



GEMMA Newsletter

People working in the fields of gender and migration

Interview with Zsuzsanna Pásztor, project coordinator at the Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA)

Can you tell us about the programmes of the Hungarian Interchurch Aid targeting women and migrants?



The majority of HIA's programmes targeting migrants involve projects which support asylum seeker youth, staying in Hungary without accompanying adults, as well as protected youth, and those recognised as refugees. Together with the Refugee Reception Centre in Bicske of the Office of Immigration and Nationality, we opened the Unaccompanied Children's Home as on 1 January

2008 on the premises of the Centre. Here the services recipients are mainly boys but a small number of girls also end up coming to us. As of January 2009, the Home for Young Adults was also added to this unit with the intention of supporting youth over 18 as well. This Home accommodates protected youth and recognised young refugees, who arrived to Hungary as unaccompanied refugee seeker minors and attained majority during the asylum proceeding. Another project of ours entails the provision of training, titled *Migrant children in child protection*, for professionals working in the area of child protection countrywide. In addition, in the framework of our newest project, launched in June, we provide training for the leaders of migrant communities in social studies. So all four projects are directed at migrants but have different target groups.

Can you please describe briefly the project aimed at child protection professionals? How long has it been running and what motivated its launching?

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Based on our experience we concluded that the integration of children coming from a third country represents a novel and mainly practical challenge for those working in the area of child protection. The legislation clearly stipulates that these children are entitled to receive child protection services but in the everyday practice there are setbacks and misunderstandings in relation to the application of the law. We are to conduct nine training sessions for 20-25 participants each time in seven locations. Beside the legal aspect, the training lays great emphasis on developing intercultural

competence, as such training element is key in helping professionals to prevent cross-cultural conflicts and other practical problems. In addition to this, all the participants have the chance to learn new skills which are relevant to migration and psychology. Another important goal of the project is to establish effective cooperation with the relevant ministries, and we seek to set up a professional network where professionals will have the possibility to turn to with further questions or problems. From next year on we hope to deliver these training sessions as accredited.

Can you tell us about your experience so far? Is this project successful, does it meet the expectations it had raised before its launching?

Based on the experience we have had so far, we consider this project clearly a success, not only based on the assessment that the participants provided, but also because the professional cooperation that evolved as a result has yielded new ideas and strategies for solving the problems related to the protection of migrant children, which we aim

to implement in the framework of a new project.

We happened to have a participant of Afghan origin, for example, who is not only experienced in child protection, but is also very knowledgeable about both the Afghan, as well as the Hungarian culture.

When you carry out your activities focusing on migrants and related to asylum, do you come in contact with policy makers on the local (such as local governments), regional or national (for instance with the Office of Immigration and Nationality, relevant ministries)? If you do, in what ways do you help the each other's work?

We have been able to establish good and extensive collaboration with a number of organisations. This is not limited to policy makers, however, as we work with civil organisations as well, including, among others, the Protestant Mission, the Kossuth Zsuzsa Children's

Home and Primary School in Bicske, or the International Organization for Migration – IOM. Given that most of our projects related to migrants are funded from EU tenders, which are administered by the Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement, naturally we cooperate closely with



the Ministry as well. We have effective cooperation with the Office of Immigration and Nationality, as well as the guardianship authority and the local government in Bicske, and the Child Protection Centre of Fejér County. With respect to the training programme targeting child protection professionals, I would like to highlight the collaboration with the Regional Child Protection Professional Service in Budapest and with the Family and Youth Protection Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. In addition to the ongoing consultations with these bodies, their representatives regularly deliver lectures at our training sessions. Whether our work is successful largely depends on the degree to

which organisations in the field are able to help each other. It may sound commonplace to say, while it is still true, that the efficiency of our work is multiplied if we work together. And while in this area, just like in any other, conflicts of interest may arise, we shouldn't forget that cooperation is indispensable for running successful projects which benefit migrants, and consequently mainstream society as well. This is what we all have to aim for. What is also of great significance, beside cooperation, is to constantly keep in mind long-term goals, such as the elaboration of long-term strategies, which demands the participation of both the ministries and those who implement the projects.

To what extent are you in contact with researchers of the field? Are you familiar with the results of relevant research projects, carried out in Hungary or elsewhere in Europe? Are you contacted by researchers in relation to their own research?

Right now we collaborate with IOM and Menedék Association, whose mission is to help migrants, on two research projects focusing on issues of asylum, but we have only little contact with other researchers working in the field. We were planning to participate in the GEMMA workshop but in the end

were unable to unfortunately, due to a shortage of time. It would be really beneficial to work with researchers; however, clearly there is a great need for impact assessment and follow-up studies. Both civil and governmental organisations would greatly benefit from such research.

In your opinion, how effective are civil organisations, working in the field of migration and asylum, in communicating their activities towards the public, researchers and decision makers? Do you have any ideas as to how this communication could be improved?

Most organisations promote their activities and their results on their websites, and organisations are also required to lay emphasis on the visibility of their projects when

implementing tenders. The key questions from the point of view of an organisation's communication include: who is the target group, what is the message they seek to



communicate to them, and in what way. In this respect the general public, researchers and decision-makers are distinctly different target groups. A large part of the communication with the latter groups is not public. What it entails rather is increased cooperation related to concrete projects. Professional workshops organised regularly on the issue would be suitable for establishing and maintaining closer cooperation.

Communication towards society in a broader sense would be necessary primarily in order to increase tolerance towards migrants and refugees. Such communication towards the general public, carried out on a permanent basis and on a professional level, is largely a question of infrastructure and financial resources. Besides, the relative weight of migration projects compared with others, carried out by an organisation, should also be considered, along with the goal of communication in a given case: is it the sensitization of the society or soliciting support? From this point of view different means of communication may be effective for different organisations. In light of the prevalence of negative stereotypes in society related to migrants, organisations operating in the area of asylum would face difficulties if they set the objectives of increasing tolerance and fundraising, therefore under the current social conditions it is not opportune to build their communication strategies on activities related to migrants. "Investing" into communication activities related to asylum bears no risk for organisations whose funding

structure is only to a small degree made up of on donations. In the absence of economic activities, however, these organisations are usually dependent on tenders, therefore communication activities should be financed from those, which takes us back to the question of financial resources. Nevertheless, there are organisations which commit substantial resources to increasing tolerance in society but my personal experience is that the communication of activities related to migrants differs from organisation to organisation; what is common, however, is that it usually remains in the background for good reason.

One solution could be to have those organisations undertake a larger scale coordination of communication strategies, which focus their activities specifically on immigration. Asylum in Hungary is small enough a field for allowing most organisations working in it to substantially cooperate in elaborating a communication strategy. This is an advantage that should be made full use of. Besides, the division of roles in the field of immigration results altogether in a more effective cooperation, as opposed to everyone doing a bit of everything. My impression is that fortunately Hungarian organisations in this field have already chosen the former approach.