will explore the role of the older generation within the communities. Based on the Delphi outcomes we will give an overview of the possibilities to fill in this role and to develop (new) programmes. We will end with some questions for the discussion in the workshop.

5.1. Parents and children

For many older refugees, the relationship with their children is the most defining factor in their life. Although many refugees families are scattered over the world, most older refugees manage to live close to one or more of their children. For those who had to flee and build a new life without their children, this is a profound missing in their existence.

Pride and fulfilment

The interviews held in Berlin, Ghent, London and Vienna, show that most older refugees are very proud of the achievements of their children. They often do very well at school and are of great support to their parents. The fact that the children are so successful gives many older refugees the feeling their existence had had some meaning. Asked who will care for them when they are no longer able to look after themselves, many older refugees answer that they are sure their children will look after them.

Mister A. from Somalia, who lives now in Ghent says:

"I live with my 7 children in Belgium. The oldest is 14 years, the youngest 3. I take care of them and I count on them to take care of me once I'll be old. They are my security for my old age. Even if one of the children doesn't want to look after his father, there still are the other ones. In Somalia there are no nursing homes. Old people are looked after by their family."

Mister B. living in Vienna says:

"Yes I have two children. My son is 23 years old, he studies Physics and this year is the final year. My daughter is 19 years old. She studies Biology in the university, they are very good. My daughter always had the highest grades at school. My daughter was 5 years old when we came and my son 9,5 years. My son is very good at his studies. His professor has chosen him to go to Leipzig to the university to become a doctor. Thank God, that I have made it!!"

Mrs C. from Bosnia, now living in Berlin:

"I am very close with my children and grandchildren. I cannot be without them for a long time. For instance, I often say, perhaps I would be more at ease when I would go back to Bosnia, when I see the men and women over there. It often pulls me there and I think, if I were amongst them, perhaps I would feel better, I would be more healthy, perhaps it would help me. But then I think, I can go "under" and stay for a month with the women and then I would feel homesick. I cannot be without the children. They are already quite big, and they can be on their own, but I cannot be without them."

Mrs D. from Sierra Leone, now living in London:

My relationship with my two boys is very, very good. I thank God that the boys are grown up listening to me and giving me all respect a mother deserves. And, I do give them respect myself even though they are my sons, they are younger than me, but I try to listen to them. We sit down together, we eat together, we do a lot of things together. I sit and I tell them about my work, about my intention, my aspirations and I learn from them and I want them to learn from me. That has been the case and I really am grateful to members of my extended family that have been there for me, that have helped me to raise these boys because I have been a single mum all this time and thank God."

Tensions and expectations

Although most interviewed refugees are very proud of the achievements of their children, some of the interviews show that the relationship between parents and children is not always an easy one.

An old Ethiopian man who participated in a group interview in London says:

"For instance, I was expecting nothing from my children before my retirement as I was leading an independent life and doing fine. Then, my children were dependent on me. Now they are employed and asking financial support from them demoralised me. I expect them to ask me what I want and provide the support instead of waiting for my request for their support. There is a generational difference. I do have sons only and I wish to have daughters. Sons are less considerate than daughters...."

In the conversation a discussion develops about sons and their behaviour. The same man complains that people who have daughters don't understand what he means : *"He (the other man) might not wash a plate, for his daughters are cleaning the table. My sons don't do that. I clean the plates."*

Another participant in the discussions answers: *"If I were you I would ask them to clean their plates. If they refuse to do, I would advise them to move from my house and lead their independent life. ... After all I am the head of the household. Everyone who is living under that roof, should be in line with the principles of the house."*

Together they conclude: *"But, as an Ethiopian parent, you wouldn't take such a harsh measure."*

A third person adds: *"Our sons do not refuse openly but make excuses not to wash their plates. Their excuses might be reasonable for them, but not for us. For example, I am living with my son. He doesn't refuse to wash, but promises to do so when the kitchen sink gets full...I don't want the sink to be stunk with dirty plates. Our life in the military world has taught us to keep everything in order. So, we challenge our children to do so,*

but they want to follow their own principles. My son's bedroom is messy most of the time and he claims that he has the right to keep the room that way. So, I don't want to quarrel with him. Instead I do it by myself."

