



YOUTH UPBEAT

Brush the tempo of Interaction & Integration

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

June 2013



General Programme Solidarity & Management of Migration Flows 2007– 2013

European Refugee Fund (ERF)
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Sustainable Management of Migration Flows

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SOS Malta is a registered Voluntary Organisation, set up in 1991, which works with local and international partners.

The organisation assists socially disadvantaged groups in improving their quality of life by providing support services and opportunities to implement development and change. SOS Malta also encourages advocacy on behalf of social causes and promotes models of good care and practice.

SOS Malta works on four pillars that encompass the above objectives. These are: Social Solidarity; Volunteering; Overseas Development; and Research and Training.

Within the pillar of Social Solidarity, SOS Malta implements projects advocating for increased intercultural understanding and the introduction and implementation of measures which contribute towards the two-way process of integration and social inclusion of migrants living in Malta.

1. Introduction

About the Youth Upbeat Project

Between July 2012 and June 2013, **SOS Malta** in partnership with **Aġenzija Żgħażaġh** undertook a project entitled "Youth Upbeat", co-financed through The European Refugee Fund Annual Programme 2011. Youth Upbeat aimed to promote integration between different sectors of Maltese society, in particular young people, and refugees or persons with humanitarian and subsidiary protection by providing opportunities for interaction and awareness-raising through the use of culture and the performing arts as a tool for social cohesion.

Partners in the project believe that culture is a comprehensive and an effective tool for integration in Malta as this approach provides opportunities to promote interaction through shared interests. Through enabling participants to understand and appreciate the cultural richness that can be contributed by immigrants to Malta, this project was successful in promoting an understanding of the positive impacts Beneficiaries of International Protection can have for Maltese society and culture.

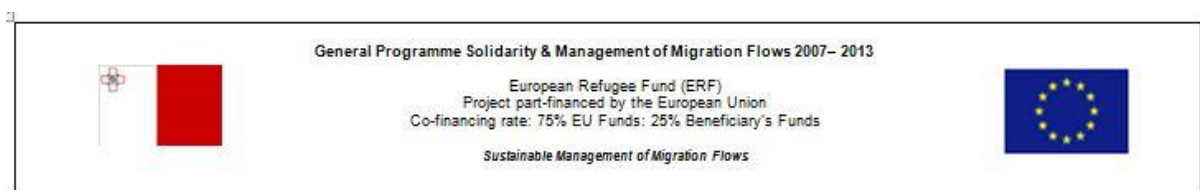
6 Cultural Ambassadors all having refugee or humanitarian/subsidiary protection status were trained to work with young people as part of the project to share aspects of their culture as well as their personal stories within 26 interactive workshops with approximately 500 13-14 year olds. These workshops focused on learning with an interactive methodology and treated such issues as perceptions, relationships, difficulties, positive experiences, culture through role plays, conversations, music and dance.

Furthermore, 12 young people interested in performing arts took part in a live-in performing arts weekend together with the cultural ambassadors, culminating in a final performance for the general public in Malta. In this performance, participants performed traditional stories from Eritrea, Somalia and Malta using language, music and performance to bring these stories together under the theme of unity and integration. This cultural evening also launched the documentary and a photographic exhibition regarding the project. Through identifying common interests in music, dance and drama, this project was successful in promoting awareness, tolerance and understanding between Maltese society and Beneficiaries of International Protection further promoting their integration in Malta.

As part of the implementation of this project, the Youth Upbeat team continuously evaluated the success or challenges faced in achieving the project objective. As such this document provides a summary of the key successes, challenges, lessons learnt and recommendations for future initiatives that may be used in the development of further projects of this nature.

About the ERF

The European Refugee Fund (ERF) is one of the four funds under the General Programme of Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows. Its main purpose is to support and encourage Member States' ability to adequately and safely receive refugees and displaced persons.



2. Summary of Key Outcomes of the Project

- **11 Beneficiaries of International Protection** trained in facilitation and working with young people
- **Over 500 young people** with increased awareness of the situation of refugees or migrants with subsidiary protection living in Malta through participation in **26 interactive cultural workshops**
- **Increased interaction** between young people and Beneficiaries of International Protection leading to more understanding of each other.
- **12 young people** with concrete experience of working together with **5 Beneficiaries of International Protection** in a cultural context through a live-in performing arts weekend
- **100 members of the public** more informed about the situation of refugees and migrants with subsidiary protection status in a cultural context through attendance at the Final Performance.
- Documentary shown as part of final performance and distributed to approximately **200 schools and key stakeholders** from government and civil society.

