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Kick-Off-Meeting Ghent, September 2016

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SENSITIVE CARE FOR REFUGEES

Guidelines for professionals and volunteers

A product of an Erasmus+ project

ISSN: 143-8962

Nr. 27

**Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling
Interkulturelle Seelsorge und Beratung**

society
for *intercultural*
pastoral care
and counselling

Gesellschaft
für *interkulturelle*
Seelsorge
und Beratung e.V.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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**Interkulturelle
Seelsorge
und Beratung**

**Intercultural
Pastoral Care
and Counselling**

Magazine of the

Society for Intercultural
Pastoral Care and
Counselling, SIPCC

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professionals and
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Erasmus+ project

Düsseldorf August 2017

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ISSN: 1431- 8962

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The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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Introduction – the project

In September 2016, the Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counseling (SIPCC) conducted together with other partners an International Seminar on "Pastoral Care and Counseling as Social Action - Interreligious Cooperation in the Urban Context of Migration" in Ghent, Belgium. The focus was on the urgent topic of care and counselling to migrants and refugees. The existential crisis of refugees and how to deal with this crisis is still one of the most important and challenging issues in Europe. SIPCC had already at the beginning of 2016 decided to work on the issue of caring for refugees and migrants in a project of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union even after the Seminar.

For those who are not familiar with this programme some comments on its framework:

Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education. Organisations are invited to apply for funding to undertake creative and worthwhile learning activities. Erasmus+ aims to promote education across all sectors of lifelong learning, including school education, further and higher education, adult education and the youth sector. It offers exciting opportunities for participants from all European countries. The programme is aimed at organisations actively involved in delivering formal and non-formal education. Participating organisations can then offer opportunities for their adult learners, volunteers, and teachers to get new learning and teaching experiences.

Erasmus+ will help participants at all stages of their lives, from school through to adulthood, to pursue stimulating opportunities for learning across Europe. They will gain valuable life-skills and international experience to help them develop personally, professionally and academically and to succeed in today's world.

Our project with the title *"Bildung für Ehrenamtliche in kultur- und religionssensibler Begleitung von MigrantInnen und Flüchtlingen - Education for volunteers in cultural and religious sensitive companionship of migrants and refugees"* started at September 1st, 2016 and was running until August 31st 2017 under the Key Action 2: Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices. This Action is all about enabling organisations to work together in order to improve their provision for learners and share innovative practices. Organisations can apply for funding to work in partnership with organisations from other participating countries. The projects funded under this Key Action will focus on sharing, developing and transferring innovative practices in education, training and youth provision between participating countries.

SIPCC acted as coordinating organisation in this project and *Helmut Weiß* took over the task, to be in charge of the coordination.

The first step to start the project was to find partners – and we found them:



- Europäisches Institut für interkulturelle und interreligiöse Forschung, Liechtenstein
- Mezinárodní akademie pro diakonii a sociální činnost, střední a východní Evropa, o.p.s, Czech Republic
- Centrum Misji i Ewangelizacji Kościoła Ewangelicko-Augsburskiego w RP, Poland
- Islamische Seelsorge für muslimische Patientinnen in Österreich, Austria
- Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, Evanjelická bohoslovecká fakulta (Comenius University in Bratislava, Evangelical Lutheran Theological Faculty), Slovakia
- Caritas Vlaanderen vzw, Belgium
- Diakonie Deutschland - Evangelischer Bundesverband - Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung e.V., Germany

"Since migration and fleeing are challenges for all societies in Europe, these issues must be addressed in a broad alliance in order to develop synergies in all their differences in the various countries. Therefore it is essential for this partnership that an intensive exchange of organisations from different countries in Europe ("Western, Central and Eastern Europe") takes place. This increases the mutual understanding, the effectiveness of the project results and the quality of education" (quote from the application).

Another important aspect of the search of partners was to involve an Islamic organization in order not only to talk about interreligious care but also to conduct an interreligious dialogue between Christians, Muslims and different world views. Looking back to the project this exchange proves to be one of the most important results.

After making contacts to the partner-organisations the next step was, to write an application, to turn this in – and after having done so to wait for the decision. Not all applications are successful, but we received a letter at July 22nd, 2016, that the project was accepted and could be started at September 1st, 2016.

Into the project there were included four "transnational meetings": September 2016 in Ghent, Belgium; December 2016 in Bratislava, Slovakia; February 2017 in Český Těšín, Czech Republic and May 2017 in Düsseldorf, Germany. In addition to these meetings a week was conducted for learning and teaching activities in Düsseldorf in May 2017. Other meetings in small teams took place for preparing the different events.

The meetings, processes and progresses of the project will be mentioned only shortly in these guidelines and get much more attention in the final report of the project. With this publication the participants and organisations try to make some remarks which might be helpful to keep them in mind for encounters, care and counselling with refugees and which might enhance cultural and religious sensitivity in listening to and talking with them. Refugees need in their existential crises people as "neighbours" who meet them open-



mindful and openhearted and with a lot of confidence, dignity and humanity. Our project had the aim to make a contribution in caring for refugees and to enhance the cultural and religious sensitivity in the encounters with them. This publication focuses on the work of organizations where people take care of refugees in various ways, but above all volunteers, who accompany refugees, whether they are teaching (e.g. languages), assisting with services (e.g. legal affairs), counselling families, or searching for housing – shortly, in all areas where they are in contact with refugees.

The main attention in these guidelines is given to *religious sensitivity* and *interreligious competencies*. These are fields which usually are neglected or avoided, but are important for being in contact and relationship with refugees.

For the participants themselves was also important:

- to meet each other as people from different European countries, to enter into a fruitful exchange; and to establish relationships beyond borders;
- to enter into an intensive intercultural and interreligious dialogue;
- to study in depth the life situations of migrants and to come into a fruitful discussion about intercultural and interreligious competences;
- to rethink aspects for educating volunteers who are willing to take care for migrants and refugees.

These guidelines have three main parts:

The *situation of refugees* in European countries. We focus on the countries of the partner organizations. The focus will be on migration as crisis and looking into the life of refugees with their needs and resources. That is the base of developing competences for their care.

The focus of the second part is the *development of competencies* for cultural and religious-sensitive care. Here again, the focus is on the *religious competencies*, since otherwise they receive little attention.

The third section presents the background and some practical implications of *competency formation* for the care of refugees: to support them for social participation and self-determination, especially in the cultural and religious sphere.

D) Refugees and their situation in European countries

1) Migration as existential crisis

a) Migration as individual and personal crisis

Crisis usually is defined as an isolated period of time in which the lives of humans are shattered. It is seen as a loss of balance and an inability to control the external forces that determine the individual possibilities and choices, and as an inability to cope with them by means of the own and hitherto proven abilities. Crisis is seen as a temporary disorder in the



flow of things. However, there are "long-term crises" for many people in the world that do not appear in time and disappear afterwards. In such a context crisis cannot be limited as a moment of chaos or as a brief period of decisive change. For the structurally injured, the socially marginalized and the poor, the world is not characterized by equilibrium, peace or prosperity, but by the ubiquitous possibility of conflicts, poverty, fear and disorder. Instead of seeing crises as moments of disorder and temporary disorientation through uncertainty in the context of normality, one can discover crises as a normal case for these people and in these situations. The ongoing crises and existential threats of war, terrorism, torture, persecution, poverty and lack of prospects are usually reasons for escaping and for the search of new possibilities, which should cover the following needs:

- an economic basis for life
- basic health care
- well-being and thus a reduction of fear and anxiety
- to create a future for children
- respect for human dignity and respect
- security, especially legal certainty
- democracy, i.e. participation in social and political processes.

