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European Asylum Curriculum (EAC)

The EAC project

The "European Asylum Curriculum" (EAC) project is one of eight projects under the General Directors' Immigration Service Conference (GDISC) umbrella with funding from the European Commission (EC). The EAC project is a EU Member State initiative aimed at enhancing implementation of the common European asylum policy through practical cooperation. With the motto "knowledge and skills for protection in Europe" the four national immigration services of Sweden, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Spain, in cooperation with the Odysseus Network, joined forces to start developing a complete training system for government officials working with asylum and protection-related issues all over Europe.

The project publishes this newsletter on the GDISC website. The newsletter will contain information on the development of the EAC. This is the first newsletter, which primarily focuses on the project's working conference "Towards a European Asylum Curriculum", held in Madrid, Spain, 1-2 June 2006.

Summary of the EAC Working Conference

Based on an inventory of the GDISC countries' existing training systems and expressed needs for a common training system, the process of developing the EAC took off via the Madrid conference. The aim of the conference was to establish a common understanding and commitment to create a European training instrument in the field of asylum – a European Asylum Curriculum. With 91 participants representing migration and immigration services from 28 GDISC countries as well as NGO's and INGO's, all emphasising the need for an EAC, it may indeed be argued that this aim was fulfilled. Several countries expressed that EAC would provide the foundation – or "road map" – for their national training systems and urged the project to develop the training tool as soon as possible.

The need for a tool of high quality yet easily applicable for the target group was stressed, as was the importance of making use of existing experiences. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and FRONTEX/the Border Guards Academy

shared their experiences during the plenary sessions, and the participating countries provided their input and experiences during the workshops.

With professional assistance by the facilitators, fruitful discussions were held during 11 workshops on the content, methods and implementation of the curriculum. During these discussions it was agreed that the current project phase shall focus on caseworkers as primer target group – yet it was stressed that the involvement of the policy level is crucial since their authorization will be required for the implementation. It was furthermore suggested that instead of covering the full curriculum, next project phase should prioritise the development of only two modules: One module on skills (interview techniques) and one on knowledge (the 1951 Geneva Convention; the five protection grounds in Article 1A).

A short presentation of the main conclusions from the workshops is provided in the below. For further information (speeches etc.), readers are advised to visit the GDISC website www.gdisc.org

Workshops of the Conference

During the workshops on content, methods and implementation of the curriculum the following main conclusions were made.



The facilitators presents the results from the workshops on content, methods and implementation of the EAC.

Content

The workshops on content provided the participants an opportunity to express their opinions and expectations on the content of the curriculum. Several matters were highlighted during the discussions and it was agreed that the three subject-areas of *International Law, EU-Aquis, and different skills* should be included in the Curriculum.

Besides a background history of the Geneva Convention, it was stressed that *International Law* primarily should include:

- ✚ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Geneva, 28 July 1951 (the five protection grounds in Art. 1 A.)
- ✚ The UN convention against Torture
- ✚ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- ✚ The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (primarily Art. 3 and 8)
- ✚ Other relevant HR instrument
- ✚ Exclusion

- + Cessation
- + Non-refoulement
- + The nexus between the 5 grounds and persecution

With regard to the *EU-Aquis*, the following subject matters were stressed:

- + The Asylum Directives
- + Subsidiary protections
- + The Practise decisions
- + Protection ground directive
- + Minim norms for granting and withdrawing refugee status
- + The Dublin Convention
- + International protection
- + Safe third Country
- + Safe country of origin
- + Accelerated procedure
- + Manifestly unfounded claims
- + Internal flights
- + Concurring interpretation of terms
- + The Directive for family reunification
- + Single procedure
- + Appeal
- + Persecution/ protection
- + Visa question

Participants engaged in discussions during one of the workshops.



The following subject matters were suggested for *skills*:

- + Decision writing
- + Credibility/fraud
- + Interviewing techniques
- + Burden of proof
- + Intercultural interviews
- + Trauma victims
- + Decision grounded information
- + Country of Origin Information (COI)
- + Appeal
- + Unaccompanied children
- + Gender related question
- + Access to and training of interpreters

It was considered to be quite a challenge to cover all of the above topics during next project phase and prioritisations were therefore discussed. It was suggested to focus primarily on

two modules in next step: One on knowledge (the five grounds in Art. 1A of the Geneva Convention), and one on skills (interview technique). By this approach, the experiences that will be achieved when applying the first modules may provide valuable input to the development of the remaining modules.

The matter of national legislation and the need to allow space for national differences when developing the EAC was furthermore discussed – both during the workshops on content as well as on implementation. (See further under implementation below.)