It was recognised by all those involved in the project that the key outcome of the project was the **change in perceptions** reached by all those participating in the project, both the Maltese young people and the Beneficiaries of International Protection themselves. Initial preconceptions, fears and attitudes were changed to that of ensuring an environment of understanding, friendship and cultural exchange.

3. Successes and Difficulties

Successes

The Workshops

It was recognised by all involved that the workshops at Villa Psaigon were very successful, especially the way the Cultural Ambassadors worked with the young people. We believe that through the workshops we reached our goal of bringing culture and stories to young people and managed to change the perceptions of these young people. This was evident when looking at what the young people thought of migrants before and after of the workshops. This change process will have a lasting effect on young people as what they learnt in workshops will also be taken home and the knowledge they gained will have a multiplying effect.

The workshops were successful as we were taking school children out of the formal school context. This was beneficial to both their interest in attending and their engagement with the activity and will aid in ensuring that this experience has a lasting effect on the participants. Furthermore, with the workshops we reached students who are otherwise hard to reach, for example, those with behavioural or learning difficulties and others with disabilities. The needs of all these groups were met by the workshops ensuring equality and accessibility by all

The content of the workshops was well planned and well prepared and was enjoyed by all. The packs used in the workshops were good and facilitated the process of learning and interaction. Furthermore, many felt that the use of different languages and the introduction of languages was a great tool to create a bridging medium between the participants. We could build upon this aspect in future projects.

Live in Weekend

This activity gave added benefit to the project in that it provided a concrete opportunity for in depth interaction between the Maltese and BoP that went further than the workshops were able to do. An evaluation was undertaken by participants and youth leaders and some key success were highlighted:

Youth leaders felt that one of the main strong points of the activity lay in its inclusive approach. The live-in offered a genuine ambience of diversity, due to the participation of a wide cross-section of young people with different socio-cultural and demographic characteristics. Careful attention was given to target the specific needs of particular vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, as well as to provide the participants with individualised attention. This inclusionary approach constituted one of the strong points of the project since it was organised and implemented in such a way as not to exclude any interested parties due to physical, social, cultural or financial barriers.

Participants in the Weekend highlighted that one of the key successes of the project was “**getting to know people from different cultures and them getting to know us**”. The fact that the Live-in gave an opportunity to concretely work together to accomplish something together as one unit was a key success of the weekend as a whole for the participants. Furthermore they highlighted learning about different cultures, stories and languages as extremely enjoyable. The key to success of this weekend was ensuring that participants were having fun and interacting while learning something new.

The presence of the youth leaders on site at all time during the live-in also enabled the provision of support and monitoring during the participants' free time. It also meant that support could be provided to the other professionals partaking in the project, particularly the performance director who was responsible for the coordination of the drama production. It would be important to include youth leaders in any other activities undertake in future.

The workshops were carried out in such a way as to enable the young people to participate through hands-on practice and visual demonstrations. Attention was given to overcome language barriers by utilising both official domestic languages (Maltese and English) as well as the native languages of the Cultural Ambassadors during the workshop sessions. Through the use of performing arts, the event provided young people with informal opportunities for interaction and awareness-raising on cultural diversity. The development of a theatrical production through the use of African (mainly Somali and Eritrean) and Maltese folktales, narrated and performed by participants in their native language was provided a highly effective medium for the promotion of integration and intercultural dialogue. The underlying morale of the narrated Aesop's Fables, also helped to transcend national and cultural boundaries by highlighting issues of universal value.

The live-in clearly achieved the goal of offering holistic activities targeted at facilitating integration and inter-cultural dialogue. The live-in event was not only successful in meeting the proposed objectives of the project, but contributed to added value through its indirect positive impact on the social, personal and psychological development of the young people and cultural ambassadors.

Difficulties

One difficulty throughout the whole project was working with a limited number of Cultural Ambassadors. This is both as a result of the limitations on the budget and difficulties in finding qualified and committed people with the time available to take part. If it would have been possible to recruit more people, activities may have had a greater visual impact and would have allowed for closer contact with the young people. The limited number of CAs meant that they were doing many things at the same time within the workshops, which made it more of a challenge to engage with the groups.

National level policies on benefits, stipend and casual labour for BoPs hindered the involvement of some in the project. For example, working as a casual worker would entail a loss of benefits, yet income from casual work would not exceed earning on benefits. Furthermore, it would be difficult to return to benefits once project ends, therefore, some BOIPs were discouraged financially from becoming involved despite initial interest.

Furthermore, it could have been beneficial to have a budget for more material and equipment such as props and costumes or better quality musical instruments, so that more of a range of music and activities could be included. More props and costumes could have added to the visual and participation aspects of the workshops.