Europe has committed itself to provide these principles. Should Europe not be proud to welcome people who are deprived of these values?

After the decision to leave the familiar surrounding – most times a long process – the escape and the uprooting from the homeland present serious mental shocks and strains to people which can be even become worse during the flight itself. Not only the experiences in the home country and during the flight, but even after arriving in a new society migrants may experience the environmental, cultural and religious changes as an overwhelming threat. Earlier applied coping mechanisms often will be found as inapplicable, they may become even maladaptive. Difficulties of adjustment can be characterized by feelings of lack of contact with the environment, the threat of isolation, and the development of emotional and social insecurity. Lack of feeling of identification with the recipient community may increase the tendency to escape into somatic complaints and into the development of major doubts of the own personality and dignity.

Thus flight and migration is often experienced as a challenge of the individual, often paired with open or concealed guilt feelings. Internal conflicts may create external conflicts: with the family members who have or had to stay in the country of origin, with the community there and above all with the new social environment.

The existential crisis of refugees has much to do with the negative experience of power: to be powerless and to be exposed to the powers in the country of origin, to the conditions there, to fighting groups and power interests, etc. Self-determination means in such a context: to flee and to seek other ways of life. But the experience to be at the mercy of other



powers continues in the new context as well: once again, one is delivered to the circumstances and other people have power upon oneself. Where do refugees find self-determination? This can only be achieved if refugees and "natives" work together and both sides become sensitive to one another.

The life stories which were collected in our project and some of them which are documented below proof colourful and powerful the existential crisis of individuals and their families.

b) Migration as a global challenge

Migration and fleeing as a global challenge is not a new phenomenon. Just think of the 20th century and the post-war period. And in 1991 the report of the *Club of Rome* stated:

"Great migratory movements are foreseeable, not only for reasons of political, racial or religious persecution, but for economic survival. (...) Our descendants are likely to experience mass migration of unprecedented proportions. This process has already begun, we only think of the boat-people from the Far East, (...). It is easy to imagine that, in an extreme case, countless starved and desperate immigrants will land with boats on the north coast of the Mediterranean."

The farsightedness of the *Club of Rome* is true: in the few years of the 21st century, more and more countries are affected by flows of refugees and migrants. People decide or are forced to leave their homeland for a variety of reasons: because they are persecuted for political, ethnic or religious reasons; because they are threatened of life and limb by war and terror; because they can hardly survive economically, to name only a few. Immigration countries must accept more and more refugees from different cultures and religions from different countries of origin, which leads to fear and resistance, at the same time there is a strong movement to welcome them. Many people volunteer to help refugees, others are afraid and protest. One can speak of an increasing *globalization of migration* with much turbulence.

There is a variety of migration types in many countries of the world: migration of labourers (inside of countries, but also across the borders), refugees, permanent migrants, undocumented migrants, people who are illegally residing in countries, regular and irregular refugees, asylum seekers and others. These differentiations are among the greatest challenges for national or international policies. One can speak of an increasing *differentiation of migration*.

In many ways, women are affected by migration and flight. In organized human trafficking they make up the majority. Can we speak of a *feminization of migration*?

Children and adolescents are also affected by flight and migration. Sometimes they come to foreign countries without adults. The escape of *children and adolescents* is a particular challenge.



International movements of migration and Flight call for bilateral and regional relations between countries and national security policies. There is growing awareness of the need for cooperation between host countries, transit countries, countries of origin and global governance. Globally, policymakers and societies need to deal with the issue of fleeing, which leads to an increasing *politicization of migration*.

"The traditional notions of state, nation, ethnicity as well as Law are shaken (by migration and flight). The quality of migration has also changed in recent years. The "super-diversification" of global migration leads to a degree of pluralization and mobility which is no longer manageable. Contemporary mobility and communication facilities promote "transnational migration" and create multi-affiliations that no longer fit into the classic formats of "home" and "foreign". Around the world, a "transnational revolution" is taking place, which re-forms societies and policies. Migration promotes the dissolution of boundaries, which have transgressing tendencies. "

These remarks show how important it is to take into account the individual needs of fugitives and "natives". At the same time, global issues relating to flight and migration must also be answered - and this requires political and social participation of the societies as a whole. Commitment to fugitives must be perceived not only on the individual level, but also in the context of the global mass movements of migration and flight. Individual care must be aware of the political and social consequences of the own actions.

c) Migration as challenge for culture and religion

Migration is not only a personal and global crisis, but also a crisis, which affects culture and religion. Those who escape leave familiar cultural and religious contexts. Frequently, the countries where refugees come from are themselves in cultural and religious turmoil and offer only limited cultural and religious protection and security. To move to another place can also mean (re)ascertaining the own cultural and religious identity. Migration movements challenge cultural and religious systems of the societies that are left, and of receiving societies. Not only political, economic and social certainties are questioned, but cultures, worldviews and religious certainties are drawn into the vortex of flight and its consequences.

What does this mean for European societies? First of all, it must be remembered that, through colonialization, the European wars of the 19th century and the world wars of the 20th century, Europe has often triggered refugees. It is therefore necessary to develop a memory culture in which the European contribution to fleeing and expulsion remains conscious. In other words, there has to be sensitivity to the fact that migration belongs *to us*. Another necessary point in the European countries is to overcome of human hatred that comes to the surface through refugees as "the strangers": racism, hatred of Muslims, hatred of people who seem different or alien. This "un-culture" of degrading people requires a new



culture and spirituality in which the dignity of all people is kept.

Refugees are a challenge to discover and develop new cultural, spiritual and humane dimensions in European societies. Cultural and religious-sensitive care a contribution to that culture.

2) The situation of refugees in European countries

An important part of the work in our project was the exploration of the living conditions of migrants and refugees in European countries. The participants of the project were invited to collect “case studies” for the second transnational meeting and to interview migrants in their surroundings.



Session in Bratislava

To give the interviews a certain framework the organizers of the second transnational meeting, the Univerzita Komenskeho v Bratislave, the Evanjelicka bohoslovecka fakulta in Slovakia, and the Islamic Pastoral Care for Muslim Patients in Austria wrote:

“The case-study should deal with a typical migrant or a typical/specific selected group of migrants/refugees in the country of the participating organisation. It should describe the life situations/circumstances which the respected person has to cope with. It should especially pay attention to the religious and cultural perception of the migrants; their materialistic, linguistic and professional needs; as well as emotional and spiritual situations and rational



assessments, which come up in the life of migrants/refugees in the situation of the new society" (from the invitation to the meeting).

With the case studies and interviews, we wanted to explore the needs of migrants and refugees in the receiving countries. There are obviously a number of basic need for all respondents: *decent accommodation*, which means finding an apartment large enough to live outside the camp; *economic security*, and that means finding paid work; *participation* in the new environment to overcome isolation and to find satisfying contacts with other refugees and the locals; *to communicate* with others, and to learn the language of the receiving country in order to be able to speak with "natives" in their everyday life; to live with *family members* or to have contacts with them when they are not present; to provide *education* and training for children and adolescents so that they can be integrated into the social environment and included in the labor market; not for all, but for some of them it was important to be able to practice their *own religion*. In summary, one can say that housing, work, language skills and education can be described as basic needs.

