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[SUPPORTING CHURCH-PLANTING IN MIGRANT COMMUNITIES]

Supporting church-planting in migrant communities

When African asylum seekers started attending services at **Vineyard Bern**, Switzerland, (www.vineyard-bern.ch) no-one could have guessed what would happen. They began a small group, which grew into an English-speaking African congregation. Then some of the leaders were moved from Bern, and so they began new churches in their new locations, in Switzerland, France and Holland. Others returned to Africa and started churches there. In 2004, **Mouvent African Vineyard en Europe (Vineyard M.A.V.E)** began, supported by **Vineyard D.A.CH**¹. Vineyard MAVE now has twelve churches across five countries in Europe, and thirty-eight churches in Africa.

“It wasn’t planned – it was a spontaneous expansion of the Kingdom,” says Marcus Hausner of Vineyard D.A.CH.

Several hundred miles further south, migrant workers from the Ukraine have planted seventeen Ukrainian Baptist churches since 2005 in Portugal, a country that has around fifty indigenous Baptist churches. With the support of the Portuguese Baptist Union, they have a seminary to train church planters, and have even sent a missionary back to Ukraine, financially supported by the Ukrainian migrant workers.



Recently built villas in Portugal –Ukrainians are involved in the Portuguese construction industry

“It is interesting because no-one planned this,” says Chad Smith of the **Antioch**

Movement, a Ukrainian church-planting vision. “It was like God did it.”

And in Copenhagen, Denmark, over 50% of church goers on any given Sunday will be “new Danes” – people whose country of origin is not Denmark.



Worshipping in Denmark

There is a lot more “spontaneous expansion of the kingdom” taking place amongst migrant communities within Europe. This concept paper describes the work of four churches and organisations from Europe (all part of the European Church Planting Network www.ecpn.org), who are supporting church-planting amongst migrant communities. From their experience, we can draw some general principles helpful to churches and mission agencies who want to get involved.

“It wasn’t planned – it was a spontaneous expansion of the Kingdom”

Migration in context

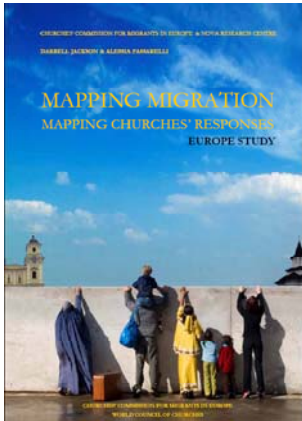
Immigration to, and emigration from, European countries has always played a major role in the continent’s history. Contrary to popular opinion, however, most migrants within Europe come from Europe: In 2004, only 37% of immigrants to European Union countries arrived from non-European countries.²

In their book *Mapping Migration Mapping Churches Responses*, Jackson and Passarelli talk about push and pull factors

which are often used to explain why people migrate.

Push factors are the reason why people leave an area: those things that push them away from their home including: a lack of services, lack of safety, lack of employment, high crime rate, crop failure. Drought, flooding, poverty or war

Pull factors are the reasons why people move to a particular area; those things which pull them to a new place. Pull factors include better employment prospects, more wealth, better services, better climate, safer environment, lower crime rates, and increased political stability, land that is more fertile and lower risk from natural hazards.³



Mapping Migration Mapping Churches' Responses by Jackson and Passarelli

It is important to remember that when talking about migrants, we aren't describing a homogenous mass. Each migrant is an individual, with their own dreams, hopes and fears for their future in a new country. They have spiritual needs along with physical, emotional and social ones. Many already have a faith. In 2003, around 48.5% of migrants belonged to Christian churches, 30.9% were Muslim and about 20.5% from other religions. Some belong to a persecuted minority in a country with a different majority religion.⁴

Appearances can be deceiving. While we might assume Iranian migrants are Muslims, some surveys show that more than 50% of those coming from Iran are actually not Muslim, says Hans Henrik,

who is Director of **KIT (kit-danmark.dk)**; they may be from an Orthodox or other church background.

