



# SpraKuM | Language and culture mediation

## Challenges to health care and social services

One anticipated result of the demographic shift in Germany is an increasing number of immigrants arriving in Germany in coming years. This will impose new tasks on health care and social service agencies; both language problems and cultural divergencies can arise as barriers even when beneficiaries are claiming just the most basic of entitlements. Germany lags behind other European countries in this regard. In spite of the large number of landed immigrants, the German language still largely enjoys monopoly status in medical, social service and educational institutions; such establishments also tend to exhibit a mono-cultural inclination.

In the course of the “TransKom Health and Welfare” development partnership, the EQUAL Project known as “SpraKuM” provides training for language and culture mediators. SpraKuM strives to achieve the following objectives:

- Improving the delivery of health care and social services to refugees and to immigrants in Germany
- Contributing to improved cross-cultural access to basic health and welfare services through the use of language and cultural mediators
- Providing qualification training to refugees and asylum seekers in becoming language and cultural mediators and then placing them in the labor market

· Establishing this new profession in Germany

## A new profession and a structural solutions approach to cross-cultural access to the basic services

Working within the EQUAL initiative, which is sponsored by the European Union, we are cooperating with two additional institutions to achieve regional and nationwide recognition of a new profession: “language and integration assistant”. The counterparts to our “language and culture mediators” are referred to as “community interpreters” at the “Gesundheit e.V.” organization in Berlin while at the “Intercultural Office of the Science City of Darmstadt” they are called “integration assistants”.

# Career qualification at SpraKuM



**Language and culture mediators:** These professionals provide language interpreting and cultural mediation parallel to the home culture for foreign patients or clients. The purpose is to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings between the clients and the institutions tasked with providing basic services.



Participants are strengthened through continuous promotion of their sense of self-worth and empowerment. This is reflected in a wide variety of cultural activities that the participants contribute to the project's working groups, which augment classroom instruction.



In the meantime the language and culture mediators at SpraKuM can provide support in 60 languages and dialects from Africa, Asia, eastern Europe and the Near and Middle East.

## The qualification concept and its modules

Qualification as a language and culture mediator builds on the results of the first project cycle. Qualification training lasts 2½ years, divided into a 1½-year theoretical phase and a one-year professional orientation phase carried out in the form of practica. The theoretical phase is subdivided into three 6-month modules, each of which represents a complete instructional unit.

In the **first module** the emphasis is on perfecting the participants' command of the German language while they also reflect on their own immigration experiences. The purpose of the **second module** is to train participants for interpreting tasks in the health care and social services settings, taking account of

linguistic, intercultural and technical aspects. An important factor is mediating with a sensitivity for the cultural differences between the patient or client and the institutions which deliver basic services. Taught in addition are the fundamental methods for cross-cultural communication, mediation and conflict management; professional ethics requirements such as confidentiality and impartiality are dealt with. There follows in the **third module** more specialized instruction and professionalization in the specific fields of health care and social welfare.

The participants are awarded sub-certificates as each module is concluded. Qualification culminates in a final certificate authenticated by the Hamburg-Eppendorf University Hospital.

## Auxiliary qualification certificates at SpraKuM

Project participants can acquire additional, internationally recognized certificates and thus improve their prospects on the labor markets in both their home country and in Germany:

- First German language certificate, issued by the Goethe Institute
- Central intermediate examination, administered by the Goethe Institute
- "Xpert" European computer passport
- Youth trainer certificate (at SpraKuM Aachen)

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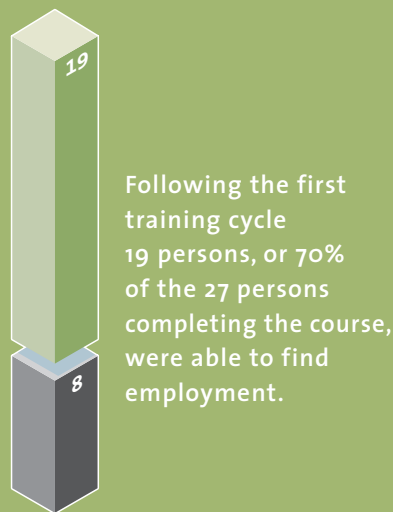
*The high qualification levels that project participants achieve pave the road to successful integration once their petitions for asylum are approved.*

