

Project
LIB(e)RO

Intellectual Output 1 / Activity 2

National Analysis-Report

Needs Analysis

Economic Forum Passau

Germany

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Introduction

The Economic Forum Passau e.V.

Passau's regional strategy 2020 led to the establishment of the regional management called the Economic Forum of the Region of Passau e.V. This was an important step to position the town and the region Passau successfully and prepared for the future in the border triangle (Austria, Czech Republic, and Germany).

The Economic Forum Passau is a neutral platform of economic, political and cultural actors in- and around Passau. Since almost 20 years, the association has been responsible for linking the region's committed institutions. This goes far behind the geographical, content-related and institutional borders of the district Passau. The focus is upon the individual persons, their ideas and commitments.

The aim of the association is the advancement of a positive image and the attractiveness of the region and business location Passau through support and enhancement of social, political and economic forces. The implementation and support of initiatives in the areas of economics, education, integration and culture is another important part of the Economic Forum's share of activities.

To illustrate the work of the Economic Forum, two of its many projects, related to LIB(e)RO will be explained in detail:

FAM - Flüchtlinge - Asylbewerber - Migranten erfolgreich in den Arbeitsmarkt integrieren (refugees - asylum seekers - and migrants and their successful integration into the working market)

Qualification and placing of refugees into the local working- and apprenticeship market is the goal of the pilot project FAM since October 2014. Within the framework of the project, working perspectives have been created for people having fled from crisis areas. Refugees of any age (most of them are between 21 and 40 years old) and regardless of their legal status can take part in the project. The project consists of several components: Refugees participate in German lessons, receive an intercultural- and application training and get help and counselling to find internships and work or an apprenticeship. So far, nearly 70 people have been placed in internships, jobs and trainings.

PASSgenAU - Zukunftschancen durch Bildung (future opportunities through education)

The motto of the project PASSgenAU established in 2012 is: "No child or youth should get lost. " The target group are children and youths struggling with school. Through the help of PASSgenAU, students should be prevented from dropping out of school or their apprenticeships. Therefore, all persons, institutions and companies interested in education form a network. This cooperation ensures that a reliable, overall system is able to guarantee the best support for the children. To make this possible, "learning tutors receive a training at the University of Passau to enable them working with pupils in need of additional help. Thanks to PASSgenAU, schools were prepared to take special care of the rising number of refugees in 2015, as the special trained "learning godparents" were instantly ready to take care of children with an escape background and additional learning needs.

Overview of funding programmes and projects for refugees in Passau

Additional to the outlined activities, measures and initiatives addressing refugees on a local level outlined in the Situation Analysis of the Jean Monnet Chair for European Politics, we would like to explain in more detail a program called “Experience Germany & Design Diversity”, as well as the establishment of the so-called “Asylotheken”.

„Experience Germany & Design Diversity“

The program realized in Berlin, Köln and Passau, focuses on inclusive learning in the fields of adult education, civic education and educational science. The design of dialogue- and learning conventions, the improvement of media competence, qualification of teachers regarding their intercultural performance in class, strengthening core values of the European society, as well as a participative welcome culture are the elements of the program, thus helping refugees get acquainted with German culture and society in an inclusive set up.

Target groups of the program are young refugees aged 15 to 30 years, regardless of their country of origin or their prospect of being granted asylum, as well as German pupils, students and trainees.

The advantage of the program consists in the fact that already existing pedagogical projects can be included. Values will be mediated through reflected experiential learning and scientific support. The reason Passau was chosen is the specific transfer situation.¹

“Asylotheken”

Supported by Sankt Michaelsbund of the Diocese Passau, 8 so-called “Asylotheken” have been established in the region since 2015. That high rate of libraries with literature in English, Arabic and some major African and South Asian languages, prove the willingness of librarians to commit themselves in the field of migration, integration and inclusion. Regen’s library, for example, on top of that, offers learning material and textbooks, and thus adjusts to the needs of foreign people living in towns and villages in lower Bavaria.²

General situation and development of minor refugees in Passau in the last two years

While there have been few refugees arriving in Passau before 2015 the number of both, adult and unaccompanied minor children, has significantly increased within the years 2015 and 2016. According to Passau’s Department for Children, Youths and Families, a peak was reached in 2015 with 2652 pick-ups of minor refugees, from which 1706 were taken into custody by the Youth Welfare Office. This numbers dropped in 2016 with 565 pick-ups and 440 taken into custody. Currently, in January 2017, there have been 5 pick-ups, 4 of them were taken into custody. The number is not expected to further rise in the near future.³