A Bosnian father from Berlin tells that the flight had a huge impact on his eldest daughter:

"My children were very small when they came and the fact that in the reception centre they didn't pick up so much of our problems, was very good for them.....They went straight to school and have done everything very quick, the language and all. Except E., she was already a bit older, ten years old, from all of us, she learned the language very quickly, she is very talented, she speaks four languages. But she also suffered with us, she was already a bit older and picked up more of the worries and the problems of our first years and she had to do a lot of translation work as well. For H. and me, she has suffered a lot with us. In the younger years it was with her that I had the most problems. But now everything is taken care of. She has her own family and we have a good relationship."

Up side down relationship

The answers given in the first round of the Delphi survey show a rather different image of the relationship between older refugees and their children, than the image given by older refugees themselves in the interviews.

The answers of the Delphi respondents are quite long and detailed. The majority of the respondents, all have to do with refugees in their work, qualify this relationship as an area of great concern. They see many conflicts and problems, and often define the relationship as 'upside down', where children take over (part of) the role of the parents. This different approach could partly be due to the fact that the participating older refugees wanted to make a good impression in the interviews, while the Delphi respondent felt he/she could answer freely, because their answers were treated anonymously.

Some examples:

"It's quite common that responsibilities and needs of the members of the family are not separated and the parents are unable or unwilling to see their children as individuals with their own needs. An example is that children are often used as translators in all kinds of contacts with the society, regardless of age or maturity. Physical punishment and verbal threats are still used in some refugee families as a way to discipline children."

"Polarisation takes place as the identities of parents and children change. Eventually children reject their parents/language/traditions in an effort to become "accepted" by the more cosmopolitan host society they live in."

"Relationships between parents and children are often driven by a strong wish for social mobility. Families that manage to reach this country have a dream for a better live. Many invest as much as they can in the education of their children. However, high barriers on the labour market and in the educational system, have lead to a sense of frustration amongst many refugee families. Parents cannot fulfil their role as role models and breadwinners. This causes conflict within families and often leads to problems in the identity formation of especially young male refugees e.g. from Arabic descent. Hence, there is a gap between the aspirations of parents and the social reality of the families."



“Situation of refugee families is often very difficult and bad, housing conditions with several family members in one rooms causes conflicts. Housing conditions play an important role with the well-feeling and psychic situation. It would be better to have offers for integration more decentralised so that people have to move out.”

Relationships between parents and their children are partly extremely conflict-ridden and burdened with the experiences of having to flee an area and being persecuted. Frequently, family roles are shifted in the way that children take over parental roles (called parentification), since children often are better able to adapt to the receiving country.

More nuances

In the second Delphi round we asked the respondents whether they agree with the picture that the relationship is rather difficult, and full of conflicts and problems. More than half of the respondents confirmed this statement. The ones who did not agree gave different kinds of answers:

“We do not see the relationship between parents and their children as full of conflicts in general, but we observed many times that children have to take responsibility for family matters by being used as mediators and interpreters”.

“In Germany many young refugees face severe integration problems. Hence, conflicts within the family arise partly from a socially and legally deprived situation.

Older refugees are still a reference to their children, especially if the old refugees are involved in the host society. However older refugees that arrived at a younger age with their children, mention that those children blamed them and their political organisations for their situation.”

“All the answers in the first round made a projection of all bad things that affect the parent-child relationship and blamed it on the fact that the parents are refugees and some times older refugees. In my view, it is too much of a generalisation. Family conflicts especially intergenerational conflicts happen as well in non-refugee families, children taking over responsibilities happen all the time in other families, regardless of their background (refugee or not). The likelihood of a bad relationship and its impact varies also from family to family and depends on different things including the social environment, family standing and practices, cultural background, and the outstanding relationship between parents as well as their own behaviour AND the parents’ parenting skills and their adaptability to the new environment. Nevertheless, what is true is that young people adapt quickly and can integrate quickly. The rest varies from case to case.”

Also many positive aspects

We also asked the Delphi respondents to give positive examples of the parent-child relationship. This question led to a whole variety of positive aspects:

“The internal relationships and social relationships of families can vary extremely from one culture to another and these need to be taken into consideration by each individual and family situation. The children are, in most cases, quicker and better integrated and help their parents cope with the everyday problems

that arise, however they are often forced to play this helping role. Traditional families are trying a new way of education, training and traditions. They must strike a balance between their old traditions and new demands on children here in Germany.”

“Another positive aspect in upside down relationship is parents accepting new cultural and social values, otherwise not known and close to them, and vice versa - children being able to preserve cultural values of their homeland and successfully integrate them in “new” identity.”

“Most important for parents, is also if they manage to preserve a feeling of security in relation to their children, i.e. that they will be taken care of by their children when old.”

