

Foyer nieuwsbrief internationaal (Verzending datum: 22/12/2010)

Welcome to Foyer's International Newsletter, November-December 2010

Foyer is a non-profit organization, founded in 1969 and located in Brussels. It is active on the municipal, regional and international levels, focusing on the integration of ethnic minorities. It is a pluralistic organization with respect for diversity at all levels.

In order to make its activities more widely known and to stimulate communication with its partners abroad, Foyer decided to launch an international newsletter, of which this is the first edition.

The newsletter covers the activities of Foyer's various projects. In November and December it is common practice to make a round-up of the past year, and both the education & multilingualism team and the Roma service provide some interesting figures on the results of their projects. This edition also features articles on a new Foyer publication, the International Immigrant Integration Forum in Lisbon and on the collaboration between Foyer's intercultural mediation coordinator and a health centre in Morocco.

Foyer's international newsletter will appear every two months.

Moroccan health centre calls on Foyer's know-how

Foyer's intercultural mediation coordinator helps set up a maternity centre in Tiznit.

[Lees meer](#)

Mother tongue teaching programmes and successful school careers

Pupils of immigrant background in mother tongue and home culture education programmes match native pupils' scores.

[Lees meer](#)

Foyer at the International Immigrant Integration Forum in Lisbon

Why Portugal should raise its voice on integration policy...

[Lees meer](#)

Roma mediators: a successful approach

In 2010, Foyer's mediators managed to get 116 Roma children (back) to school.

[Lees meer](#)

Congolese and Rwandese youth in Brussels: two publications, a short film and a debate

Despite their often complex trajectories, youngsters show a positive attitude.

[Lees meer](#)

Moroccan health centre calls on Foyer's know-how

Intercultural health care

One of Foyer's key projects is intercultural health care. Foyer not only has an ante- and postnatal consultation centre that is also open to undocumented women, its intercultural mediators are also highly sought after in many hospitals. This wide range of activities and

consistent approach have also attracted attention abroad. Recently, the non-profit association “Bani” from Tiznit in southern Morocco has initiated a collaboration with Foyer.

The first contacts between the Bani Health Centre and Foyer date back to 2009. Hamida Chikhi, intercultural mediation coordinator at Foyer, and Fatima Hanin (Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism) travelled together to Tiznit, capital of the eponymous province. Tiznit is the last city (of about 50,000 inhabitants) before the Sahara border.

Chikhi and Hanin visited, among other places, the innovative Haemodialysis Centre founded by Bani and went on the medical bus SMI/PMI to the village of d’Aït Oumrbite. Thanks to this medical bus, medical care becomes available even to the people living in this impoverished and remote mountainous region. They also attended the talks on the foundation of an antenatal consultation office and visited a women’s cooperative that produces argan oil (“Tiwizi Argane”), an EU-funded initiative.

The various talks and meetings made clear that local women play a very important role as confidential counsellors in local health care. These women assist patients and take on the role of interpreter if necessary. Indeed, most doctors and nurses come from major cities and speak only Arabic or another language, while the people who live in the mountains usually only speak and understand Tamazight, a Berber language.

The gender issue comes up for discussion as well. Since more and more women take up important positions in the social and medical sectors, they also need assertiveness training.



Since the activities of Bani Health Centre show a number of parallels with the work of Foyer’s intercultural mediators, two Bani board members, mayor Safini of Aarba Sahel (Tiznit), and Ladouzi Abdel (from Paris), came to Brussels in March 2010. They visited Foyer and asked the intercultural mediators to be present at the launch of their new project, called “Dar Al Oumouma”, in October 2010.

The Dar Al Oumouma Project

“Dar Al Oumouma”, the Mothers’ House, wants to provide women in the countryside with better access to antenatal and infant health care. At Dar Al Oumouma, located in Tiznit, pregnant women are welcomed in their familiar environment, and they do not have to undertake a long and tiring journey to the larger cities.

During their stay in Dar Al Oumouma the women attend health education meetings and receive information about hygiene, breastfeeding, nutrition, vaccinations and other aspects of

mother and infant health care. Women can stay at the house from one week before until two or three days after giving birth. They can give birth in a comfortable environment where staff are present 24 hours per day.

Dar Al Oumouma is a good alternative for facilities that these rural women rarely have access to because they are too expensive and/or too far away. Accessibility is therefore central to this project, to which various partners contribute: the local population, the social organizations, local communities, the district council and governmental organizations.