When reading these case studies, however, it is also clear that these people - like all human beings - need *recognition and appreciation* beyond these needs. To get legal, personal and cultural recognition and appreciation is probably the most important prerequisite to gradually overcome the existential crisis. When refugees have to wait for their legal recognition as asylum seekers, they feel their personal integrity, security and dignity at risk - and it is not only a feeling, it is reality. All the dangers and traumatization they have experienced before can be re-presented again. Missing recognition leads to the questioning of one's own person and shakes the own self-esteem and is a reduction of one's own dignity.

Recognition has many dimensions for refugees. A special place is the legal recognition. Different criteria exist in different European countries. It would be desirable if uniform standards could be developed. Here, politics is required at all levels, at state and European level.

Social recognition is a further step. This is not guaranteed if in many European countries refugees are blamed for the social upheaval. Certainly, societies can and must discuss the consequences of the migration movements and the presence of refugees in their countries and seek solutions, but it is also urgent that refugees need social attention and recognition for their situation. Everyone who meets them is called upon to respect them and respect their human dignity.

A refugee from Ethiopia complains:

"Because people think you are different, they do not acknowledge what you have done and who you are. And that makes you to retreat to your own ethnic community and to look at the people in your so-called host country as different and also hostile. This creates a devil's circle."

Special attention must be paid to the recognition of refugees. Anything that diminishes or



endangers recognition, respect and dignity must be avoided. This does not mean not to enter into open and realistic conversations with fugitives, but to pay always attention to them as human beings - whether they are treated respectfully. Dealing with refugees means too, to be treated in a respectful way. Dignity is a two way attitude.

For religiously sensitive care of migrants, it is important to remember that recognition and appreciation also have existential, spiritual and religious dimensions: Who or what gives us humans recognition, appreciation and dignity? Do I have to earn the recognition myself? But is this possible? Am I dependent on other people or the society to give me dignity? Or do I have value and dignity because I am a human being and can I expect to be respected? Is 'God' or another transcendent instance the guarantee of my worth and my dignity? If that is so, no one can take it from me. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is clear that all human beings are unique as creatures of God and have a dignity that cannot be questioned. It might be helpful to listen to refugees and migrants about their experiences of degradation and it will be important how we as fellow human beings respond sensitively and dignifying to them.

Three voices from the above case studies about the living conditions of refugees, their needs and their recognition and appreciation will now follow, one from Belgium, one from Poland and one from Austria-

Life conditions of refugees and asylum seekers in Belgium

“Caritas Belgium has observed many issues with the *daily life of refugees*: precarious living conditions; social isolation, mostly due to the deficient access to social networks and language barrier; difficulties accessing professional occupations.

What are the main *obstacles* migrants have to face? Language barrier; loss of reference points; feelings of uncertainty about the future; unfamiliar social and professional environment; skill gaps; lack of recognition of actual job qualifications; social precariousness; family and social isolation; administrative and legal issues; trauma resulting from exile; stress tied to the situation in the home country.

All these factors are tightly connected and directly impact the life plan of these individuals.”

Refugees from Eritrea in Poland

“Refugees from Eritrea found themselves in Poland because of well-founded fear prevailing in their country of origin. The refugees live very modestly in Poland. They generally do not go to places of entertainment. They also do not eat pork nor drink alcohol. This is because of their religion, and in view of these restrictions they are excluded from a substantial area of social life, which hinders their process of adaptation and integration in the society. The increasing numbers of migrant groups in Poland has however led to the strengthening of ties between the Eritrean refugees and other migrants from Africa. For example spending free time at home in their midst.”



Observations of the Islamic Community in Austria:

“To illustrate what refugees in Austria go through we will talk about widespread challenges in this general part.

Refugees are under extreme pressure while fleeing their country and on the way to their destination. The psychological and physical pressure and the challenges they face make them strong in a very special way. The adrenalin shooting through their body and the many new impressions cause a kind of numbness to weaknesses.

What we then saw through our long experience is that what follows this phase is something interesting. It is the so-called crack down phase. This crackdown phase often occurs when the home country is long left behind and the destination is reached.

The everyday life begins – and so does the reality. The children are back in society faster than their parents. This is because they attend schools and kindergartens again and are back in society and have contact with pupils of their age, while their parents often must wait a whole year only to attend a German language course. So, the parents find themselves in emptiness. They get the feeling not to be worth anything, not being wanted or needed. Especially not having a place or worth in the new society.”

3) The culture of integrative participation and living together

For countries and societies which receive migrants and refugees the question is paramount, how to create an environment that fosters inclusive participation, and empowers migrants *and* receiving communities to work together toward the creation of cohesive societies in which different cultures, worldviews and religions have space and can live their identity. All parts of the society are called to contribute to inclusive participation – nobody must be excluded. This is a task for the majority and the minority groups of the society.

The first step for creating an environment of “inclusive participation” for migrants in receiving countries is to reflect on the barriers which can be found in the own society. According to the booklet of Caritas Europe *Welcome – Migrants make Europe stronger – Caritas’ practices for an inclusive Europe*¹ there are three major barriers in European societies:

- Cultural barriers - limited acceptance by and interaction into receiving communities.
- Structural barriers – limited access to basic rights and services.
- Socio-economic barriers – limited access to resources and participation.

¹ Published by Caritas Europa in Brussels in Dec. 2016
Rue de la Charité 43, 1210 Brussels, Belgium; www.caritas.eu/news/migrants-make-europe-stronger



For our theme let us concentrate to cultural and religious barriers:

“Cultural and religious barriers can be defined, on the one hand, as those obstacles that prevent migrants from feeling and acting as an integral part of society and, on the other hand, as those factors that hinder the receiving communities from accepting and understanding the cultural differences between themselves and migrants. The role of public institutions and civil society actors within the receiving countries is a key to creating the conditions for mutual understanding and to fighting stereotypes and fears of the unknown, especially those affecting receiving communities. Discrimination is one of the most devastating obstacles limiting the full participation and integration of migrants and their offspring.”²

“In addition, there is also a lack of religious dialogue and understanding of different religions and worldviews within Europe. This seems especially evident relative to Islam.”³

Looking at these barriers we can describe the next steps for defining the tasks of the receiving countries to meet the needs of migrants: fighting stereotypes, fears and discrimination and to create an atmosphere and environment of *living together*. The best way of overcoming fears and to train to live together is personal encounter with migrants, to listen to their stories, to their existential crisis, to their desires of a better life and of their resilience and power – as we have done in our project. Beside the official and legal recognition of basic rights, beside access to resources (housing, food, work, education, language skills etc.) migrants need a constant personal encounter with people from the majority society. They need people who are open to explore and appreciate their special talents. And all refugees are gifted persons in one or the other way. Even their dreadful experiences as migrants can become a gift for people in the receiving societies: to become aware of the situation in other countries, to develop empathy and solidarity, to be with migrants as a sign of justice and dignity and to develop models of living together. This model can be described as *competence* to live together in a good way of diversity and acceptance. Living together strives to bring together differences in an ongoing discourse and dialogue and to create a society of “reconciled differences”.⁴

Societies in Europe have to learn that they are not "exploited" by refugees, as repeatedly is asserted by different parties, but that they are "recipients" in the sense that they are enriched by fugitives. The European countries do not just receive "workers", but the people who are coming from abroad carry values with them. Fugitives bring their mother tongue, a certain culture and a certain view of the world, as well as human and religious trust, and

² Caritas Europe p. 8.