“All parent-child relationships are not bad per se. And positive examples may vary from people’s perceptions. For instance, a family where children look after their parents who are old is for me a good example, not an upside down relationship as portrayed in round 1.”

When we look at the results of the urban conferences, it is quite interesting that especially in London much attention is given to necessity of intergenerational programmes. In this city many people have the feeling there is a large gap between young people from different ethnic communities and the other generations. Intergenerational programmes that give different generations the opportunity to learn from each other, are considered to be important to develop a (new) sense of social cohesion and social inclusion.

5.2. The role of the elderly within the community

Communities important in London

In the interviews the older refugees were not specifically questioned about their role in the community, but asked about their social relations. Some share experiences about their work for their community. It is remarkable that almost everyone interviewed from London emphasises the importance of the community in their personal life. They enjoy the relationships and the chance they get to meet with younger people. The people interviewed in the other cities rely more on their families than on the communities.

It is not clear whether this is a result of the policy of the other cities, in which more emphasis is laid on the intercultural opening process of the mainstream system and services, than in supporting the refugee community organisations as seems to be the case in London, or if it depends on the scope of the refugee communities within these cities.

In the urban conferences the relationship between older and younger refugees was not a major topic, with the exception of London. In this city much attention is given to intergenerational programmes, because many people have the feeling there is a large gap between young people from different ethnic communities and other generations. Intergenerational programmes giving different generations the opportunity to learn from each other, are considered to be important to develop a (new) sense of social cohesion and social inclusion.

An Ethiopian man in London tells about his work for the community:

"I was trying to teach children Amharic language and we had a school assisted by the Lottery Fund. And, we did that for two years and I was responsible for teaching the children. Again under the Ethiopian Community in Britain there is another programme and I have been trying to teach there as well. I also teach Amharic in some other organisations when I am invited. That is one activity. The other activity is writing articles and poems to different websites and publications involved in the political activities of Ethiopians in London."

Knowledge and skills of older refugees within the communities

When questioned about the power of older refugees in the first round of the Delphi questionnaire, the respondents gave, a list of answers that relates to the role of older refugees towards the communities in general, and to the younger generations in particular.

Examples are:

- Facilitator and mediator in conflicts
- They might help others to deal with the experience of living in exile
- Experience and expertise

- Culture protector / reminders of their common identity, repository of home/national culture, keeper of traditions and family values
- Important / historical memory
- Authority person in the area of culture
- Transmitters of their values and culture
- Bridge to their culture of origin
- Position in intercultural and intergenerational dialogue

- They are important social supporters of younger generations and amongst each other within their community in the receiving country
- Some influence on younger refugees
- Support the vulnerable family significantly
- Support and in some cases role model of the family unit
- Decision maker

Possible programmes and activities to use the power of older refugees

In the second round the respondents are invited to think more specifically about the programmes and activities that could be developed to use the skills and capacities of older refugees in various fields. Some of their suggestions relate directly to their relationship with younger generations within their communities.

- Including the target group in various measures of educational and social training programmes corresponding to individual knowledge's and competences - specifically in connection with generation-overlapping initiatives. (4 x)



- Organising events where older refugees can narrate their history. Via (cultural) events /empowerment programs older refugees have the opportunity to share their life experience. (3 x)
- Programmes that involve cultural heritage and enable diversity, tolerance, and community cohesion (6 x)
- Life story and empowerment projects (4 X)
- Cross-cultural intergenerational programmes - can provide opportunities for older refugees to communicate, and reflect on their own culture, experiences, past life, current values/views etc. - as well as sharing in dialogue with other older and younger people, from different cultural backgrounds from their own.
- There may be a value and a place for cultural intergenerational programmes which are essentially 'within' a particular cultural group, (e.g. to pass on knowledge/experience and to share views - between the generations - about particular issues/challenges which may be affecting specific communities) and/or intergenerational programmes which explicitly aim to promote 'cross-cultural' dialogue and understanding. This kind of work can make an important contribution to building greater 'community cohesion'."
- Train older well qualified refugees as cultural mediators and trainers for fellow country men, teaching them the importance of education, learning to learn etc.
- The experienced people could be mediators in conflicts, they can intervene in the "scene".
- This can be a very important and useful role - for someone who knows their own culture very well, and is able to communicate and establish links with the 'host community' - e.g. with other mainstream voluntary and community organisations, and/or with statutory services etc. on behalf of a group of older refugees. There is the need to ensure that this role does not become the only conduit for this kind of 'bridging' between different cultural groups, as it can be important to establish a range and depth of relationships, instead of just relying on a few relationships with 'key individuals'.👉

"Collecting oral histories is what I do these days"



6. Older Refugees: a vulnerable and powerful group

Manifesto

Invisible group

Older refugees seem to be a forgotten and invisible group. Once they have completed their asylum application process, most of them are lost out of sight.