¹ Projekt „Deutschland erfahren & Vielfalt gestalten“

² Diocese Passau, Homepage. <http://www.bistum-passau.de/aktuelle-meldungen/10/11/2015/projekt-%E2%80%9EAsylotheke%E2%80%9C>

³ Passau’s Department for Children, Youths and Family, Interview with Mr. Kaseder

Recently, Passau town and district host approximately 130 minor refugees. Additionally, there are also some of full age for whom the Youth Welfare Office is still responsible. In December 2016, there have been 19 refugees younger than sixteen years. A total of 73 were between sixteen and eighteen years old. The young adults (> 17) live in flats on their own but are still supervised. Forty-one refugees already came of age, but are still within the responsibility of Passau's Youth Office. Currently, there are living groups of minor refugees in Vilshofen, Passau, Neureuth and Büchlberg.

A majority of unaccompanied minor refugees come from Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea and Syria - countries, which have been in turmoil for most of the lives of those children making their way to Europe. Trying to integrate them through education poses a problem to teachers, social workers and the educational system of Germany in general, as the young people vary widely in educational and personal background. The region of Passau hosts a big number of minors from Afghanistan. Additional to a general low educational level, children from Afghanistan currently face the problem to be under threat of deportation as soon as they come of age. Anxiety about the future, fear for those left at home in addition to the psychosocial challenges adolescents commonly face, make further promotion difficult. Many of them seem to have little energy for anything other than mere activities of daily living.

Nevertheless, unaccompanied minor refugees are well cared for concerning their special educational needs. School attendance is compulsory for minor refugees in Germany. Minors visiting lower secondary education level classes (Mittelschulen) in Bavaria enjoy a wide range of additional support. Those finished compulsory education of secondary level or those aged 16 visit the so-called "BAF-Classes" (technical college for refugees and asylum seekers), as in Bavaria vocational education is compulsory, too. Here minors as well as adults get prepared for a dual training.⁴

Minor refugees live in community centres for youths, well cared for by a number of social workers, supervisors and volunteers assisting them receive additional tutoring and support for their homework, if needed. A range of information and leisure opportunities is available, too.

General situation and development of adult refugees in Passau in the last two years

The administrative district of Passau permanently hosted a total of 1946 adult refugees in 2015. The data was collected on the 11/01/16. The number of refugees decreased to 856 according to a statistic of 04/01/17. As more and more refugees, especially those from Syria, recently receive a residence permit, some collective living quarters have closed down by now.

The access of adult refugees⁵ to education opportunities in Germany depends on their legal status. Refugees who are granted asylum and hold a residence permit, have full access to so-called integration courses, each consisting of a language course and an orientation course. Under the new law of 2016, integration courses are even compulsory for people with a good prospect of being

⁴ <https://www.km.bayern.de/allgemein/meldung/3136/index.html>

⁵ In daily talk, we call a person "refugee" who has escaped from the country of origin because of war, for political, religious, or economic reasons. In legal terms, a refugee is a person who was an asylum seeker and has achieved refugee status. A person who has applied for refugee status and is waiting to be assessed by the government is referred to as an "asylum seeker". Aiming for an easy understanding of the analysis, we will use the term "refugee" independent of the legal status.

granted asylum. At the moment, these are refugees from countries such as Syria, Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Eritrea.

However, asylum applicants waiting for a decision on their claim and those with a negative decision on their status and holders of “Duldung” (temporary suspension of deportation) face high barriers on educational opportunities. Many refugees wait for years in remote camps of lower Bavaria, without any official language and integration courses. Although the Protestant Student Community (ESG) offer free language learning lessons on a volunteer basis in Passau town, refugees from villages of District Passau have little chance to reach town, given that public transport access is difficult and thus implicating social isolation and frustration. Thankfully, refugee helper circles have formed in most of the villages helping refugees to build a new life in Germany. Volunteers teaching German language and other core matters as German culture and habits, use various premises such as parish community centres or libraries. A lack of pedagogical qualification with volunteers and a big heterogeneity between German knowledge levels, ranging from illiteracy to B2 (autonomous language use), hampers an effective learning process, though.