³ Caritas Europe p. 9.

⁴ Identität und Integration - Zusammenleben in Vielfalt und Verschiedenheit - Eine Ermutigung für unsere Kirchen, Erklärung der Konferenz der Kirchen am Rhein - Regionalgruppe Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa, Strasbourg, 2. Juli 2011, p. 6. www.leuenberg.net/de/identit-t-und-integration.



they bring it all into the new societies. They remain connected to other "worlds" than the locals. With the connections of migrants to many parts of the world, they give a society wideness beyond its own borders. They show alternatives to the lifestyle and challenge obvious and indisputable customs and morals. Refugees call on the majority societies to become aware of the situation in the countries they have left and continue to be connected with, and to deal with the political, economic and social situation there. They encourage to deal with their own and the foreign culture and religion. Refugees challenge the citizens to widen the "own" horizons, to act and to be open to the outside world. This helps a society to expand and protects against "narrow-mindedness" and self-sufficiency.



"Round table" in Český Těšín

In many parts of the world we are witnessing a retreat into nationalist ideologies, also in Europe. According to this, "foreigners" have the choice to assimilate themselves, that is, to leave their own culture, their religion and their identity behind them, and to become like everyone else or to "go home". These tendencies are dangerous and naive. Because differences with all enclosed stresses are a pool of creativity. Societal homogeneity, with the exclusion or neglect of minorities, with the schema "we" here against "them" there threatens a democratic community. Diversity is and remains the quality of Europe. Diversity is the quality of the Erasmus + programme. Diversity is the quality of our project - diversity of countries, languages, cultures and religions. It is precisely this diversity that has given many professional impulses in our project, created new relationships and encouraged fruitful learning. Refugees increase diversity, promote societies and allow migration to be understood as an opportunity:

- as an opportunity for a joint struggle for justice and global solidarity;
- as an opportunity to live together in diversity in peace;



- as a place of spiritual experience and a way to God (who loves all human beings) - and as a place of learning for the humanization of mankind.

Cultural and religious characteristics belong to the identity of a person. In a foreign country and in a strange society with different moral concepts, laws and living conditions, refugees find their grounding and roots in their identity. This is why they should have the opportunity to keep their cultural roots and their religion as far as possible in the receiving societies. Therefore, it is helpful when they connect with people with similar language and culture; when they are looking for spiritual and cultural sisters and brothers in the new environment; that they keep in touch with their families and friends in their home countries and that they use these connections to get the courage to go into new relationships in their new life. But as the majority society they must be open to others and not creating a "parallel society". Living together only can succeed, when refugees are looking for ways to the people in their respective context and look for relationships. However, the "natives" have to do the first steps.

4) Exploring the resources of refugees

The image of refugees as needy people is a distorted picture. They bring resources and skills into their new context. This is also evident in the interviews conducted in our project. They are committed to coping with their situation in the new environment - and usually they succeed. Here are some short examples.

A report of Caritas Belgium:

“What is Caritas’ position on that issue (spiritual life of migrants), as a Christian organisation that respects all differences?

We talked to *Ibrahim*, a Muslim from Palestine, about 30 years old, a soldier and recognised refugee in Belgium. He arrived in Belgium six years ago; his original plan was to move on to Sweden, but he ended up choosing to stay in Belgium.

His first year was challenging, as he was isolated, disoriented. Integration was made possible through the assistance of Caritas social workers, who welcomed him, explained how life in Belgium works, helped him to learn Dutch and find housing, first in Antwerp, and then in a smaller town. Ibrahim offered to help as a volunteer with Caritas and led group information sessions about citizenship. Having faced the same problems as the other participants motivated him to help them; the first stages of the reception of refugees are essential to him. He was then hired by Caritas. The social workers who helped him out have now become his colleagues!

He sees Caritas as a big family, where he feels welcomed, integrated and where he can put his skills to use. Practicing his religion is not an issue for him, as he can pray in a church just as well as in a mosque and live according to his beliefs. Understanding and respect are what his success is founded on.



Today, Ibrahim enjoys a peaceful life, he doesn't think he'll go back to his country, which is torn up by war; his children are growing up here, and he is working on many projects to ensure others can have the same experience: he has written a book that goes over the various stages of integration, a source of hope for a brighter future!"

A report from the Islamic Community in Austria

A couple with 4 children (age 4 – 16 years).

The father is an academic (university graduate), the mother a housewife with basic education. They met and married when they were young. The wife was depended on her husband during her entire life in the home country. Both never left the familiar environment. Their escape from Syria to Austria was her first journey ever.

The father, a man with slightly higher social standing in Syria was eager to achieve the same high status in Austria and he acquired a basic knowledge of the German language within a short time.

The language course, his wife had to attend, was a big burden for her as the only thing she wanted was to bring up her children properly. The four children were well-educated and intelligent, but also quite withdrawn. Their journey started in Syria and continued in Jordan, where they settled down for a year in a refugee camp. After Jordan they fled to Egypt and spent there another year before they immigrated to Austria by seaway. Because of the constant changes of location, there were no chances for integration for their children. The two oldest children had witnessed the war and the frequent moves made the children suspicious against something new.

After a year, when the family settled down and the children started attending the school and after sustaining and improving a healthy and stable lifestyle they became more independent and had lesser problems socialising themselves. The best solution to cope and overcome all the negative experiences was to establish contact with new people and to take an active part in society.

An interview in the Diaconical Work Lörrach, Germany

with Ms. A who has been living in Germany now for two years with her five children (21, 19, 17, 14 and 5 years old).

"How did you get to Germany?"

Ms. A has fled with the children 2012 from Syria to Turkey. Her husband wanted to stay in Syria to look after the house and the other family members. In Turkey the family lived two years from their savings. Ms. A had the hope that the war would soon be over and they could return to their country. But the opposite was the case. The situation in Syria became worse and worse. Ms. A felt abandoned by her husband during this difficult time.

She could not find work in Turkey. Their children were still small and there were no relatives who could take care of them. She saw no prospects for herself and her children in Turkey.



She was lucky that her brother was already living in Germany. For political reasons he had fled to Germany years before.

In December 2014 she flew to Germany with her children.

How did you feel living in Germany at this time?

For her it was a shock to live in a community accommodation. At that time, they were the only Syrian family, because at that time many refugees came from the Balkan countries. Approx. 100 refugees lived in residential containers and shared the toilets, showers and the kitchen. She and her children were very afraid. They felt alien and frightened, so they did not dare to leave the rooms for two days. They starved for two days.

On the third day, the Arabic-speaking social worker came and knocked at her door. She was the first person to trust her and tell her about her fears. Her social assistant took them a bit of the fear and helped them with the authorities and other things.

Her children suffered greatly during this time because they missed their father. They did not feel sufficiently protected by their mother. Ms. A felt increasingly helpless and became depressed at this time. This fear disappeared only when she and her children moved into their own home.

Her new life in Germany was not as she had imagined. She felt as frozen, anxious, and impotent against all the new demands she had to take.

