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EESC fact-finding missions on the situation of refugees, as seen by civil society organisations



MISSION REPORT – GERMANY
7 AND 8 JANUARY 2016



European Economic and Social Committee

Mission report – Germany, 7-8 January 2016

In December 2015 and January 2016, EESC delegations visited eleven EU Member States to meet civil society organisations working with migrants in order to identify the problems, needs, failures, success stories and best practices of the various players in the current refugee crisis with the ultimate aim of providing input into EU policy-making. The delegation to Germany was composed of Antti-Jukka Ahtela (Finland, Employers' Group), Peter Schmidt (Germany, Workers' Group) and Krzysztof Balon (Poland, Various Interests Group), supported by Johannes Kind, EESC secretariat. The delegation visited facilities and held meetings in Passau and Munich on 7-8 January 2016.

1. Conclusions

The arrival of migrants in large numbers in 2014 and 2015 was not met by an adequate response from the relevant authorities at federal and regional levels. It is due to volunteers, donors, civil society organisations, the federal police and local authorities that chaos has been avoided and that the reception of migrants is working reasonably well. The mayors of Passau and Munich have overstepped their responsibilities and remit to fill the gap left by federal and regional authorities, and the role of civil society has been and continues to be essential. The cities of Passau and Munich have accumulated substantial debts to finance their efforts.

More than 1 million migrants arrived in Germany in 2015 and migrants continue to arrive in large numbers (Passau alone saw a peak of over 8 000 arrive on a single day on 26 October 2015, with around 2 000 per day arriving in early January 2016). The German and Austrian authorities agreed informally on an arrival capacity of 3 600 migrants per day who arrive by bus from Austria. Institutions, civil society organisations and volunteers are operating at the limit of their capacity and expect difficulties when the number of migrants increases again with improving weather conditions, while the number of volunteers is decreasing over time.

Language training, childcare facilities, schools and workplaces are of key importance for the integration of migrants. The integration of children and minors in childcare facilities and schools plays a very important role in the integration of their families. The very intensive support provided by law to unaccompanied minors demonstrates the importance and usefulness of language training, integration courses, school and professional education as well as mentoring.

Bavaria is running a "3+2" de facto scheme of three years of professional training within a dual system of training and employment and two additional years with the employer during which migrants are tolerated even if their request for asylum is ultimately rejected. This provides security both for the migrant and his/her employer and makes the investment of time and money worthwhile.

2. Summaries of the meetings

a) **Refugee housing facility Salzweg, Passau County, operated by district administration on behalf of the regional government – meeting with Caritas, local volunteers and public employees in the presence of local media**

Against initial resistance from local representatives and citizens, a refugee housing facility was set up in the town centre with the support of a local initiative of active citizens. Salzweg has about 7 000 inhabitants and houses about 300 asylum seekers in the facility as well as in houses and apartments elsewhere in the town. The facility is run by the district administration (2 staff), counsel and advice to migrants is provided by Caritas (1/2 staff) and the facility heavily relies on the support of local volunteers for language training, integration programmes and logistical support. Caritas, which is reimbursed for 80% of standard staff costs by the regional government (but pays higher salaries than standard staff costs resulting in reimbursement of 63% of staff costs), cannot provide counsel and advice to migrants at all facilities currently in operation in the region for which it is in charge.

b) **Refugee emergency housing facility in Lindau, operated by Passau City – meeting with representatives of Passau City, local media and refugees**

The facility, operated by Passau City, houses migrants who have passed initial registration by the federal police and are awaiting proper registration of their claim for asylum in the Bavarian branch office of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in Deggendorf. Each town and county can be obliged to supply 200 places; this facility currently houses 300 and has capacity for 400 migrants. Migrants stay for one to two months; 50-100 migrants arrive monthly from initial registration by the federal police and an equal number leaves for registration of their asylum claim. This is against a background of 1 000-2 000 migrants arriving daily in Passau at a rate of 100/hour (two buses from Austria) and 3 000 overall in Bavaria, who are distributed via bus and train to other emergency housing facilities all over Germany. The costs of the facility are reimbursed by the regional government (except staff costs). The facility is run by a security service in two shifts; there is one Arabic speaking staff member. Food is provided by a catering service (two warm meals, one bread-based meal).

c) **Passau train station, operated by the federal police with the support of volunteers – meeting with the federal police and volunteers**

At the beginning of the refugee crisis, migrants arrived by train in Passau at a rate of +/- 2 000 per day (more than 8 000 on the peak day of 26 October 2015), were registered by the federal police and received support from spontaneous volunteers. After Germany and Austria agreed that migrants would arrive by bus only (see point d) of current procedure), the train station now serves only for the transportation of migrants to the Bavarian branch office of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in Deggendorf and distribution of migrants all over Germany. Several times a day, migrants arriving on a dozen buses from registration of their claim for asylum in Deggendorf are put on the train with the assistance of the federal police. The police operate with 38 staff on behalf of BAMF, which does not have sufficient staff.