In their daily life, they are confronted with a triple task of aging:

They have to deal with the loss of physical functions and the loss of relatives that ageing involves. Like everybody else, they also have to fit their past into their present life;

They have to find their way in a culturally unfamiliar environment that ascribes different meanings to the concept of old and in which the elderly are treated differently than they are used to;

They have to find a way to come to terms with the often traumatic experiences they have endured before and during the flight, and sometimes during the asylum application process as well - traumas which will often only be revealed later in life.

Not all older refugees are the same. In fact there is no group of older people which is so diverse as the group of older refugees. Apart from differences which are related to the country of origin, the level of education and the experiences during the flight, the group of older refugees can be divided into three categories:

Refugees who came to Europe at a relatively young age and are now ageing in their country of reception. This number will increase rapidly over the next years; Refugees who had to flee at an older age and have been living in a European country for just a short period of time, or might even still be waiting for a decision from the immigration services; Elderly relatives, mostly mothers and/or fathers of refugees living in Europe, who are brought over by their children who would not be able to look after them properly otherwise.

Despite the many differences, older refugees in Europe have to cope with similar life circumstances including:

- Social isolation because of loss of work, language problems and small and scattered communities;
- Spreading of relatives over, in some cases, all continents;
- Relatively severe health problems because of the harsh circumstances they have lived in;
- A poor income situation due to incomplete pension built-up;
- The complexity of rules and procedures linked with legal residency, family reunion, etc.;
- Feeling homesick for their own country;
- Little social recognition.

Capacities should be recognised


This does however not imply that older refugees must be seen as pitiful people.

To make sure the capacities of older refugees are being recognised, and that they can take responsibility for their own life, it is important that they get the opportunity to tell their life stories, (re)discover their talents and are being heard.

This means that strong emphasis should be laid on: The development and implementation of empowerment programmes that give older refugees the opportunity to express their feelings and stories in different ways and for different audiences;

The involvement of (older) refugees in the design of care, housing and health services and social activities provided to them.

Actions to be taken

- Refugee community organisations and organisation supporting refugees should work together to organise empowerment programmes for older refugees from various communities, with assistance of professional art teachers.
- Refugees should get opportunities to work or prepare for work by having access to education, training as soon as they enter the country. The EU should create more flexible regulations improving access to the labour market, e.g. by drawing attention to the special skills of (older) refugees.
- The EU should develop common European regulations for the recognition of qualifications of refugees in general and older refugees in particular.
- Special language courses should be developed and tailored to the needs of older people from different ethnic communities.
- Service providers should seek active collaboration with local organisations for and of refugees to develop special care, housing and participation programmes for older refugees, according to their needs.
- Service providers should really make strong effort to make their services and structures more accessible to people from all cultural backgrounds and to develop special training programmes for their staff and facilitate the involvement of employees with different cultural backgrounds.
- Provisions of truly accessible (non written) information should be part of this intercultural opening.
- Refugee community organisations should be supported to organise inter-generational programmes in which older and younger refugees can learn from each other, support each other and reach out to other communities.
- Refugees and their families should be included in the EU integration policy, amongst others by extending the scope of The Long Term Residence Directive to refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary forms of protection, and including refugees organisations in the European Integration Forum. 

Partners

The Power of Older Refugees is an initiative of the foundation BMP, in collaboration with the following main partners:

VluchtelingenWerk Nederland



Refugee Council (London)



Asylkoordination (Vienna)



Zentrum für Flüchtlingshilfen im bzfo (Berlin)



Kom-pas (Ghent)



The following organizations participated in the Delphi survey and the final conference of the project:

CEAR (Spain)

Letvian Red Cross (Latvia)

Finish Central Union for the Welfare of the Aged (Finland)

Alliance of Women (Slavakia)

Helenic Red Cross (Greece)

Opu (Czech Republic)

MaTAFiR (Slovenia)

Stichting BMP (Netherlands)







Bahak-o-Doestan performing (Bakhtiyor, guitar, right, playing the