Across Europe, migrants have generally received a negative press, and this has affected attitudes of people in the host countries. A 2009 study of 8000 Europeans across eight countries showed that just over half (50.4%) felt their country had too many immigrants. There were of course national variations: 62.4% of Italians and 46% of Dutch expressed negative attitudes towards migrants, compared with 27.1% of Poles.⁵

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What some churches and organisations are doing

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (ccme.ceceurope.org) has designated 2010 as the year of European churches responding to migration. Each month has a different theme ranging from celebrating diversity and welcoming the stranger to fighting racism and combating slavery and trafficking in human beings.⁶

There are many Christian churches and mission organisations across Europe already working with migrant communities. *Mapping Migration Mapping Churches' Responses* gives an overview of every European country and highlights some of the ways they are responding.

Within the European Church-planting Network, several teams have responded to the challenges of church-planting in migrant communities in various ways: support from the country of origin, support from within the denomination and supporting local churches.

Support from the country of origin

At the beginning of 2008, there were an estimated 153,000 Bulgarian migrant workers in Spain⁷. Spain is a majority Roman Catholic country, and there is a small Protestant population.

The **Bulgarian Bible League (BBL)** is supporting training church leaders. Plamen Petrov, a Bulgarian missionary in Spain previously worked with BBL in Bulgaria. “He started two or three churches in Spain and saw the need to train these people to become church planters,” explains Spaska Pantcheva, BBL’s National Director. “He asked us for materials to help train. We sent him the five modules on church-planting that we developed and he organised two groups and a church-planting seminary where he lives around Valencia⁸.”

Members of the Bulgarian Bible League have also met with key Bulgarian church leaders in Madrid, where the biggest concentration of Bulgarians and as a result, they have started church-planting training in Madrid.



The newly planted Bulgarian church in Hatvia, Spain

In Portugal, as mentioned earlier, seventeen Ukrainian Baptist churches have been planted amongst Ukrainians working in the construction industry in Portugal.

“Some of them were believers who started to share their faith with colleagues,” explains Tolik of the Antioch Movement. “So the Ukrainian Christian community started to grow in Portugal – however it became a problem because

they didn’t have a place for worship. So local Portuguese invited them into their churches. They now have a meeting in the afternoon between the meetings of the Portuguese believers.”

The Portuguese Baptist Union is supporting this initiative and the Baptist Union in Ukraine is involved in sending teachers to mentor and train leaders.

Support from within the denomination

Vineyard M.A.V.E grew out of Vineyard D.A.CH, and the leader of Vineyard M.A.V.E, Eduardo Kiakanua, is still part of Vineyard Bern. “Vineyards D.A.CH and M.A.V.E function in partnership,” he says. “During the year there are various gatherings and formal and informal meetings between the movements.”

“Both movements share the same vision, values and church-planting strategy, and the philosophy behind planning the churches is the same: we build relationships, form and equip a team, look for the people who multiply and then start an initiative. Furthermore, Martin Buehlmann, the leader of Vineyard D.A.CH provides coaching support for the leader of Vineyard M.A.V.E.”

Supporting local churches

The **Kirkernes Integrations Tjeneste (Churches Integration Service) (www.kit-danmark.dk)** is a national umbrella organisation working with local churches across the denominations. They began in 2002, after being approached by migrants who wanted to find a church; others who had become Christians and who wanted to start churches and African missionaries from London who wanted to start churches in Copenhagen.

“We saw the need to coordinate the migrant churches – not just out of one denomination, but out of many,” says their director Hans Henrik. “The original vision was for denominations to host migrant churches, and support them. This would include helping the church have a constitution as required by Danish law, or

find a place of them to meet or get a missionary visa for a pastor.”

We saw the need to coordinate the migrant churches – not just out of one denomination, but out of many

KIT currently has links with 213 international and migrant churches. In the last five years the organisation has supported the planting of sixty new migrant churches – an average of one a month. Currently, they focus on seven areas:

1. Migrant congregations – helping these congregations with the regulations associated with being church, such as missionary visas, networking pastors and government registration.
2. Challenging and motivating ethnic Danish congregations to get involved, and providing support for them.
3. Promoting *FUN* – an association for young New Danes and now a member of the Danish Youth Council.
4. Encouraging local churches to reach out to refugees who come to Denmark as part of the UN quota.
5. Courses for women “New Danes” on topical issues, arranged in cooperation with local churches, as well as café evenings and international food nights.
6. Providing advice and guidance for increasing numbers of au pairs coming to Denmark.
7. Working with a Copenhagen church on a project helping young women who have been trafficked, out of prostitution.