# Career practice among the trainees

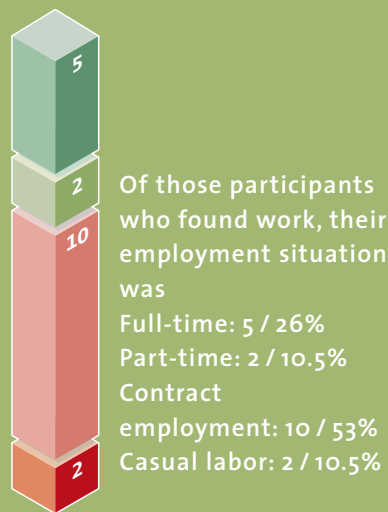


Cooperating municipalities in North-Rhine Westphalia:

- SprakuM in Aachen
- SprakuM in Wuppertal



Following the first training cycle 19 persons, or 70% of the 27 persons completing the course, were able to find employment.



Of those participants who found work, their employment situation was  
 Full-time: 5 / 26%  
 Part-time: 2 / 10.5%  
 Contract employment: 10 / 53%  
 Casual labor: 2 / 10.5%



The qualified participants are working  
 · As language and culture mediators: 16 / 59.3%  
 · In other careers: 3 / 11.1%  
 Of the 8 participants (8 / 29.6%) who could not be placed, 2 (2 / 7.4%) are doing volunteer work

## Municipalities in North-Rhine Westphalia participating in SprakuM

Refugees' taking part in the SprakuM project is made possible by the participating municipalities as they offset the costs against the entitlements prescribed in the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act or in Volume III of the Social Welfare Code; disbursements are in the form of co-financing and remuneration of the daily expenses for travel to the training sites.

Cooperation has been established with the following municipalities in North-Rhine Westphalia:  
 Aachen, Alfter, Baesweiler, Bochum, Bönen, Bonn, Breckerfeld, Cologne, Duisburg, Dormagen, Düren, Ennepetal, Erkrath, Gangelt, Geilenkirchen, Gelsenkirchen, Herzogenrath, Jülich, Kaarst, Kevelaer, Krefeld, Linnich,

Mönchengladbach, Monheim, Neuss, Oberhausen, Ratingen, Remscheid, Stolberg, Viersen, Würselen, Wesel and Wuppertal.

## Employment and deployment of language and culture mediators

The experiences from the first training cycle show that the use of language and culture mediators in health care and social services facilities helps foster the integration of asylum seekers into the labor market without lessening employment opportunities for groups enjoying priority in placement. Making use of linguistic and cultural potentials already on hand makes for efficient support of assistance seekers who speak a foreign language. Errors resulting from misunderstandings can be avoided and protracted communications processes can be abbreviated considerably.

*The results of the SprakuM program are evaluated by the Hamburg-Eppendorf University Hospital and by the Integration Ministry of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia.*

*Among the institutions that make use of language and culture mediators are hospitals, public health offices, psychotherapeutic facilities, psychiatric practices, all kinds of advisory agencies, youth welfare offices, social services offices, welfare agencies etc.*

*To date it has been possible to place 70 per cent of the qualified language and culture mediators in the primary and secondary labor markets.*

*More than 200 facilities involved in delivering basic social services in North-Rhine Westphalia regularly avail themselves of services by language and culture mediators.*

# Contacts at SpraKuM



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The objectives of the “TransKom Health and Welfare” development partnership are, firstly, to try out new concepts for professional qualification of refugees and, secondly, to improve intercultural communications in both the health care field and in welfare agencies.

TransKom’s operative partners include:

- Practicum Year at the Charitable Services Agency of the Protestant Church in Rhineland
- Pedagogic Center in Aachen (Pädagogisches Zentrum Aachen e.V.)
- Charitable Services Agency in Wuppertal
- PSZ Psychosocial Center for Refugees in Düsseldorf
- Ministry of Integration of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia
- University Hospital at Hamburg-Eppendorf
- BiG Health Care Education Institute (Bildungsinstitut im Gesundheitswesen gGmbH), Essen
- Medikon GmbH, Oberhausen

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