The high administrative burden in terms of ensuring paper work, audit trail and communication with RA often makes it difficult for the project manager to invest in improving and ensuring the quality of the project activities as a whole. Furthermore, inflexibility of budget meant that we were not able to react to the project as it progressed and improve it for the better, such as with props and costumes as mentioned above, as any change implied a long negotiation process. Furthermore, delay in reimbursement was burdensome on the partners.

The continuous evaluation process was a challenge, as finding time to evaluate after each workshop or each week was difficult, as was finding time to bring together the project team. It will be important to ensure that in a next project, monthly meetings are held and evaluation meetings are held weekly at the end of the workshops.

The live in weekend was problematic in terms of organisation and challenging in terms of what needed to get done. It was also difficult to get people involved as the workshop was planned close to the exam period. The live in was particularly challenging in terms of the amount that needed to be accomplished in a short space of time whilst also ensuring the young people had a positive experience. As such emphasis had to be continuously placed on the importance of working for the final production, a factor which may have hindered participants from absorbing the performance skills on their own pace and experiencing learning for the sake of learning. Moreover, the tight schedule of events may have possibly been too demanding on those who had no prior experience in drama production.

4. Participants Experiences

On asked what they have learnt or enjoyed about the project the Cultural Ambassadors had the following to say:

"It was great to meet the young people involved and interact more with Maltese people. It was interesting to learn what they think and what their perceptions of migrants are"

Adhanom- Supporting Cultural Ambassadors

"I learnt how to speak to Maltese young people. Before I didn't used to speak to anyone and was scared to speak to Maltese people or scared to speak to anyone in the street, now I am much more confident to speak to people I don't know. Now we are able to joke with the young people and have more confidence to speak and get to know Maltese people".

Neamh- Supporting Cultural Ambassador

"It was satisfying to see the change in opinion of the young people from the beginning to the end of the workshop. At the beginning of the workshop some young people were scared to go in to the room but by the end of the workshop they were really enjoying it".

Fisseha- Cultural Ambassador

On asked how their opinions had changed as a result of the activities, participants had the following to say:

"I wasn't quite sure why these people come here. But now I know, due to war and other problems. There are some that look down on them, but they have feelings like us. They are ok"

"I used to think that they left their countries because of war and dictators. Now i know they also escape from poverty. They are in search of hope. I am now aware that they are just like us. They appreciate our help a lot"

"My perceptions of them have changed. I wasn't used to looking at them as similar to us, but now I have learnt that even they are human beings and that they are indeed like us"

"I used to view their music as somewhat alien. Our music is different. But here I listened to African music and I liked it"

"I was aware that there is a lot of poverty...I knew that they were dark skinned but I never imagined them to be so forthcoming and friendly. Everyone seems to hate them because they are black and different, but they are not so different after all"

“Before this project I could not understand them [the immigrants]. My friends and I used to poke fun at them and the way they speak. But I have learnt a lot. I think we should not judge each other. They are like us. They have rights like us. They came to Malta not because they wanted to but because they wanted to improve their life. If I were them I would not want others to ignore me just because I am different. We are all equal.”

“We can learn a lot from each other’s cultures and we can build communities which enable this exchange. This way misunderstanding will reduce”

On asked if they would recommend the live in to others one participant had the following to say:

“I would not just recommend it, I would include it in secondary and post-secondary schools syllabus as a drama and cultural class, as an annual activity”

Participants had the following to say about the Live in:

“It was an unforgettable experience and you get to know people of different cultures. It was very educational and enjoyable”

“Laughing together, having fun and creating energy whilst working hard to accomplish success was the great thing about the weekend”

The youth leaders had the following to say about the Live in:

“Apart from developing the participants’ theatrical and performing skills, the live-in event also offered a constructive opportunity for enriching their overall personal and social development, whilst promoting integration and the celebration of diversity.”