Principles in supporting church-planting amongst migrant churches

So what general principles can be drawn from the experiences of these organisations, about supporting church-planting in migrant communities?

Understand the needs of migrants and migrant churches

“Before they are given their boarding pass, and take their seats in the plane, they are looking for a church. It is like there is something inside of them waiting for something to happen.”

This comment comes from Tony Acheampong, a Ghanaian pastor leading an international church in Denmark.

Migrants who already have a faith are looking for a new spiritual home. Others are more open to receiving the Gospel when they are far away from home. However the language and culture of their destination can present problems. For many English speakers, particularly professionals working for periods of time in European cities (where the national language is not English), an international church can meet their needs.

“Language becomes the common denominator of international churches – there may be fifty different nationalities, but they all speak English,”

‘New Danes’

comments Hans Henrik Lund of KIT. “These kinds of people are often temporarily in the country – they may live in Copenhagen today, Brussels tomorrow and Spain next month. They are from the international societies, and we advise the churches to just be as lively and as attractive as possible.”

Hans Henrik calls these churches “multicultural”, and distinguishes them from mono-cultural churches where the members are all from a similar nationality – for example a Tamil, Vietnamese or Nigerian church.

“Loneliness is a big problem amongst migrants,” he says. “To live in another culture means we meet strange customs, food and clothing. Everything is different from being at home. The answer to loneliness is fellowship. How can we provide fellowship: by planting migrant churches. When you are a stranger, what is the answer? It is to meet like-minded people of the same culture.”



This can open doors to the Gospel. “What attracts other people is not the fact they are Christian churches, but that they are people meeting together, for example to celebrate a national day. But it is also a Christian service and Christ is preached.”

“Migrant churches have great potential to help with the integration of the migrant sub-culture,” says Eduardo Kiakanua, leader of Vineyard M.A.V.E

However, he warns that starting a church amongst migrants - particularly asylum seekers and refugees - will take time. “The relationship in the church-planting team takes more time to develop, as there is a greater need for contextualisation and adapting socially. A big challenge is the lack of stability and commitment of the members, due to their migrant status, and

making decisions in the church requires a lot of patience. Another challenge in starting a church is finance - it is hard to find the money to pay the rent and unexpected expenses for the church or the church members.”

Loneliness is a big problem amongst migrants

However the benefits outweigh the difficulties and present opportunities to share the Gospel, says Spaska Pantcheva from the Bulgarian Bible League: “There is a natural desire to be among people who are from the same culture and speak your language – you have enough stress from being outside of your country, so it is something akin to shelter to be among people from the same culture.”

“In Spain, some of the Bulgarian migrants are from a gypsy background. Even in Bulgaria it is hard for them to be integrated into society. When they move to Spain they remain a separate group. With people like this, are there more opportunities for the Gospel for people reaching others from their own community in a different country?”



Baptism in Valencia region

Rustam Ibragimov from the Antioch Movement is helping towards planting an Azuri church amongst Azuris who are living and working in Ukraine. He feels it is important to plant churches within ethnic minorities and migrants in his country because “they don’t get connected to the national churches for the most part.”

“It is much easier to each people for Jesus when they are not in their culture,” he says “They are separate, and they feel alone. It is a strategic time to do this. But it is best if the church planter is from a culture that is at least very close to that person’s culture, or the same.”

When an indigenous church is supporting a migrant church, it’s important to be aware of cultural differences, as Chad Smith of the Antioch Movement, explains.

“Sometimes you can put restrictions on how the migrant church should worship or behave. We want to embrace what they are doing, but not restrict people to doing whatever we think the model should be. That is where it breaks down in most traditional denominations or settings – the host church want to restrict how it is actually executed in terms of evangelism or leadership models or meeting style. You need to allow migrant churches to have the freedom to decide what is culturally relevant for their people. I don’t think that is something that has been very well learned, but the church is in the process of understanding more, especially as migrant populations pop up in these cities.”