How do you feel in Germany today?

These initial difficulties at the beginning in Germany are gradually disappearing. Mother and children feel really comfortable in Germany since they live in their own home. Their fears became less and they have now privacy. Ms. A attended a six-month integration course. The children, except for the eldest daughter, came to school and the youngest son in the kindergarten. All have a regular everyday life and therefore normality. Ms. A usually understands the people who speak to her in German and she tries to answer. Meanwhile, she has lived in Germany for almost two years and feels well. Even their children enjoy the normality after these experiences. Ms. A herself enjoys the freedom to be able to determine herself her life without the family and cultural constraints in Syria. For her it is great that women in Germany are not financially dependent on their husband.

As a Muslim, she can freely exercise her faith and feels accepted and respected by her Christian friends.”

In addition to these personal resources many people in need and existential crises gain courage and hope from their religion and faith. What a great gift are like-minded sisters and brothers in faith who give security and comfort. For many, prayer means reducing fears and threats and getting more serenity and patience. When situations are desperate, people can seek consolation from God. And finally, difficult times get a different dimension when recognition and encouragement of God are experienced.

In working with refugees, religious resources can play an important role alongside human



sources of resilience. To remind them of these sources is a part of caring for refugees.

B) Competencies for cultural and religious sensitive care

1) Requirements of working with refugees

Working with refugees is challenging because it is about going into relationships with people in existential crises. Anyone who takes care should have personal skills and develop them further. In order to be able to reflect and question oneself in this work, some few essential points will be mentioned here:

- the ability to reflect and to question oneself: what is happening in contacts with refugees on an emotional level and which feelings disturb the contacts?
- suffering is particularly visible in contacts with refugees; therefore it is necessary to meet them with respect and dignity and treat them as equal partners;
- own prejudices have to be checked again and again;
- it is important to be authentic, to represent the own beliefs authentically and to be open to the values and convictions of other people;
- it is important for refugees to be accepted as they are, with all their cultural, religious and personal characteristics and not to judge them;
- no refugee is like the other, therefore their concrete situations and individual stories have to be listened to; respond to them and do not generalize;
- in order not to become overwhelmed working with people in need, it is helpful to share with other trustful persons or in groups about your emotional experiences; those who are not willing to do so, should consider whether he or she starts working with refugees;
- working with refugees is work with law enforcement agencies, so it is very important to think carefully about how to speak in public about refugees; they need your protection.

Anyone who discovers that these points are problematic for him or her can get help in many places to continue the work. But please keep in mind: beside all difficulties encounters with refugees make sense, enrich and extend own horizons.

The aim of the commitment for refugees is their independence. Caring and help has to become capacity building for self-help and lasting effects. With this in mind, support and care is particularly focused on the existing knowledge, skills, competencies and resources of the people. The aim of helping action should be to help refugees to act as self-determined and self-responsible as possible. This requires a conscious notion of one's role as a helper as well as a reflected attitude towards closeness and distance, partnership and neutrality in relationships.



2) Basics of cultural and religious sensitive care

a) *Some introductory remarks*

In the following sections we would like to develop competencies for the cultural and religious-sensitive care of refugees. In our project, we have concentrated on religious-sensitive care and on interreligious competences. Our investigations during the project on these points in the partner institutions and most of the institutions that work with refugees have shown that interreligious competences have been given far less attention than intercultural competences. We are aware that both are closely linked, but we believe that some formation in religious sensitive care is necessary. Refugees ask for the significance of their lives and they do it in their own individual way and with their personal backgrounds, they ask for the meaning of their experiences of migration and they are searching for hope - questions which touch upon their existence (see Chapter 1: Fleeing as existential Crisis). And, among other things, they look for spiritual responses which go beyond the daily miseries. People who work with refugees ask existential, spiritual and religious questions too: How can I help these people? How to solve the "refugee problem"? Does it make sense in spite of many setbacks and difficult situations to work with refugees? In the following passages we want to mention some points, how to deal with spiritual and religious issues, how to become a sensitive caring person and how to acquire competences in this area, to become able to communicate even in perplexed situations and discussions and to become partners in relationships.

b) *Culture and intercultural competencies*

In the widest sense of the word, culture means everything that humankind created, in contrast to the nature which humans did not create. People cannot live without culture. For culture is a system of meaning, interpretation and orientation that is expressed in "signs and symbols" in the widest variety of ways and guides people's living together and behaviour. Cultural services are all contributions that develop the system of meaning, interpretation and orientation of a group, whether in language, technology, art, music, morality, religion, law, economics, architecture, sciences - in all human activities. Culture is in a constant flow and in constant changes, because new creative responses have to be found to the respective human questions in certain situations. This is achieved by an ongoing discourse in which as many people as possible must be involved.

Culture in a more narrow sense can refer to a *group of people* to whom a particular "set of signs and symbols" is attributed. Or it means in a broader sense all that what makes human beings to human beings, inasmuch culture distinguishes them, for example, from animals.



While the narrow definition of the term is usually associated with a use in singular ("the culture"), a broader term can also speak of "the cultures" in the plural.

In the encounter of refugees very often different systems of meanings, interpretations and orientations meet – because the involved people come from different systems. Interacting with these differences requires intercultural competences that must be learned and used. In general, an intercultural cognitive competence (With what knowledge – or even prejudice - about another his or her culture do I meet this person?), intercultural attitudes (With which attitudes towards the other do I go into relation?) and intercultural competences (How do I behave adequately in the encounter?) will decide about successful communication. Intercultural cognitive competence means to acquire better knowledge of the countries of origin, of their social and political structures, legal framework, causes and consequences of migration processes, and much more. Intercultural attitudes already are listed above in the paragraph "personal requirements". Intercultural competence is the implementation of knowledge and attitudes in the specific interaction with people - here with fugitives. The following intercultural skills can be distinguished:

- *Empathy*: willingness to empathize with people of other cultural and social backgrounds and belonging as well as empathy with the victims of prejudice, racial exclusion and unequal treatment.
- *Role distance*: ability to take the other perspective, to relativize one's own point of view, and to decentralize cultural and social self-awareness.
- *Ambiguity tolerance*: the ability to withstand uncertainty, insecurity, strangeness, ignorance and ambiguity. Curiosity and openness towards the unknown, respecting other opinions as well as delimitation and conflict.
- *Communicative competence*: language skills, dialogue, understanding and negotiation skills.

Intercultural competences not only facilitate the relationship between people of different cultures and religions, but are also given a high priority in a plural society - and also in refugee work. Only such competences allow the realization of cultural and religious differences - and the development mutual understanding and relationships.

c) *Religion and interreligious competencies for the care of refugees*

Religion and culture are closely interrelated; both of them strongly interact with one another and are often confused. Both are systems of "signs and symbols" but religion must be distinguished from culture because it is bound to a "final reality". Religion is based on a transcendental force (or on a multitude of transcendental forces), which is characterized by original narratives, by rites and by ethics, which are important for human life. The Protestant



theologian Paul Tillich characterizes religion as the “ultimate being” and that “what is absolutely essential to humans”.



