



**THE RESPONSE OF ASSET UK DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP TO
INTEGRATION MATTERS: A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR
REFUGEE INTEGRATION**

OCTOBER 2004



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Asylum Seeker Skills, Empowerment and Training (ASSET) UK Development Partnership¹ (DP) welcomes the opportunity to respond to *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration*. We believe it is absolutely important to get it right.
- 1.2. ASSET UK DP is a national EQUAL development partnership funded by the European Social Fund, the national Learning and Skills Council and others to support the needs of asylum seekers in the UK. A list of ASSET UK DP partners is provided below (Annex 1). Due to its limited remit, ASSET UK DP will not provide detailed feedback on the whole strategy. Our response will, therefore, focus on employment, training and adult education.
- 1.3. ASSET UK DP is conscious of the fact that refugee integration is of interest to many and expects the Home Office to receive many responses to the consultation. For this reason, we would like to keep our comments on the strategy brief.
- 1.4. Our response makes a number of recommendations to tackle some of the persistent issues and support refugees into further education, employment, self-employment and enterprise. We particularly urge the Home Office to include asylum seekers in the strategy and ensure their needs are also supported.

2. GENERAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ASSET UK DP commends the Home Office for its endeavour to deliver new solutions to support refugee integration. We particularly welcome and endorse the SUNRISE approach as a holistic and a refugee-centred approach to integration.
2. We concur that more can be achieved through partnership working between the public, private and voluntary sectors. RC believes more needs to be done to support refugees and asylum seekers to overcome the barriers to employment, self-employment, further education and training. It is vital that the Home Office provides leadership to ensure partnership working on employment, training and adult education issues affecting refugees is productive. The Home Office (HO) should encourage partnership working at high strategic level between DfES, DWP, DoH, Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to support the needs of refugees.
3. We are glad to note significant progress has been achieved. We congratulate the Department for Work and Pensions on their *Refugee*

¹ Click on the hyperlink for further information.

<http://www.asset-uk.org.uk/index.htm>

Employment Strategy - the first ever in the UK- and hope it will contribute significantly towards reducing the high level of unemployment among refugees. HO to work closely with DWP and Jobcentre Plus to ensure Jobcentre Plus *Refugee Operational Framework* improves access to and quality of services for refugees.

4. Self-employment or enterprise is a viable alternative to employment for many refugees and could be a way out of poverty and social exclusion. We urge HO, ODPM, the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) and RDAs to stimulate and facilitate business creation for refugees.
5. We are pleased to note that the strategy recognises that refugees are "individuals, with complex and diverse backgrounds, skills and qualities". We also commend the Department of Health for investing £2M in supporting refugee health professionals in the UK in the last four years. However, we would like to emphasise that refugees with professional qualifications such as doctors, engineers and dentists face additional barriers and many are still in dire need for support to access the UK labour market. We urge HO to work with DWP, Jobcentre Plus, DoH, NHS Trusts and the voluntary sector to support the needs of refugees with professional qualifications.
6. We also congratulate the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), DWP, Jobcentre Plus, EQUAL Development Partnerships and the Learning and Skills council (LSC) for the significant progress they have achieved in addressing ESOL issues. However, we are acutely aware of the fact that there are still many refugees and asylum seekers on waiting lists in London and the regions. In addition the recent survey report published by Adult Learning Inspectorate and OfSTED raises additional issues that need to be addressed². We urge HO to work with DfES and LSC to support refugees to overcome the English language barrier.
7. HO needs to work with DWP, Jobcentre Plus and the voluntary sector to promote volunteering for refugees to ensure refugees gain useful UK work experience and skills, contribute to UK businesses and support their local community.
8. ASSET UK DP is deeply disappointed that the Home Office is still maintaining the dichotomy in policies for reception and integration. We believe that the activities that asylum seekers engage in such as learning English language, vocational training and gaining work experience through volunteering at the reception phase contribute positively towards their integration in the UK labour market and society. We urge that the Home Office permit asylum seekers to train and work.

² Click on the hyperlink below for further information.

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.displayfile&id=3410&type=pdf>

-
9. HO needs to take on board lessons from the European Commission Initiative EQUAL (Theme I) for asylum seekers - both from the UK and European projects – we suggest that asylum seekers could be prepared for integration or return through the following approaches:
- (a) Conducting skills audits for asylum seekers and preparing personal development plans as a means of empowering asylum seekers;
 - (b) Provision of ‘on-line’ information about language programmes for adults, further and higher education, vocational training and employment is an effective way of widening access to and participation in learning for asylum seekers;
 - (c) Provision of high quality intensive English language programmes that are contextualised to the asylum seekers/refugees’ prior experience or aspirations. Linking such programmes to work placements would offer a ‘fast track’ to improving the English language and work-related skills at the same time.
 - (d) Training and capacity building for staff, advice and guidance workers and teachers who deal with asylum seekers and refugees is essential;
 - (e) Opportunities for volunteering and work shadowing for asylum seekers enable them to gain useful experience, knowledge and skills and contribute to their local communities;
 - (f) Employer awareness about asylum seekers’ and refugees’ potential in the labour market is key to their successful integration into the UK labour market;
 - (g) Employers and frontline advisers working with asylum seekers need help to make sense of the complex documentation presented to them by asylum seekers and make informed decisions; this may make employers even more reluctant to offer volunteering opportunities for asylum seekers.
 - (h) Creating opportunities for asylum seekers to begin to settle in the region where they most likely will stay after a positive decision and so to begin their integration’ if they get that positive decision with more of a ‘flying start’ is an important prerequisite for their integration;
 - (i) Identifying, disseminating and mainstreaming new approaches and models of good practice are proven to be key activities in the process of reception and integration of asylum seekers; and
 - (j) Learning from and sharing with EQUAL European partners and partners in Scotland has been extremely useful and needs to be encouraged.
10. ASSET UK DP is pleased to note there are clear indicators and an action plan developed to measure progress and impact of the strategy.

Unemployment among refugees is exceptionally high. It is vital that HO co-ordinates action to ensure measurable reductions in their unemployment rates are achieved every year.

3. CONCLUSION

1. ASSET UK DP is pleased to be able to respond to the Home Office's consultation on *Integration Matters*. We hope our response will be given serious consideration.
2. We believe the barriers to employment are well documented and known to the Home Office and DWP. What is needed is action to tackle the issue of refugee unemployment and combat social exclusion of refugees. We believe refugees' untapped economic potential needs to be fully utilised. This has clear benefits for refugees, UK businesses and the people of this country.
3. ASSET UK DP is willing to continue working with the Home Office, DWP, DfES, other statutory bodies and other key stakeholders to achieve this important goal.

ANNEX (1)

PARTNERS OF ASSET UK DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

ORGANISATION	STATUS
1. Basic Skills Agency	Member
2. London South Bank University, LLU+	Member
3. National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)	Member
4. Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)	Member
5. London Metropolitan University, Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU),	Member
6. Refugee Council	Member & Chair
7. Refugee Council, Training & Employment Section (TES)	Member
8. Sheffield College	Member