We want to embrace what they are doing, but not restrict people to doing whatever we think the model should be

Tony Acheampong from KIT adds that no matter how a group of people appear to be well integrated, their cultural thinking and values will still differ from that of where they are living.

“People have their own unique cultural understanding and there is always an unseen tension between the two cultures,” he says. “It comes as a challenge to both parties – for us as the migrant churches we might have our own way of worship, but the Danish too might have their own way. We must be able to

accommodate each other and meet half way somewhere.”

At times denominational tensions can spill over into the migrant church itself. In Spain, churches planted by Bulgarians are Bulgarian churches, but the members may actually come from very different church backgrounds within Bulgaria, with opposing theological beliefs, or church practices.

“The biggest challenge for churches outside of Bulgaria is that they come with different teachings,” says Spaska Pantcheva. “We have to help them overcome these prejudices or some religious models and build their faith on the base of the Word of God.”

Work in partnership

The churches and organisations described in this paper are working in partnership with the migrant churches.

Plamen, the Bulgarian missionary working in Spain has built contacts with pastors of the small evangelical minority there, and preaches in their churches as well as inviting Spanish pastors to preach at his. In this way, relationships are built.



Plamen preaching in a Spanish church

Hans Henrik of KIT emphasises the importance of building the relationship as a means of creating partnership.

“We go and sit down with the pastors and drink coffee and spend time with them to build relationship, because foreign cultures are built on relationships. To build the bridges between migrant groups and Danish churches is very important.

One of the best ways to partner with a migrant church is to allow them to use their premises, and most evangelical free churches in Copenhagen host a migrant church.

“If we go to a city and want to start a church of Ugandans, we also need to go to a Danish church and say ‘would you like to open your church for a group of people from Uganda?’” he explains. “We encourage them to open their church say on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon from 1-4 p.m and give it away for a foreign group to meet – mainly for fellowship in the beginning, but later on it can become a church.”

However it is vital for the each church using the building to work hard at their relationship with one another.

“Danish people are very clear on rules, and there can be a lack of flexibility. So a migrant church could be thrown out if their service is too loud, or they don’t have the same expectations of cleanliness, or the rent isn’t paid on the first of the month.

“We encourage the Danish churches to make a contact with the migrants and have cooperation together – maybe meet together two or three times a year, have a common service and an international service where you do it in Danish and another language. Also to make social arrangements – for example meet on a Saturday to clean the church or go to the park and have a picnic together.”

As the second generation of migrants grow up and go to school in the host country, they may feel more at home in a local church than a migrant one. Hans Henrik feels churches need to engage with this issue to help integration in the future:

“There is a Danish church which hosts a Vietnamese church and Burmese church, but the children all go to Sunday school

together, while the Vietnamese and Danish churches have their services. The Sunday school is 100% Danish, but the children are from all the different cultures. Then they eat together and the Burmese church has their services in the afternoon.”

Sharing a meal together



Mentoring and teaching

In addition to the practical support such as helping a church register or providing a place to meet, training for leadership is vital. In the example above, the church leader was staying in the host country, which provided some stability for the church. With many of the Vineyard M.A.V.E churches, the congregation is primarily made up of asylum seekers or refugees. A 2006 report from Vineyard M.A.V.E highlights some of the difficulties this creates:

“The churches themselves suffer, as a lot of members and leaders live with the fear of having to leave soon. Visiting these leaders to encourage and train them is very important and increases the stability. In most cases it is not possible for the leaders to travel (e.g. from France to Switzerland) as refugees are not allowed to travel abroad. Therefore there is no way around visiting these churches.”

The churches themselves suffer, as a lot of members and leaders live with the fear of having to leave soon

The partnership between Vineyards D.A.CH and M.A.V.E provide mentoring and coaching for the leadership of

M.A.V.E, who in turn visit and mentor the leaders of the M.A.V.E churches.



Visiting a Vineyard M.A.V.E church in Africa

Often a migrant church will start “by accident”, and there is no trained leader for the congregation.