Relaxing in the teaching and learning activity in Duisburg

In the German-language, the term religion is used mostly for individual religiosity as well as for the collective religious tradition, unlike in English, where religion is more the tradition of a religious organisation and faith the lived religiosity. Although both areas have an enormous diversity, some universal elements can be formulated: individual desires for meaningfulness, moral orientation and a certain interpretation of the world. "Religion" does not “exist” as an abstract quantity or quality, but has to become "faith", i.e. in the implementation of the respective belief principles in the lives of the believers.

The power and beauty of religions are most likely to be discovered in their festivals. That is why it is important to celebrate and enjoy with people of other faith communities. In our project Christians and Muslims collaborated and we could agree to name the "ultimate reality" or "the ultimate being" with "God". The different traditions of Christianity or Islam were not mixed up, but in interreligious conversations and prayers, we found many similarities and "celebrated" them.

Religions are often blamed for many grievances among people and are also instrumentalised for political and other purposes. People have experienced terrible battles in the name of churches and religions in the past - and even today, there is a violent fundamentalism that kills with god on the lips and leads to terror and war. If religious people are bound to a "final reality", to the *only* “truth” and thus to the *only* interpretation of our world and of humanity,



this can lead to clashes and violence. But they must never be fought with force, but always in dialogue, in the relationship to God, who is always greater than human understanding, and in reverence for one another.

Faith in God helps many people in their lives. Faith remains a creative and regulating force in the coexistence of people, for the preservation of creation and for the commitment to peace and justice. Work with refugees is also understood in this sense.

For many refugees, religion plays a distinctive role at many levels of their individual and collective life. Religion in the sense of religious tradition and faith is part of their personal identity. It is the basis for their value system, which also characterizes their everyday life. If religion and faith is an important part of the identity of a person, he and she will take elements of his or her faith when they move to another country. In the new environment religion and faith can become an important part of the identity of a refugee, even if he or she had little interest in religious matters before he or she left home.

In order to meet refugees in their religious identity, care givers have to become sensitive to meet them in their spiritual identity.

We speak of interreligious and interfaith contacts with refugees in secular societies (at least in some parts of Europe), in which religion is regarded as obsolete or negated, and, on the other, by religious missionary attempts by which people are made to objects. In our concept we are concerned to see and to recognise the religious needs and backgrounds, but the self-determination of the refugees has top priority and is a part of human dignity and human rights.

When we speak of *interreligious competences*, we take up on the intercultural competences we were taking about before, on *cognitive* competencies, the competences of *attitudes*, and the competences of implementation and *acting*. But first of all, it must be said that in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is very clear that the concern for refugees and people in need is not only a human commandment, but also a divine one. In Judaism and Christianity, care is expressed in the commandment of charity: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Jesus tells the story of the "merciful Samaritan," who found a stranger who had been robbed, beaten, and left at the edge of the road. This man took cleaned his wounds, brought him to an inn and asked the people to take care until he recovered. A foreign believer does this charitable act.

In Islam the task of staying in dialogue and relationship with other people and nations is expressed and offered in the Koran (Koran 49:13). "O men of men, We have created for you men and women, and made you peoples and tribes, that ye may know one another: verily, before Allah is the most honorable of you that is the most fearful".

The religious principles of being with the others and helping them and especially the foreigners are in line with the general explanation of human rights: "All human beings are



born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience, and are to meet each other in the spirit of brotherhood. "

d) Awareness and encounter

Any encounter with one or more fugitives means to meet with strangers, with people who are different in many ways. This other and "strange" person is not just another individual, he or she is different because he or she is socialized in another "sign system". To recognise the differences is a prerequisite for encounter and for non-violent communication with the other. When humans do not become aware of differences one is not able to enter into relationship. Anyone who really gets involved in encountering and enters in respectful communication will leave this experience transformed: new images emerge; others are seen more differentiated, schematic interpretations are changed. Encounters become the "royal path" of learning and developing competencies - especially for interreligious learning.

Working with refugees offers endless possibilities. Transforming processes will happen on all sides, new possibilities and behaviors are rediscovered, especially when the encounters take place in an atmosphere of appreciation.



The group in Duisburg

3) Knowledge is necessary in religious sensitive care

When we use the scheme of intercultural competences, we can first speak of cognitive



competences or competences of knowledge that aim to better understanding of one's own and the religion of others. Therefore it is helpful to acquire knowledge of different religions. Caring of refugees means mainly to be exposed to the traditions of Islam and Christianity, since most of the refugees come from these religions. If religions have their foundations in their founding narratives and myths, in their rituals (in retrospection to these narratives and their relationship to God) and in their ethos as an expression of living faith, it makes sense to know something about all of that, at least to understand a little bit when refugees talk about their faith. However, it remains to be emphasized that religious generalisation is more harmful than useful. The talk about "the Islam" or "the Christianity" is not helpful, it is rather appropriate to hear how the individual person understands his or her faith individually and expresses the own religious identity in the "system of the signs and symbols".

Since religion and culture are closely linked, the basic knowledge of the essential content of the faith, the rituals, the festivals and the ethical consequences are also linked to the countries of origin of the refugees.

Professionals and volunteers in refugee work will always discover differences to their own religious convictions and believes and endure these differences. However, they should also be able to see and appreciate the aspects in which faith communities come together.

The acquisition of religious knowledge can be a great help in dealing with people of other faiths. When they experience that "these natives" are interested in their faith and know something about it, they feel themselves understood, appreciated valued.

4) Attitudes in religious sensitive care

"If a stranger dwells with you in your land, ye shall not oppress him: he shall dwell with thee like a native among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself: for ye also were strangers in Egypt: I am the LORD, Your God." (Bible, Leviticus 19: 33-34)

"He who spends the night sated and he knows that his neighbor is hungry, does not believe in me completely" (Prophet Mohammad).

Christianity and Islam underline the recognition and dignity of fugitives. Quite apart from the legal situation of a fugitive in the respective country, it is a human and religious commandment to preserve and admit human dignity in every situation.

Refugees come with their personal spiritual, religious and ideological identity. Therefore, it is important to respect and tolerate this identity as that of a "neighbor". Just being different is a matter of patience and restraint - an attitude not to understand in advance before you listen to the other. When fugitives meet in a group, they often share common spiritual and religious beliefs. It is, therefore, the responsibility of those who work with them to become familiar with spiritual and religious expressions in a sensitive way, to be open to them and to



respect them.

a) Keeping relationships in religious differences

In encounters with strangers, and especially with people of other religions and convictions, always differences are at stake – religion traditions have different ways of interpretations in many aspects and they have won views on "truth". It is necessary to endure these differences, or even to make them fruitful for encounters and conversations. These differences can also lead to conflicts. The task of the professionals and volunteers in refugee work is to be prepared for such situations in order to find ways to understand the positions and to help to overcome tensions. A good method is to raise awareness between the involved people and to reflect in which context the conflicts and tensions emerged and what is behind the differences. A helpful way is too, to get to know the living conditions of the people who have fights and arguments. As we already have stated: the personal encounter, e.g. through visits, meetings with groups and celebrating together is the way to come closer to each other. Professionals and volunteers in the care of refugees should learn to become "moderators" and "mediators" in situations of tensions and conflicts to look for agreements and compromises. In any case, prejudice, violence or hate must be avoided.

b) Avoiding generalizations

Generalizations are completely inappropriate, especially when it comes to religious or other convictions that are important for the identity of refugees. Care givers instead should patiently listen and be open for exploring the spiritual and religious attitudes and opinions of the refugees, in order to understand the specific characteristics of the faith of each individual person. Each faith has particular characteristics, follows own priorities and has also individual needs.

c) Endurance and sustainability

Since care for refugees requires complex tasks and challenges, it is important to develop long-term strategies of the companionship and to prepare various programmes for them. With regard to the final goal, namely, the participation of refugees in society and living together with them, it makes sense to work not only with refugees only as individuals and in groups, but to try to reach as a second step to build up mixed group with members of refugees and local people. Through this cooperative approach the mutual understanding of the others can grow.