1. Needs of refugees

Number of refugees questioned: 9 (5 minors, 4 adults, 2 of the adults are young mothers)

The interviews conducted line out the disparate educational attainment and cultural standards of minors from different countries of origin. Of five surveyed minor refugees three are from Afghanistan, one is from Eritrea and one migrated from Syria. Whereas the young man from Syria (aged 16) was able to answer in quite a differentiated manner, got a clear idea about his future (doing a dual training) and knew about libraries in his hometown, filling in appropriate answers seemed to be more difficult to the young people from Afghanistan and Eritrea. One of three Afghans questioned stated that he had not been in a library before; the same applies to the refugees from Eritrea and Somalia. Those having visited a library in Germany did it within a leisure time program of the living group’s social worker or because of particular interests (for example, one Afghan boy wanted to learn cooking and borrowed cookbooks from a small community library in Deggendorf). One of the Afghans was in custody of the Youth Welfare Office until recently and now faces the problems adjunct to coming of age. While well cared for up to the age of 18 years, he now feels left alone and without any support to catch up at school or other problems related to making up an independent life.

In general, both, minor and adult refugees state an interest in using an e-learning platform, although some believe that a combination of both, e-learning tools and physical learning materials, would be of greater effect. Especially young mothers living in remote villages without any access to educational opportunities are in need of low threshold and local offers. Two young mothers who live in Perlesreut named the lack of educational offers in the rural area and the fact that there are buses to Passau only twice a day as a main obstacle of integration. While their husbands work, mothers care for the kids. The few hours left, while children are in school or in nursery, are not enough to get to town for educational matters.

All of the adult refugees questioned know and had been to libraries in their hometowns. All of them have been visiting libraries in Germany or do it on a regular basis, reading newspapers, availing German language textbooks or using computers and printers. Thus, the idea of libraries as learning places is widely appreciated especially among adult refugees. Fortunately, most of the refugees live near to a library or are able to reach one by public transport.

Asking about the favoured contents of an e-learning platform, all the questioned persons named German language courses uppermost. Subjects of further interest are politics and economics. The awareness of already existing online language-learning resources, outlined by the Jean Monnet Chair for European Politics, does not prevail, neither among refugees nor among volunteers or social workers.

The question whether problems of German culture and customs sometimes occur was answered with “No” by all refugees. Those questioned, all stated to feel at ease in Germany, only some mentioned a general lack of friendliness and openness. Basic computer skills can be assumed for all refugees. Nevertheless, especially illiterate minor refugees will need assistance in dealing with online learning contents such as to ensure an effective and meaningful use of the platform.

Beside their mother tongue, most refugees speak German in different levels; English is spoken by only a few.

2. Needs of librarians

Number of librarians questioned: 4

Since 2015, when the number of new arrivals was highest, libraries have become a place for refugees to read and get information but also to relax and spend time. Especially adult refugees use libraries to escape crowded and noisy refugee camps for a while. Many libraries in the District of Passau were swift to react on that upcoming need (Asylotheken), as described above.

However, most of the community libraries in the countryside are rather small with little equipment such as Computers or WIFI-access available, whereas the library in Passau is spacious and well equipped. Generally, librarians welcome the idea of setting up an e-learning Platform and place it at disposal in libraries. Nevertheless, librarians mention staff shortages in some libraries as well as a lack of sufficient equipment.

All librarians questioned are or have been in contact with refugees, both minors and adults. The encounters differ, for instance refugees come regularly to borrow books, doing an internship or attending to a language course, to name but a few. The encounters were perceived positive without exception. Three of four librarians believe that a library is suitable to be used as a learning space, although only two have computers available that could be used by refugees. Three libraries have WIFI-access and offer it free of charge. All of the four libraries have multilingual textbook collections and librarians there speak at least one foreign language. However, only two libraries believe to have time resources available that go beyond mere assistance like responding to simple questions at the help desk, due to severe staff shortages. Three librarians are generally willing to work with a train-

the-trainer concept and have an idea about what social inclusive learning could mean within the framework of LIB(e)RO. Two of them stated having encountered knowledge transfer, both within their function as German language teachers.

As sufficient equipment is crucial for setting up an e-learning platform in libraries, we talked to more than ten libraries about computers and free WIFI available. Unfortunately, it was spotted out that most libraries are not equipped sufficiently. While some libraries have only one computer, which is used for lending service processes only, others have few computers with time-limited access of only 30 minutes. WIFI-access depends on a membership in most cases.

For a smooth running of an online learning platform in rural areas like the district of Passau, a better IT-equipment in libraries will be required. The prevailing shortage of personal as pointed out will make the assistance of volunteers unavoidable.

3. Needs of social workers and volunteers dealing with (minor) refugees

Social workers

Number of social workers questioned: 2

Social workers dealing with minor refugees face major challenges. Many of the young people have faced, and still face, great uncertainties, are often psychologically strained or traumatized and feel under pressure of expectations of family members in their home countries. Often social workers work alone, without the benefits of clear guidance from policy or research, as the phenomena of unaccompanied minor refugees is rather new.

