



JRS Europe

Serving Forgotten Refugees

Jesuit Refugee Service www.jrseurope.org

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Community Links: School Integration in Ireland

Detention conditions in new EU countries

On 18 December 2007, JRS Europe formally launched the *Civil Society Report on Administrative Detention of Asylum Seekers and Illegally Staying Third Country Nationals in the 10 New Member States of the European Union*. Held in the European Parliament and hosted by Jean Lambert MEP, the event heralded the launch of the report that focuses on the conditions of detention in the 10 new Member States that acceded to the EU on 1 May 2004.



*Jean Lambert, MEP and Philip Amaral, Policy and Advocacy Officer JRS Europe
Photo: European Parliament*

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Across Europe, at any given moment, thousands of individuals are detained awaiting removal or the outcome of their asylum application. On 1 May 2004, 10 new states acceded to the European Union (EU) and, through their geographical position, automatically became responsible for policing the external borders of the EU.

Very little is known about the detention conditions in the new member states: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The new JRS report, coordinated by JRS Malta, sheds light on the often forgotten situation of asylum seekers and migrants, deprived of their liberty in detention centres throughout the new Member States.



*Dr Katrine Camilleri addresses MEPs and experts
Photo: European Parliament*

The launch in the European Parliament was attended by MEPs, representatives from the European Commission and NGOs active in this field. Given the forthcoming European Parliament Directive on return, speakers Dr. Katrine Camilleri and Philip Amaral analysed how this directive could impact the situation of detention in Malta, Hungary and Poland.

With countries in Europe becoming more and more focused on policing their external borders, the new Member States on the edge of the EU face greater pressure to tighten their border controls. "This research has created a network to monitor and report on the detention conditions in these new Member States over the months and years to come", said Philip Amaral, Policy and Advocacy Officer JRS Europe.

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To obtain a copy of the report, visit the JRS Europe website: www.jrseurope.org

Integration in Ireland

As Ireland becomes increasingly diverse, schools and teachers have an even greater responsibility to integrate their pupils into the wider community. Schools and educational activities allow parents and children, who are new to Ireland, to meet other families living nearby and real communication and friendships can develop. Community Links, an integration project of JRS Ireland, works with schools in Dublin to help school personnel address the challenges of working in an ethnically and culturally diverse environment.

Many schools in inner city Dublin are located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Increased numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants living in the area have greatly changed its demographic makeup. Some inner city schools report that anywhere between 30% and 90% of the children in their classrooms are from an 'international' background, although many of these children were born in Ireland.

The JRS Project has been providing support to schools through the development of resources and the provision of training and information for teachers and principals since 2002.



Children learn about other cultures, Dublin



Taking part in integration projects, Dublin

Teachers receive a resource folder with facts sheets about the main countries of origin and standard school letter templates translated into 12 languages. This allows the schools to communicate better with parents when English is not their first language. Training courses are organised for teachers aimed at dispelling myths and misinformation about refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants, as well as providing school personnel with the information they need to advocate for their students.

Parents are also targeted by the Project. A booklet, translated into 7 languages, provides migrant and refugee parents with basic information about the school system in Ireland, which could be very different to the system in their country of origin.

With Ireland's increasingly diverse population, greater resources are required to help children from refugee or migrant families adapt to life in Ireland. The JRS Community Links Project is targeting assistance at teachers and parents to ensure these children are not disadvantaged as a result of their background or history. The provision of this form of support helps parents, children and families integrate successfully into Irish society.

For more information on the Community Links Project, visit the JRS Ireland website: www.jrs.ie

Ruth Diaz-Ufano, JRS Ireland

JRS Ireland: Intercultural and Interfaith Calendar

After the success of the 2007 Intercultural and Interfaith Calendar, JRS Ireland recently launched the 2008 edition. It contains information from a variety of cultures, religions and diverse communities living in Ireland. The calendar includes: religious and public holidays in Ireland, UN days and national holidays in some other selected countries.

Copies can be ordered at a cost of €6 per calendar. To order, just send e-mail to clproject@jesuit.ie indicating your name, organisation, address, e-mail and telephone number and how many calendars required.

The challenge of helping refugees and migrants in Poland

The Catholic Church in Poland is facing new challenges to respond to the growing number of refugees and migrants crossing its borders. Existing church networks need to target social support and resources more specifically at refugees and asylum seekers if they are to help this vulnerable group in the future.

Historically, following World War II and the redrawing of new borders, Poland has not been an ethnically diverse country. However, over the past few years migration has grown. The vast majority of new migrants and refugees are from countries that made up the former Soviet Union. A small number of migrants from Africa also reside in Poland while 30,000 Vietnamese live in Warsaw.