Methods

During the workshops on methods, the participants agreed on the following:

Self-training as a principle

Self-training was regarded to be an important element for the EAC with the trainee playing an active role. Trainers should therefore focus on facilitating rather than applying classical lectures.

Long distance E-training as a tool

The suggestion expressed in the EAC Concept paper to use E-training through the Internet as a tool was welcomed despite the fact that this method is new to almost all participating countries. Yet it was stressed that E-training as a long distance tool would have to be interactive and accompanied by a classical “face- to-face” session between the trainees and the trainer.

During the discussions it became evident that to so-called “case-based method” was the most popular method. Other methods such as observation (or “shadowing”), role-plays, and competition simulations (which could involve participants from different Member States) were considered to be very useful. The importance of tutoring (or mentoring) in conjunction with the above methods was furthermore stressed.



Participants engaged in discussions during one of the workshops.

Implementation

As mentioned in the above, a common agreement on the need for an EAC was reached. The participating countries emphasised their intention to apply this training instrument, provided that the material is in depth and up-to-date.

The discussions during the workshops on implementation may however be summarized as focusing primarily on two levels of implementation: *Implementation per module* (things learned to be put into practice), and *implementing the full EAC*.

Implementation per module

An agreement on implementing the EAC modules by the “train-the-trainer” system was reached. In an optimal scenario these trainers would have experience both in the field of asylum (experienced caseworkers) as well as didactics, yet it was agreed that either or would suffice. It was furthermore agreed that English will be the working language of the EAC. Accordingly, the first group of national trainers to be trained (and thereafter able to train the trainers within their respective organizations, or the target group – depending on the setting in the specific country) need to hold a quite good English level. Yet it was stressed that the modules need to be translated to national languages and to take national legislation into consideration to enable implementation of the EAC in each country’s specific national setting. Translation could be made by each individual country, or be facilitated by EAC – depending on funding. It was also expressed that trainers would be able to adapt the methodology required for specific national needs via the “train-the-trainer” system.

As discussed also during the workshops on content, it was suggested to start with a smaller number of modules on a pilot basis. This strategy would enable the project to follow-up and assess the train-the-trainer system as well as the implementation of the.

Implementing the full EAC

It was concluded that a “central body” (possible a secretariat) would be required for implementing and up-dating the EAC. Such a central body would draw on the expertise in the countries and thus develop relevant network of experts. This central body (or secretariat) was suggested to hold the following tasks:

- ✚ To assess and provide an overview of existing training and expertise in the field of asylum as well as possible training locations.
- ✚ To coordinate the logistical part of training (trainers, material, locations, invitations etc.)
- ✚ To coordinate the updating of the material (updating should be done by country-experts)
- ✚ To coordinate the development of new modules (via expertise from the countries)

This central body should be small and flexible, mainly coordinating the above-mentioned tasks via “working groups”. The countries are responsible for the input and shall fulfil this responsibility by assigning experts to the different working groups. Strategic decisions will be made by the GDISC Annual Conference or the GDISC steering group.

Funding

Along with contributions in kind from the countries (for instance, assigning experts to the working groups and offering training locations etc.), it was agreed that the EAC will need further funding from the EC.

Next steps

With all input received during the conference, the EAC project group now develops the curriculum of the EAC as well as an introductory module on EU Law and asylum. This material will be shared with the reference group for comments and input. (The reference group consists of the European Council on Refugees (ECRE), the International Association of Refugee Law Judges (IARLJ), UNHCR and the EC.) The curriculum and the introductory module will be presented at the GDISC Annual Conference in Prague, October 2006.

Several participants expressed their interest to be engaged in developing the EAC. The project group indeed encourages further involvement by the GDISC countries with expertise for developing remaining modules, and promotes the use of **Focal Points** from each country. With this approach the project can keep in contact with engaged representatives and receive direct input from the countries for developing the EAC. Hence, the project group urges each country to appoint a Focal Point for EAC as soon as possible – preferable before the end of July 2006.

Please provide the EAC project and GDISC contact information (organisation, name, position, email and phone) for your EAC project **Focal Point**. Please send the information to Ms. Minke Vorestenbosh (MVORSTEN@IND.MINJUS.NL)

Further information on the conference and the EAC project including the project's Concept Paper, please visit GDSIC website: www.gdisc.org and click on the heading "GDISC Activities".

Thank you for your contribution during the Madrid Conference!

The EAC project group would like to take the opportunity to thank all the participants, the workshop facilitators and the speakers for your participation and contribution to the development of the EAC during the conference in Madrid! We would also like to express our gratitude to the European Commission for their expressed support to this project as well as funding.

With your input, the development of an EAC is now in progress. The project group has commenced the work and have great expectations for the process ahead. We hope to receive further input from you during the development of the EAC.

Yours sincerely,
The EAC project group