“A migrant may meet someone else from their country in the street, and they start talking, then they meet in their homes – four, five or six people from their own nationality,”

Hans Henrik of KIT explains. “After a while they meet more people and there are ten or fifteen people meeting. One might be a Christian and so they start a Bible study group where they read the bible and pray together. Then they think ‘We need a church in our own language or of our own culture; where can we go to church?’ Many times, someone stands up in their midst and becomes a leader. Sometimes that happens accidentally – like a Filipino lady who was an au pair. She was a Christians and gathered some people to do bible studies. Then they had two or three Bible study groups and there was no pastor, so she was forced to suddenly become the pastor of the church.”

The Bulgarian Bible League is supporting church-planting in Spain through sending teachers from their country.

Some of the believers in the migrant churches have been Christians for many years; others will have come to faith since moving to Spain.

“This is a challenge because there are not very many people who can train these new believers and teach them how to

study the bible and grow in their faith,” says Spaska Pantcheva. “In these communities it is hard to appoint someone to become the leader so people are dependant on the church planter to be the one who is the authority and is taking care of them and going to visit them. We are doing the training now because we want some leaders to emerge from this community.”

“We plan to deliver interactive training through internet lessons to help people to be trained; not only through seminars where they have to travel from many places to gather in one place, and usually people are so busy that they have no time to travel. They can watch these lessons through the internet and then we can contact them and build our relationship with them.”



A Bulgarian group gathers for training in Madrid, using BBL materials

It’s not just the migrant churches who need support, and part of KIT’s work in Denmark is with the churches who want to reach out to migrant communities. They recently completed research on the Lutheran Church and migrant churches, and have published their findings in *Migrantmenigheder.dk*, with a website of the same name. However, the aim of the research is to give practical information that churches can use.

“If we do not put our knowledge into action the research of this project will become another piece of stored knowledge. And that will not benefit the citizens of this country,” says Hans Henrik of KIT.

A glimpse of the future

Traditional church in Europe may be in decline, but there is hope – and according to some, migration into Europe can play a significant role.

While the Danish churches are going on a downward spiral, the international and migrant churches are on an upward spiral and growing

“Many young people come to Christ in the Global South and then come to Europe,” says Hans Henrik. “They don’t bring a different kind of Christianity – rather a ‘fresh breath’ – and they actually believe Christianity is relevant. In addition, some migrants become Christians when they come to Europe.

“For many Danish Christians, going to church becomes an option among many options. In Denmark, eighty-nine state churches are going to be shut down

because their buildings are empty. While the Danish churches are going on a downward spiral, the international and migrant churches are on an upward spiral and growing. The whole face of Christianity in Denmark in the long-run is going to take an incredibly radical change to the point where a lot of questions are going to be asked among the Danish society – is this Christianity?

“And I think the same kind of scenario is going to become a kind of overall picture for the whole of Europe. I think the expression of Christianity in Europe will be radically changed. There will be a more global approach rather than a cultural approach based on that country, caused by the melting pot that is taking place because of the internationals.”

The challenge to churches and mission agencies in Europe today is: God is already at work in this area – are you willing to join him in it?

¹ D.A.CH stands for Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

² Darrell Jackson and Alessia Passarelli *Mapping Migration Mapping Churches Responses Europe Study* 2008 Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe and Nova Research Centre p14

³ Ibid, p4,5

⁴ Ibid p29

⁵ Survey carried out by Conflict and Violence Research Institute, as reported by Radio Netherlands Worldwide www.rnw.nl

⁶ See <http://migration.ceceurope.org/> for more details and how to get involved.

⁷ The Madrid-based National Statistics Institute (INE) estimates around 728,000 Romanians and 153,000 Bulgarians were living and working in Spain at the start of 2008.’ <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/1230823921.8/> With the economic downturn, some Bulgarians are now leaving Spain and returning to Bulgaria in search of employment there.

⁸ You can read more about the Bulgarian Bible League’s training methods in the ECPN concept paper ‘Preparing to Plant: Calling, Equipping and Training church planters in Europe www.ecpn.org

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