Volunteers without any formal organisation beyond a spontaneously filled timesheet assure that the migrants are assisted during a waiting time outside of up to 1½ hours (including medical assistance if necessary). Five to six volunteers are present per shift. All food and beverages provided at the station are donated, but migrants also receive a food package from the authorities for the journey. Donations and volunteer rates are declining.

d) Clearing area Danziger Straße, Passau, first registration of migrants by federal police – meeting with the federal police

The clearing area replaces the controls that would typically be carried out at a border point. Migrants arrive by bus from Austria at a rate of two buses per hour, as agreed with the Austrian authorities. Migrants who request asylum in Germany are registered (fingerprints, body check, questionnaire, check whether already registered previously in Germany, no check against European system). Migrants who want to request asylum elsewhere, who come from countries with no risk of persecution or whose claim has already been refused in Germany are sent back to Austria (they may be back requesting asylum in Germany in the following days). This procedure is in place since 8 December 2015 and about 3 000 migrants have been returned up to 7 January 2016. Previously, turning migrants back to Austria was not possible and Slovenia still (7 January) does not take migrants back. Families are never separated, e.g. if there is an outbreak of infectious child diseases in one of the facilities down-stream, families with children under a certain age are not sent there. Following registration, migrants are taken to Deggendorf (Bavarian branch office of BAMF) by train or returned to Austria by bus.

The police are assisted by volunteers assisting migrants – see point f) Passau verbindet.

e) Passau City – meeting with representatives of the City of Passau

Faced with the arrival of thousands of migrants on a daily basis since 2014 – from October to December 2015, 300 000 migrants arrived in Passau – the city stepped into a void out of a sense of humanitarian duty and to enable public life to continue. Passau was able to fall back on functioning mechanisms set up during the floods a couple of years earlier. This included the arrival of volunteers without being called, flat hierarchies and self-organisation and the mobilisation of city staff and additional budgets for which reimbursement is yet uncertain. Passau involves its elected representatives from the local to the European level (Passau round table/Passauer Runde). Migrants are distributed equally in Germany with the exception of unaccompanied minors who are in the care of border municipalities.

f) Passau verbindet – meeting with volunteers assisting migrants at the clearing area Danziger Straße

"Passau verbindet" ("Passau connects") grew out of spontaneous flood support at Passau university in 2013 and has about 10 coordinators helping volunteers to organise themselves and to provide an interface with the federal police. The coordinators provide a guide, set out requirements, accept self-registration via Facebook (required for access to police-controlled area), organise shift plans for which there is a decreasing number of volunteers and organise SMS-alerts when more volunteers are

needed (typically at night). The volunteers, half of which are students, distribute food and water, hot tea and initially also baby food and medical assistance. The initiative started with confidence-building between volunteers and the federal police who then temporarily relied heavily on volunteers before they gradually took over. Without the volunteers there would now be no more hot tea, no drawing corner for children, no welcome culture and no possibility for citizens to come into contact with migrants. Volunteers also organise long term activities for migrants who stay, such as welcome dinners, sports activities shared with refugees and mentoring.

g) Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Munich and Upper Bavaria – meeting with Chamber representatives at their head office

The chambers of commerce and industry, membership of which is obligatory for companies, are responsible for the professional training of apprentices in the German dual system of training in companies and educational institutions. In the refugee crisis, companies have provided humanitarian aid and supported with staff. In the long term they are investing in the education and qualifications of migrants, which are the key to integration and the prevention of social conflict. Bavaria has raised the age of obligatory schooling to 21 enabling integration programmes for young migrants from 16-21 with 2-year long courses including German and professional education. In Bavaria, there are about 40 000 migrants between 18 and 21 and in Munich alone there are 8 000 unaccompanied minors. On the other hand, there are about 10 000 vacant places in the dual system in Bavaria.