The interviews revealed that social workers deal with a wide range of different cultures and mentalities and thus have to respond to every single child in a more intense way than indigenous young people need, thus time resources for getting the kids to work with an online learning platform are scarce. In addition to that and as a consequence of the large number of migrating minor refugees since 2015, the district faces a severe lack of social workers. Only one social worker stated, tentatively, to possibly have time for using the platform together with the children they care for.

Whereas refugees themselves claimed not to have any problems with German culture and customs, social workers state that respect and understanding for other cultures among minor refugees from different ethnic groups is often missing. Moreover, attitudes towards gender equality differ widely from a Western conception.

Social workers suggested scheduling trainings for refugees to help them accept each other and learn about German values, i.e. social skills trainings, in addition to an e-learning platform. As a means of handling the staff shortage described above, a social worker proposed to start empowerment trainings, in which refugees can learn from and help each other.

In general, it should be noted that it might not be possible to have social workers as a link between refugees and libraries as a rule, it would rather be necessary involving volunteers or fellow refugees into the process. Furthermore, social workers pointed to the fact that educational levels differ widely among minor refugees, English language skills are barely existent.

Volunteers

Number of volunteers questioned: 1

When thousands of refugees arrived in Passau every week from the Austrian-German border in 2015, maintaining order was only possible by the assistance of a big number of highly dedicated volunteers. AS refugees have settled now and thus no more assistance is needed at the train stations and borders to provide new arrivals with food, blankets and medical care, the kind of dedication of volunteers now is of a more long-term integrative manner. As main challenges within that process, the following aspects can be named: getting refugees into work or dual training, getting illiterate refugees educated, finding living space for those with residence status, and getting newcomers acquainted with German culture and values. Volunteers still play a major role in having all those assignments accomplished in a successful way.

Though only one volunteer was interviewed, experience shows that the answers the person gave can be seen as representative for volunteers in refugee work. Since 2015, the questioned volunteer has been supporting refugees from the refugee centre of Perlesreut. He set up language learning lessons in the library and organises integrative events. Being a retired police officer, pedagogical skills and awareness of knowledge transfer, are, as with most volunteers, rather scarce.

Therefore, an offer of theoretical and practical tools of methodological learning would be of great help. A train-the-trainer approach would be useful in this context, as it would enable volunteers to empower refugees as described above.

Volunteers also attach importance to lessons about German culture and values, especially when it comes to dos and don'ts at working places, at school or in public leisure facilities.

In general, volunteers and social workers are in favor of an e-learning Platform as a contemporary and economic learning opportunity, which can be used independent of one's location, with interactive and extensible contents. Libraries are also seen as suitable places for giving refugees the opportunity to use the platform, as most of them do not have personal computers available.

4. Summary and estimation of the actual situation

Taking the situation of minor and adult refugees and their diverging needs into account, first and foremost, the e-learning platform should be made accessible to adult refugees, too, as already outlined in the analysis of the Jean Monet Chair for European Politics.

Nevertheless, the interviews carried out with the different target groups show that an e-learning platform is commonly seen as a contemporary low-threshold opportunity to learn, especially for those who have no access to education opportunities out of legal reasons, because of cultural conditions or mobility problems. When it comes to most favoured contents, German language courses have top priority with minor and adult refugees. Therefore, the e-learning platform should offer a comprehensive list of links of virtual German language courses. As pointed out, the educational level differs widely, depending on the country of origin but also on personal backgrounds. The contents of the platform should therefore range in offers, to serve the needs of all. Moreover, it is of crucial importance that the language of the platform is of the respective EU-country, as only few refugees speak English.

The respondents, especially social workers and volunteers, request for trainings in the field of knowledge transfer and methodological learning. A train-the-trainer approach is well appreciated as volunteers as well as refugees can be empowered and thus help others. This leads to the fact that the interviews pointed out that both, librarians and social workers, face severe shortages of manpower and thus they can't be generally seen as counterparts of the project. Therefore, volunteers, who up to now play a major role in integration processes of refugees, should be involved.

The interviews also show that libraries have been a place for refugees to read and learn since the massive migration in 2015. However, one major obstacle to having libraries as places where refugees can access the platform is the fact that most are not sufficiently equipped with IT-services. This applies mainly to small libraries in villages, yet these are the areas with refugees mostly in need of low-threshold education opportunities.

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