Caring for the young, elderly and most vulnerable members of Polish society has always been an important role for the Catholic Church. The Church is guided by the Holy See and takes its inspiration from The Holy Bible, which teaches respect towards foreigners. The new task for parishes, Catholic schools and institutions is how to translate the natural role of the church as a carer of people in need into a role that targets assistance directly at refugees and migrants. Given that migration to Poland is a new phenomenon and the majority of refugees and migrants are Muslim, new forms of intercultural and religious dialogue are required.

“...how to extend help to those refugees and migrants who need it but currently fall outside the traditional parameters of the Catholic Church.”

Some Catholic organisations, such as Caritas Poland, do currently provide direct assistance to migrants and refugees in Poland. Polish volunteers staff kindergartens offering childcare for the children of migrant workers. However, initiatives such as these are scattered across a wide area with little structural coordination. The real challenge for the Catholic Church is how to organise a network of social support, utilizing the established church structure, that helps refugees and migrants in a sustained and targeted manner.

The Catholic Church currently has a lot to offer refugees and migrants based on a history of social support directed towards the poor, vulnerable and those in need. However, as migration is such a new phenomenon and Poland has traditionally been an ethnically homogenous country, this opens up new challenges for communication with diverse religious and ethnic communities. The key issue over the next few years is how to extend help to those refugees and migrants who need it but currently fall outside the traditional parameters of the Catholic Church.

Fr. Norbert Frejek, JRS Representative for south Poland

JRS UK: New scheme swaps vouchers for cash

JRS UK, in collaboration with the community organisation South London Citizens, recently launched an initiative to give asylum seekers cash for their supermarket vouchers.

At present asylum seekers in the UK are not allowed to claim benefits or to work. They often have to rely on help from churches and community groups for accommodation and healthcare. Under section 4 of the UK Asylum and Immigration Act, some asylum seekers are able to receive £35 (€47) a week voucher support. Asylum seekers covered include those who have a judicial review pending on their case, those who have been able to reopen their asylum claim and those who have agreed to return to their country of origin. Some people have been receiving vouchers for two years or more.

JRS UK initiated the exchange scheme to allow for greater choice and for individuals and families to purchase cheaper food from street markets. Asylum seekers also need additional cash to pay for travel to interviews and to visit solicitors.

Mesu, who is seven months pregnant, wants to prepare for her baby's arrival. Being able to exchange vouchers for cash means she can buy a basic layette for her baby. She can also purchase a bus pass to go to her English classes in the evening.

The voucher exchange scheme has gained popularity since its launch in December 2007. Currently, £7,700 (€10,365) of vouchers are exchanged every month.

For more information about the voucher exchange project, contact JRS UK at uk@jrs.net

Jesuits elect new Father General

On 19 January 2008, the Society of Jesus elected a new Superior General as head of the Society of Jesus at a meeting of the General Congregation in Rome.

Fr. Adolfo Nicolas, who comes from Spain, spent most of his Jesuit career in the Far East after being ordained in Tokyo in 1967. He replaces Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach who retired from the post at the age of 79 after 24 years service.

In a message to JRS, the outgoing Father General spoke of his gratitude to JRS for helping refugees and asylum seekers around the world. He said that “hope increases when we help refugees to have faith in themselves and in their futures” and added that the work of JRS transforms “past and present hatred into life with the wisdom which enables reconciliation...”.



*Fr Peter Balleis, Director JRS International
with Fr Adolfo Nicolas, the new Father General*

‘To the other towns’

Advocacy around Europe

When discussing advocacy in Europe, a lot of attention is given to institutions in Brussels, particularly the European Union and the European Commission. Lobbying MEPs and policymakers can produce effective results but advocacy work is also undertaken in other cities throughout Europe with many different institutions and personnel.



In December 2007, three representatives from JRS Europe were invited to address a hearing of the Council of Europe in Paris on the detention of irregular migrants and asylum seekers. Fr Jan Stuyt, Director JRS Europe, recently took part in the UN dialogue on protection in Geneva where he used the recent JRS Europe publication on destitution to draw attention to the often forgotten situation of destitute failed asylum seekers.

National offices are also very successful in campaigning for the rights of asylum seekers and migrants in their respective countries. In January 2008, a coalition of NGOs including JRS Belgium, won a case for two expelled Palestinians against the Belgium state at the European Court of Human Rights. In Berlin, a group of German parliamentarians were presented with case studies and information about migration and development while some members of the Dutch parliament will shortly receive a briefing on detention and destitution.

The importance of advocacy at a European level should never be underestimated. However, this needs to be complemented and supported by work at a national and local level, as shown by the recent case in Belgium. Targeting information at the right audience is key. In this manner, advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers does not have to be focused on Brussels-based institutions but can be undertaken in towns and cities around Europe.

Fr Jan Stuyt, JRS Europe

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