Bavaria is running a "3+2" de facto scheme of three years of professional training within the dual system of training and employment and two additional years with the employer during which migrants are tolerated even if their request for asylum is finally rejected. In order to enter the programme, migrants must originate from a country that is deemed unsafe. Before the "3+2" scheme was put into place, asylum-seekers were granted toleration periods of between four weeks and several months. Migrants in in-firm training receive language support from their employers and, if in the dual training system, they receive parallel language training from the chamber of commerce and industry. The Bavarian chambers of commerce are investing EUR 8 million per year into language training for migrants, which is controversial among the German chambers. They also provide advice to companies on asylum, housing and language training.

h) Condrobs – meeting with representatives of Condrobs at their shared housing facility at Kistlerhofstraße 144

Condrobs is a provider of care for minors, which has extended its services to unaccompanied minors from third countries. Unaccompanied minors receive the same support as resident minors in government care, which is the responsibility of the municipalities (also financially). Support is extensive in terms of human and financial resources with a ratio of one staff per six minors. Unaccompanied minors are usually more autonomous than resident minors, but need more language and other training as well as psychological support as they are often traumatised by separation from their families and the conditions during their journey. Female minors are a minority of 10-15% and tend to be more traumatised. The number of unaccompanied minors has soared from about 500 in 2013 to about 5 000 in 2015 and now exceeds the capacity of schools. The project provides housing and care to unaccompanied minors who share the facilities with students who have been chosen due to

their experience in third world countries. Minors and students go to school/university during the week and share evening and weekend activities. The students work at the reception, provide language training and will progressively be trained for providing care.

i) Caritas – Meeting with representatives of Caritas Bavaria

Caritas provides asylum and social counselling to migrants during the processing of their claim for asylum – which can take from several weeks to over 10 years – such as in the housing facility the delegation visited on the previous day. Caritas also provides integration counselling after recognition of asylum claims. For these tasks it is co-financed by the government. Caritas runs childcare with a ratio of one staff to ten children (11 if there are migrant children in the group) co-financed by municipalities. Caritas International is maintaining information and training centres in North Africa, which run schools, provide professional training and generally provide prospects in the countries of origin and transit.

j) Stadtwerke München - meeting with staff representatives and a company representative of Stadtwerke München (city-owned electricity provider)

Initially staff at Stadtwerke collected donations to support migrants. When the city's mayor decided in autumn 2014, in the absence of action by the regional government, to mobilise all available space to provide emergency housing facilities, Stadtwerke helped with the VIP area of the Olympic Stadium, operated by Stadtwerke, and volunteering staff. For these, coordination was required, which was provided by volunteers freed from work by analogy with legislation on volunteer firefighters. The volunteers organised medical treatment, legal and asylum counselling, sports and children's programmes as well as excursions. Many came from Stadtwerke, but they also included city and regional administrative staff doing extra shifts. The city provided security services and catering, counting on the regional government to reimburse. The stadium was used for sports events in summer and reopened as an emergency facility in October 2015 at the second peak of the refugee crisis.

k) Arbeiterwohlfahrt – meeting with members of the board and operational staff

Arbeiterwohlfahrt (AWO) is a well-established social care provider, which only recently started providing emergency housing facilities for migrants and care for unaccompanied minors. In the Munich region, housing is the most expensive in Germany and AWO therefore needs to run inflatable tent-like shelters for up to 300 migrants with a 24hr security service, social assistance, medical check-up and language courses during the day. The conditions are considered very difficult, particularly for families with small children. Turnover is high with 150 migrants arriving on a daily basis. AWO provides a ratio of 1 staff/100 migrants which is above the standard of 1 staff/150 migrants. The facilities can only be maintained with the help of volunteers.

1) **Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, Familie und Integration – videoconference with representatives of the ministry in Munich and Brussels on 20 January 2016**

Most migrants arriving in Germany are entering through Bavaria, which therefore provides a disproportionate share of reception facilities and care for unaccompanied minors who normally remain in the municipalities where they first arrive. The migrants are then distributed in Germany according to a key (Bavaria: 15%) whereas the EU relocation scheme has not started working. Bavarian expenditure on asylum and social counselling has increased from EUR 5 million in 2014 to EUR 30 million in 2016 and expenditure on language training has also increased manifold. Bavaria has established a framework for systematic language training in 2013, whereas the federal level only provides integration courses. Bavaria makes particular efforts in professional training and integration into the labour market, which are considered the key to successful overall integration. The authorities are impressed by the high level of volunteer commitment and recognise their obligation to provide housing and care for migrants or at least to bear the costs. Asylum and social counselling are co-financed.