5) Conversational skills in religious sensitive care

a) *Communication skills*

Since refugees often have urgent needs of different kinds, the communication with them must firstly be "need-oriented". One should also be very sensitive to the present conditions of the refugees and care for the person with real empathy. In order to become and be able to communicate with others, listening is probably the most important prerequisite. Working with refugees means to "serve" them without to "surrender" to them or allowing them to submit to them. Listening means not only to understand the facts and the content, but to try to "read" the emotions in the stories or the facts. In which emotional state is my counterpart at this moment and what does that do with me? Thus, communication skills primarily relate to establishing a relationship on a personal level and not just to perceive the content. Interreligious communication and education is using "hermeneutic skills", that is, to reflect what has been said on different levels.



Evaluation in Düsseldorf

In encounters between domestic people and refugees there will be always a power-gap (citizens of a country have more power than refugees, the majority society has more power than the minority society, children and women need more protection than men etc.). Even if this gap cannot be bridged completely it must be the effort to relativize these power constellations and become aware of them. Communication between people who work in migration work and refugees should recognize these "power games" and dissolve them as best as they can.



b) Abilities to speak “the language of faith”

Many people have little language abilities for religious issues. To share the own faith with others in an open way and to get inspiration for own beliefs is quite unusual. Care givers should train themselves in this area in a religious-sensitive way, be able to understand the religious language of others and express their own convictions in appropriate terms of faith. The educational process for care givers should provide opportunities to support their ability to express one's faith with others in a loving, friendly and selfless way. They should learn to be open to receive new incentives for their faith and the service of care for the refugees. To talk about religious and spiritual matters is only possible on the basis of a mutual trusting relationships and communication with fugitives.

c) Becoming sensitive for religious practices in daily life

Care givers must acquire knowledge or be told by refugees how they live their faith in daily life. Religious morals affect clothing, diet, eating habits, celebrations, hygiene regulations and many other things. The living together in families, religious communities and everyday life is regulated not only by culture, but also by religion and faith. This has to be respected and supported.

Particularly important for Muslims is that they can meet prayer times and that they can observe the rules of Ramadan. Events and even talks must be planned in such a way that prayer times are possible for them. Here it is particularly important to acquire knowledge about Islam (see above).

d) Expressing the own religious identity in an genuine way

We have emphasized above that fugitives must not be made "objects of own missionary tendencies". Nevertheless, it is appropriate to communicate the own faith to others in an appropriate way in order to stimulate the discussion about faith, to make it fruitful and to give the refugees an understanding of the receiving countries. Through being open to others “strangers” can become companions and care givers can become "cultural and religious ambassadors" of their own country. Care givers and refugees are encouraged to discover and strengthen their own spiritual identity and value system. So they become partners in the interreligious conversation.

e) Care givers need sharing and caring

It has already been mentioned above that working with refugees can become complex and exhausting. Therefore every organization which is active in the field of caring for fugitives has to organise the possibility for support and care through individual counselling or counselling in groups. Mutual sharing in educational and practical work is imperative for all



stakeholders, so that these people involved can express current and spiritual experiences in the work with refugees. They need the opportunity to exchange views with colleagues. They will experience that others are happy in some incidents like themselves, but that in others they are frustrated too. It is not a shame to talk about failures and collapses and about conflicts which occur again and again. However, they will also discover how rich and stimulating this work is - not least in the religious sphere. Through exchange, sharing and learning competencies will grow and the quality of the work will enhance. Our project as mutual exchange is a successful example.

These few competencies for sensitive care can only be listed here as general principles in encounters with refugees. They have to be proofed, changed and supplemented in day by day practice and experience. However, they show the necessity of the education even for care givers in the field of sensitive care. And caring for refugees is at the same time a part of educating refugees in their social abilities.

C) Education in cultural and religious sensitive care

a) Caring for refugees as educational mandate: Guidelines for learning and learning together

"In line with the values of our Basic Law (in Germany), we are committed to advocating common beliefs, implementing values such as dignity of the person and equality of migrants in everyday life and counteracting discrimination in education, work and support participation in social and political life. Inequality and the exclusion from education and work cause ghettoization and withdrawal into one's own ethnic community or to be feasible by a minority of radicalized fundamentalist groups which are strictly demarcated by the majority society, reject integration, and fight the host society in which they live."⁵

What is formulated here from a German perspective also applies to Europe, of course. In this Erasmus + project we have felt committed to these values and to implement them in our work and in the publication. Training of competencies and skills in the care for refugees is a key task, including taking care of cultural, religious and spiritual interests of them. The aim of all efforts is participation, integration and successful coexistence.

The aim of the participation of refugees is to build up resources for sustainable development of active participation of the persons and institutions concerned, to find common rules and regulations for dealing with everyday situations in which different cultures, religions and traditions meet. For this, it also needs education. Professionals and volunteers who care for fugitives are committed to educate themselves in these fields. This is not just about the

⁵ Rita Süßmuth, Migration und Integration: Testfall für unsere Gesellschaft (2006).



teaching of language skills, but about the joint learning of life and lifestyles, which makes the newcomers able to act in their new contexts. Cultural and religious sensitive companionship is almost indispensable. In the following, principles are named whose attention is helpful for care and companionship of the refugees.

Participation: Refugees must be perceived and esteemed by care givers and the whole society as subjects, not as "educational objects or objects of care". The participation of all as learners and as persons is not only a methodological task, but above all an attitude. Content, knowledge and lifestyles are not defined by the "educated" or the caring persons, but are developed and implemented jointly. This also applies to the areas of culture and religion and questions of existential meaning.

Partnership: In the design of learning processes there is often the classic role of "above" and "below". That should be resolved. Learning in our context is understood by everyone as a collaborative process. This is also indicated by the term "companionship", which indicates that the companions and care givers do not prescribe the direction, but all people involved are searching *together* for suitable ways.

Self-determination in learning: authorities or agencies often provide curricula for the education processes of fugitives. However, the learning in cultural and religious sensitive care should be designed as a holistic learning process in a specific learning community. The ways of learning is geared to the needs of the refugees. Learners are care givers and refugees.

Self-help: The aim of learning is to help people to find their own language and way of dealing with the issues directly affecting them. Caring for refugees does not mean to make them dependent, in contrary, all learning and educational processes are directed towards empowering them to become more and more independent, self-reliant and self determined. This is especially true in the areas of their own culture and religiosity, where they are the "teachers" of the people who work with them.

Local reference: Place of learning and reference point is the local and concrete life situation. In local situations, of course, regional, European and global aspects also come into play, but all of them have to be referred to the specific situation "here and now". Learning is learning in immediate contexts and therefore always related to real life situations.

Resource orientation: It is necessary to discover and integrate the own resources of the fugitives. That means, not only to look at the resources of the individual, but also about the group he or she is living in or at the greater community and to use their resources too.