Foyer's intercultural mediators helped prepare the facilities at Dar Al Oumouma, assisted in drawing up the tasks for the staff and the programme for the intercultural mediators and the education sessions.

[Terug naar het overzicht](#)

Mother tongue teaching programmes and successful school careers

Research has shown that no less than 25% of Brussels pupils drop out of secondary school. That is one in four. Boys of immigrant background are more than twice as likely to leave school without qualifications than their native counterparts (30% versus 13%). For girls the gap is even larger: one quarter of female pupils with an immigrant background drop out, compared to 7% of their native counterparts (2006 data).

And yet, it needn't always be this gloomy. For years, Foyer has successfully run multilingual educational projects in several Brussels primary schools, with very good results.

Through a mother tongue and home culture teaching ("OETC") approach developed by Foyer, pupils receive integrated educational support. Attention is paid to Dutch language skills as well as to positive attitudes toward languages. Home languages are given an active role. One of the main aims of this approach is precisely to facilitate the transfer from primary to secondary school. Therefore, participants' educational careers are closely monitored.

Over the past six years, 210 children finished primary school in the OETC programme. Foyer managed to obtain data on the current situation of 199 of these pupils, which allows us to evaluate the programme. In this newsletter, we would like to highlight a number of striking findings.

The number of OETC-pupils in Dutch-language schools obtaining a full secondary school degree is very high, viz. 91,26%.

There are hardly any drop-outs at all among OETC pupils (less than 5%). That is all the more remarkable, given that 60% of pupils in the OETC target group come from a disadvantaged background.

Apart from the -5% of drop-outs, we also consider 'unqualified': pupils who went on to part-time education and may not obtain a full degree; a number of children who moved on to French-language schools and were possibly confronted with problems there; pupils who did not complete their vocational training.

If we add all these cases, we find that only 13 to 14% of OETC pupils can be considered 'unqualified'. This means that, as a socio-economically disadvantaged group, these pupils match the results of native Flemish pupils (15% unqualified school-leavers). Moreover, the results of OETC pupils who are in the first years of secondary school today continue to show an overall upward trend.

[Terug naar het overzicht](#)

Foyer at the International Immigrant Integration Forum in Lisbon

On 16 and 17 December 2010, Portugal's High Commissariat for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI) organized an international forum on immigrant integration in Lisbon.

The aim of the gathering was to present Portuguese integration policy and to bring together scholars, policymakers and NGO professionals to reflect on immigrant integration issues. A Foyer staff member also attended the forum.

Among the speakers were former Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio, Rinus Penninx (IMISCOE coordinator), Georges Lemaitre (OECD) and Marta Bronzin (IOM Head of Office - Lisbon).

Portuguese integration policy has been praised by IOM and the UN and scores high on the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), but it is not very widely known in Europe. That should change, according to several speakers at the forum, because there are various aspects to this integration policy that could serve as an example.

Since successful integration involves a two-way process, Portugal's integration policy is rooted in the principle of intercultural dialogue, and aims at creating a society in which immigrants can easily integrate and feel at home.

A range of initiatives, at national, but very often also at the local level, aims at dispelling myths about immigration, at promoting dialogue between groups in society and between citizens and institutions, and at facilitating immigrants' access to information and services. According to its new Immigrant Integration Plan (2010-2013), the government also plans four moments a year to explicitly celebrate diversity.

A key project is the "one stop shop", which unites various government and non-government services to immigrants under one roof. The "Escolhas" (Choices) programme has been successful at integrating disadvantaged second-generation youth.

Does this mean that Portugal is an immigrant integration paradise? Of course not. As a number of forum participants underlined, there is always room for improvement, and integration policy should, by definition, evolve together with society. Yet that fact that many countries tend to invest less in integration policy today was described by the Portuguese Minister for the Presidency as "a fatal error".

For more information on Portuguese policy: www.acidi.gov.pt

[Terug naar het overzicht](#)

Roma mediators: a successful approach

In order to increase the number of Roma children in Brussels schools, 2007 Foyer's Roma and Travellers Service has been working with three mediators since 2007. Two of them are of Roma origin themselves. In this newsletter we want to share some of the results that this approach has yielded over the years.

First of all, we want to stress that, contrary to popular belief, the majority of Roma children in Brussels attend school on a fairly regular basis. Nevertheless, there are still several Roma children in Brussels whose school careers range from irregular to downright problematic. Thanks to counselling in schools, with the help of mediators and support services, many of these families do manage to get their children back to school. What remains is a core of families who are in such dire straits that they have adopted a survival logic and lack the possibilities, the motivation or the will to invest in their children's education.

