

1. Introduction

“Torture means destruction of individuals, of families and communities, of hope and of humanity, of soul, mind, psyche, of life.

Creation is the opposite of destruction.

Creating networks can bring support to our clients, our work and our staff.

It helps us to stay sane in the destructive world that our clients have to face – and we with them.”

(Quotation from the final symposium in Bucharest)

1.1. Background

This publication is based on a project launched by five European Institutions working with survivors of torture and human rights abuses and supported by the Refugee Fund of the European Commission. The project’s aim was to develop common principles in central issues relating to the care of survivors, and to transmit the findings into the European Network of Centres for the Care of Torture Victims to secure synergy effects and sustainability.

The Network of European Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres for Victims of Torture and Human Rights Violations (referred to below as the European Network), was initiated in 2002 by the BAFF (German Association of Psychosocial Centres for Refugees and Victims of Torture) and founded in 2003. Currently, the network brings together around 70 centres or programmes providing healthcare and support to survivors of torture across Europe (defined as the area covered by the Council of Europe).

Between them, the centres have a huge body of experience and knowledge about how to assess and deal with the problems of these vulnerable groups, and consequently it was natural that the idea of creating a network should emerge. A network was seen as an effective way through which initiatives could improve serv-

ices to their clients, contacts between experts could be strengthened and common principles of good practice be developed. The network's philosophy lies in defining common standards while respecting and fostering the diversity of its members and promoting an interdisciplinary approach.

A few years ago, the Network started working on the development of recommendations in relation to the EU Directives and Guidelines for Initial Health Checks for Most Vulnerable Groups, which the network published in 2004 (www.european-network.org).

The project, which has the title “Developing European standards of documentation, assessment, training, prevention and lobbying in the work with most vulnerable refugee groups (victims of torture and human rights violations) in order to evaluate and facilitate good practice”, was developed as a continuation of this line of work.

The project is unprecedented for the European Network: it provides a practical example of inter-country and inter-disciplinary cooperation by bringing together centres working in different European states and specialising in various fields of support. The project is remarkable in that the centres involved have decided to develop best practice standards by critically evaluating their own work and working together on the results.

1.2 Objectives and organisational framework

The project aims to develop a common approach within the EU to the task of addressing the specific needs of vulnerable groups, especially those who have undergone torture or other severe human rights violations. The project took the form of a pilot cooperation between five European institutions:

- XENION: Psychosocial assistance for the politically persecuted (Germany)
- Zebra: Intercultural Centre for Counselling and Therapy (Austria);
- ICAR Foundation: Medical Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture (Romania);

- Primo Levi Association: Treatment and Support for Victims of Torture and Political Violence (France); and
- AMC/Equator (Netherlands).

The project, which took place in 2008/9, was coordinated by the German Association of Psychosocial Centres for Refugees and Victims of Torture and consisted of the following steps:

In the *first step* two members of each partner, three members of the steering committee and two evaluators – one internal, one external – participated in a preparatory meeting in Paris in July 2008. Criteria for self-evaluation were developed and responsibilities were discussed with regard to the following topics:

- Intake and documentation, including questions of confidentiality, methods of assessment of refugees' problems and needs, and the complex treatment they require;
- Collaboration with health and social systems, civic society and support communities;
- Prevention work; and
- Lobbying for vulnerable groups, especially victims of torture, and bringing about improvements in decision-making in asylum procedures by the state and the EU.

In the *second step*, each partner carried out a self-evaluation, analysing its own approach with regard to the topics. In the *third step*, the partners set out to develop joint criteria and recommendations for good practice for each of the four topics. For this purpose, an interim meeting took place in Berlin, in January 2009. In the *fourth step*, members of the partner institutions presented the criteria and their recommendations to the European Network Conference in Barcelona in May 2009. In the *fifth step*, the partners held a final symposium in Bucharest in September 2009, at which the results of the project were brought together and common criteria and recommendations for good practice in torture care were finalised.

In the final step, project results, criteria and recommendations were documented, and we are proud to present them in this publication. We hope that the criteria and recommendations will be of use to professionals working with torture survivors, helping them to provide a better service to their clients. In addition, we hope our work in the project will have a noticeable impact on decision-making processes, so that legislation will be more effectively im-

plemented, and victims of torture and human rights abuses will find a better and fairer reception in the countries of the EU.

1.3 About this publication

This publication has been developed to disseminate examples of good practice in the work of the Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres, to highlight the most pertinent problems in the treatment and support of refugees and victims of torture, and to present recommendations for good practice developed within the project.

This project followed two lines: its goal was to identify examples of good practice, while both taking into account the different contexts of the centres involved and developing common norms and recommendations for this kind of work in Europe. Self-evaluation and critical appraisal of the centres' work were chosen as the methods of achieving this goal. The tension between developing and presenting examples of good practice on the one hand, and critically reflecting on one's own work on the other, was consciously accepted, in order to achieve real and convincing results.

The issue is however difficult and controversial: How do institutions evaluate the effectiveness of their own work and the relevance of their work for the vulnerable refugees who are their beneficiaries?

This publication looks at current central issues regarding the needs and provisions of vulnerable refugees as they were identified, analyzed and discussed among the five institutions. Despite their differing contexts and methods of operation, the centres recognise that comparing their approaches can ensure a more efficient exchange of expertise and professional know-how. This publication documents the information they generated, as well as the process that led to the formulation of criteria and recommendations.

First we outline the Evaluation Methodology and provide theoretical background, giving the arguments for using an evaluation method which reflects the specific approaches and the diversity of the institutions.

Next a chapter on the History and Origins of the Participating Centres describes the development of each centre in the context of its country and its core approach to treatment and support. That leads to a chapter on Current Key Learning Issues, which outlines the common thematic framework which the partners have identified and discussed.

Examples of Good Practice reflects critically on the outcome of the discussions and presents an account of both the achievements and the problems which the participating centres face in providing support to victims of torture in Europe. We also analyse the factors that hinder successful help for the survivors.

In the early stages of the project, we came to the conclusion that it would be more consistent with our approach and aims if we referred to “norms and recommendations” rather than “standards”. In the following chapter, we document these recommendations. They were developed by the participating institutions as a set of criteria for professional conduct, and are followed by Challenges for the Future – highlighting the steps which we feel are necessary if these recommendations are to be translated into sustainable action across Europe.

We hope that the examples, information and recommendations assembled in this publication will help various groups of professionals working in this field to learn about the diversity of approaches and methods applied in the rehabilitation and support of victims of torture. We also hope that some of our suggestions will be taken up, and that our experience will offer a framework for other institutions which need to evaluate and develop their work.