Resources include the life experiences as well as the cultural and religious affiliation of refugees and care givers.

To share responsibility: To handle everyday tasks is an absolute responsibility. For successful cultural and religious sensitive care, all participants are responsible. Responsibility must be shared, conflicts must be addressed together and solution must be developed together. Learning of common responsibilities in different roles is part of the processes in working with refugees.

Sustainability: Learning is based on sustainability and not on the fulfillment of programs for refugees, professionals and volunteers. What sustainability means is found out through the analysis of the situation, the needs of all people involved, the way how learning and changes can be empowered and how the learning is helpful for the future.

Lifelong learning: Learning to “go with” refugees is above all a learning of learning. A *learning* attitude is the prerequisite for a permanent willingness to face new challenges and changes. This is also true for intercultural and interreligious learning. In the process of concrete learning, all stakeholders engage in an attitude of continuous learning, openness to new insights, new knowledge and new ways of life. Learning does not end with a course or a process of companionship, but it encourages new learning for life in future.

Moderation: The ongoing discussion and moderation of interreligious learning processes brings people into relationship. This is a great challenge and opportunity for the caring and companionship. Companions understand themselves as part of the learning group (learning community) and are not “above”. When it comes to existential questions, they are as much in processes as all other people. They pay attention to the processes, talk about the next learning steps and help to reflect. The greatest capacity should be in awareness-raising and capacity-building.

Education makes strong - especially refugees living in Europe need education. For sure, integration and participation cannot function without education. More than half of the refugees are under 25 years of age, so they need education. Educational institutions, initiatives and administrations, and on the basis volunteers are faced with the task of finding ways to welcome and to care children and young people who have escaped - often unattended. It is a mandate to include and let them participate in education, culture and society. This includes, in particular, to identify their competencies and potentials and to take care of their spiritual needs.



b) *Guidelines for practice in seven points*

Culture and religious sensitive care means to be in a holistic *personal relationship*- to involve oneself as a whole person with a person with all his or her facets. Care can only be designed in such a way that companions enter in a personal way into the processes and work towards the fact that people gain trust and confidence and open themselves on a personal level.

Cultural and religious sensitive care takes every person as *unique human being* seriously. This woman or man, this child or youth never can be made into an object, never becomes an object of judgment, even condemnation or “missionary” activities.

Cultural and religious-sensitive care takes every *life story* as unique with the own truth. Even if fugitives have similar motifs and experiences, their story and biography never is identical with others. Each person wants to be perceived, acknowledged and appreciated with his and her own history. This requires open listening and an attitude that *this* story was never told and heard before. Therefore it is important to go into each conversation open, not with a “programme” and an attitude of “not-knowing” in advance.

Cultural and religious-sensitive care is aware of the *emotions* of the persons involved and works with them in such a way that the persons are not hurt in the process. Both refugees and care givers experience many opposing and ambivalent feelings. Anxiety and hope, grief and confidence, disappointment and joy can be present at the same time and characterize changing moods. Caring does not eradicate these conflicting feelings, but helps to articulate them and reduce their tensions.

Cultural and religious sensitive care *tolerates the strange and odd sides* of the other person and nevertheless tries to remain in relationship. Caring and companionship is always working on conflicts, which are coming from the past and resonate in the present and may be aroused in the personal processes.

Culture and religious sensitive care is aware of limitations, for example, if traumatization is heavy trained staff must be consulted.

Culture and religious sensitive care is open to talk about culture and religion, to address existential questions and to address the resources of culture and religion. However, it is not intended to indoctrinate refugees, but to help them practice their faith self-determined.



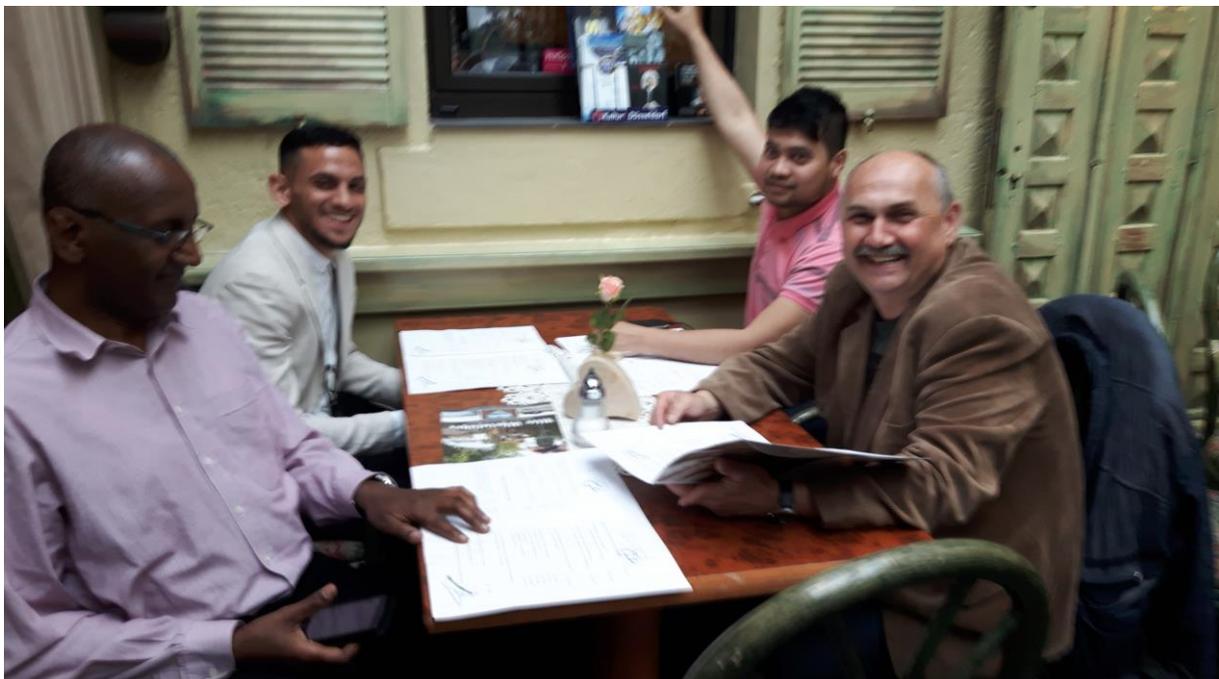
Summary

The existential crisis of migration and fugitives remains a challenge for Europe. The Erasmus + project of the above mentioned institutions in different countries of Europe has set itself this task and has focused above all on a cultural and religious sensitive care of refugees. In the course of the project it became increasingly clear that this area is not very popular – and therefore needs reflection and further work.

It was important to perceive and describe the reality of refugees, especially their needs, but also their resources. Again and again it is claimed that refugees "exploit" our societies. This must be decidedly countered and the European societies should discover that they enhance cultural and religious varieties and ask for new forms of inclusive participation and communal life.

The competencies for cultural and religious-sensitive care include knowledge, open attitudes, and skills that can be acquired through intercultural and interreligious education and community learning. But important is to put into practice.

A particular concern of the project and these remarks is to illuminate the positive meaning of religion, especially against the abuse of religion. The participants also want to work beyond this project on this issue. They are convinced that this is worthwhile.



Learning and fun



Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

The Partners in the Project