5. Lessons learnt and Recommendations

Lessons Learnt

- When working with young people, it is important to look at the school calendar in planning events e.g. the exam period clashed with live in weekend. Although this was taken into account at project proposal stage, the subsequent revision to the proposal due to the shorter project length meant that activities had to be planned differently. In future projects, it will be essential to ensure this is taken into account throughout.
- It was evident from the success of the activities that key to approaching integration is to first tackle perceptions and preconceived ideas. The Maltese need to get to know you to change their idea about you and chances for such encounters must be encouraged.
- Working with young people is key to integration as young people can change their perceptions in a very short space of time (eg in a 3 hour workshop). Young people are also great multipliers of their learning and therefore, working with young people can create an effective ripple effect in spreading positive thinking further.
- It was evident from the project activities that there is a big gap within education as to learning about other cultures and learning about tolerance. In future projects, one element of the project should be to involve policy-makers as part of the project and include an advocacy element to ensure that interventions would be sustainable by influencing the development of policies and practices that approach integration in a sustainable way, such as the inclusion of integration and learning about other cultures into the school's curriculum
- When working with Beneficiaries of Protection and seeking to include them as beneficiaries in such a project, initial and continued training is key. It was evident that there is a lack of knowledge of computers and using IT programmes such as Word and Excel. If we wish to increase the employability of BoP and provide them with more opportunities of interaction and integration, training is essential. Perhaps a future project could look at training on IT/ECDL for BoP to enable more diverse employment opportunities. Due to length of this project, it would have been difficult to address this.
- Working on this kind of project over a long period of time where a lot of activities are undertaken requires a flexible workforce. When working with BoP challenges encountered included members of the team applying for resettlement or having other employment and therefore, not able to commit to all activities. It would be beneficial to include enough budget to train and recruit a higher number of people, to allow for more flexibility.
- Inclusion of specific information and awareness raising activities with stakeholders about the project in general would enhance visibility and engagement. If these had been included at the outset, we may have increased visibility and also enabled the process of getting people involved in the project.

Recommendations for future projects of a similar nature

- Building upon the success of the workshops in this project, it may be interesting to look at some form of exchange with Maltese culture within the workshops, so that the CAs would also learn about Maltese culture. This did happen informally as part of the workshops but it may be interesting, if these are done again, that the students prepare something in advance to share about Malta and the Maltese culture. This could also be inbuilt into the curriculum so discussions on the topic could begin in class before the workshop and could continue after the workshop.
- Budget changes recommended would include: an increased budget for equipment to enable more flexibility with materials etc to enhance the experience of the young people in the workshops; an increased budget for salaries that would allow for the recruitment of a bigger and more flexible team.
- Recommended changes to workshop content may include: to look at including food as part of the workshop either serving Eritrean/Somali food or by getting the students to cook together; it would be interesting to look at including traditions such as Eritrean tea ceremony into the workshops; it will be important to look at different gender roles in African countries and involve women in workshops in order to show a cultural balance. Slightly longer workshops were also suggested to allow for more content, however, it was recognised this could be a challenge given constraints on the school curriculum.
- It may be beneficial to include an event such as an intercultural night where people make food from their countries and invite participants, so there is another opportunity for interaction in a less formal context.

Recommendations for approaches to integration

- We would recommend that policy makers consider including activities such as the youth upbeat workshops as part of the school curriculum putting aside at least a day a year to such activities. This should be part of a wider approach to integration within the curriculum, promoting understanding of cultures and diversity as part of the PSD classes.
- A review of employment and benefit legislation for migrants and Maltese in general to facilitate involvement in projects such as youth upbeat without jeopardising income and benefits.
- Promoting opportunities for interaction in a comfortable and relaxed setting is key to change perceptions, which is the first step towards integration. Any policy or project to tackle integration should take this on board.

6. Conclusions

All in all Youth Upbeat was a great success and we made a big impact with the project as is evidenced by the quotes contained in this report. In summary the achievements of this project include:

- The project changed perceptions of the Maltese regarding Beneficiaries of Protection
- The project promoted awareness of the situation of BoP among the Maltese population
- The project promoted a more comfortable environment – people feel more at ease around migrants
- The project broke down the fear of the unknown
- The project showed the importance of the Maltese meeting and spending time with the migrants to tackle negative perceptions

It has been an extremely successful project especially given the limited time period in which it was carried out. It is, however, just the beginning of what Malta should be doing to tackle integration. Through the project experience and evaluation, we feel it would be ideal to carry on looking at developing further awareness among young people as an approach to integration. This could be done by a continuation of the schools workshops perhaps integrating these as part of the curriculum or part of a wider integration approach within the education system. These workshops can be relatively low cost and have a good impact.

The Maltese government need to look at this beyond a project approach. A 5-10 year plan on integration is needed rather than one off interventions such as that which was undertaken by this project. This plan needs to look at integration in the classroom as well as in the community.



Brush the tempo of Interaction & Integration

SOS Malta in partnership with Aġenzija Żgħirażagħ are participating in a 1 year project, "Youth Upbeat", co-financed through The European Refugee Fund.

Youth Upbeat aims to promote integration between different sectors of Maltese society, in particular young people, and refugees or persons with subsidiary protection by providing opportunities for interaction and awareness-raising through culture and performing arts workshops, serving as a tool for social cohesion.



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