It is primarily the more problematic families with whom Foyer's Roma mediators work. The task of the mediator consists in fostering mutual trust and understanding between schools and families, in order to facilitate the schooling of these families' children. The mediators work closely together with about 20 schools in the Brussels region and with several other services, including the local youth crime units and the judiciary.

The demand for interventions (home visits, mediation, etc.) has increased dramatically since 2007. Foyer's Roma and Travellers Service treated about 350 files concerning Roma children in 2010, compared to 71 in 2007. The two Roma mediators registered 1353 school-related interventions in 2010, more than double the number from 2007 (618). In 2007 the mediators found a school for 38 non-schooled children and assisted in enrolling them. In 2010 they helped 116 children get (back) to school. They also managed to mobilize Roma parents for 25 parent-teacher meetings in various schools and acted as interpreters on the spot.

This increase in the number of interventions does not mean that there are more Roma or more Roma in precarious situations than there were three to four years ago. Rather, it is due to more systematic collaboration with the various schools and to the mediators' work having become better known.

Three years on, what are the net results of the mediation approach? In short, the rate of absenteeism among Roma pupils has gone down considerably in all schools involved (by 38 to 50%); the number of truants has decreased by 16 to 28%, the number of Roma pupils in schools has gone up (e.g., from 5 to 40 Roma pupils in 5 years' time at Foyer's Vocational Training Centre), and Roma parents have become considerably more involved in schools. In one of the primary schools, the parents committee has welcomed the first ever Roma parent.

Mediation for Roma, by Roma, takes time and patience, but a sustained effort and a systematic approach do yield good results, which proves that the schooling of Roma children is not the hopeless case it is sometimes taken to be. The mediation approach helps create opportunities for the enormous potential present among the Roma families of Brussels.

[Terug naar het overzicht](#)

Congolese and Rwandese youth in Brussels: two publications, a short film and a debate

The year 2010 marked the 50th anniversary of Congolese independence. On this occasion the Belgian media paid ample attention to this former Belgian colony, and also to the relations between Congo and Belgium. Yet Foyer wanted to shed some light on the situation of the Congolese community of Brussels as well, and, by extension, also on its Rwandese counterpart. It therefore commissioned two studies, one on each community.

The studies were carried out by researchers from the Universities of Antwerp (UA) and Leuven (KU Leuven) and focused on Congolese and Rwandese youth (17-22 years old) in Brussels. Through conversations with these youngsters, their parents, and key figures from both communities, the researchers analysed the social situation, school career, and self-image of young people of Congolese and Rwandese origin in Brussels. The two studies highlight a number of common characteristics, as well as a few remarkable differences between the two communities.

The researchers' analysis provides food for thought – and action. Given the shared history of Belgium, Congo and Rwanda, it is remarkable that so little attention has thus far been paid to young Congolese and Rwandese in Belgium today.

The studies resulted in two publications, launched at Foyer on 10 December 2010. The launch was attended by some 120 people, most of whom were Belgians with Congolese roots.

By way of introduction, a short documentary film (by Bleri Lleshi and Gotha Henri Erumba) brought the voices of Rwandese and Congolese youth directly to the audience.

Following a presentation of the main findings of both studies, a debate was held in which 6 experts on the Congolese and Rwandese communities participated.

The subject stirred some controversy, given the conflict between Rwanda and eastern Congo. However, the majority of the young people who participated in the studies, as well as the majority of the young people in the audience, called on their parents to stop discussing the situation in the countries of origin and to get on with their lives in Belgium. Throughout the debate, these young Congolese and Rwandese came across as rather positive about their future, and as very mature for their age, which is perhaps not surprising, given their often complex migration trajectories.

A frustration shared by many Rwandese and Congolese parents is the Belgian state's failure to recognize their qualifications. It is most outspoken in the case of the Congolese community, which is older and became established before Belgium had developed any specific immigrant integration policies. Thus, highly qualified African parents were doomed to remain unemployed, and ended up living on benefits. This made any intellectual effort pointless in the eyes of their children.

It also became clear that African parents should not be afraid to make themselves heard and seen at their children's schools, and to call attention to the situations and needs of Congolese and Rwandese pupils.

[Terug naar het overzicht](#)

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