



HANDBOOK FOR **WELCOME** AND
INTEGRATION
OF **REFUGEES** IN EUROPE



IN COLLABORATION WITH



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1. Introduction by Daniel La Parra Casado, University of Alicante

In 2015 the so-called ‘Refugee Crisis’ started in Europe. As a consequence, a large number of people reached different European countries to apply for international protection. Between 2015 and 2018 an estimate of over three million people arrived in Europe mainly from Syria but also from other countries of origin. The outcomes were different. Some countries and municipalities received a considerable amount of people, while other countries, regions and municipalities did scarcely participate in the welcoming and integration process. Some of the receiving countries became countries of destination, while others were transit countries. In some of the countries the groups of forced migrants were received and treated like asylum seekers, while in others, they were incited to cross the country, expelled or became either economic migrants or illegal migrants. In 2016, Europol estimated that at least 10,000 unaccompanied child refugees disappeared after arriving in Europe.

The perception of this situation was strongly determined by the political discourse and its dissemination through the old and new mass media. The special Eurobarometer survey 469 on “Integration of immigrants in the European Union” (April 2018, Eurostat) informs that two thirds of the Europeans feel they are not well informed about immigration matters. In fact, Europeans tend to largely overestimate the number of non-EU immigrants in proportion to the population of their country (in 19 countries the estimated proportion of migrants within the population is at least twice the size of the actual number of migrants and a half of the Europeans say there are at least as many illegally as there are legally staying immigrants).

The total number of refugees is estimated to account for a small proportion of the non-EU migrants. In global terms, less than 10% of the total number of immigrants are refugees. Africa and the Middle East are the main regions of destination for refugees, while Europe is one of the main recipients of economic migrants. Nevertheless, in the public discourse about immigrants and refugees these groups are commonly mixed up and therefore they are confused also by the public opinion. In 2014, in the context of the Great Recession, Europeans identified the economic situation, unemployment and EU finances as the most important issues facing the European Union. The following year, in 2015, immigration overtook those three topics and was perceived as the most important one (Eurostat Eurobarometer).

There are many reasons as to why the refugee crisis could be described as a political crisis. First, because of the political measures that failed to prevent the armed conflict in Syria, its escalation and was unable to guarantee better protection of the civilians. Second, because the international community failed to provide better protection in the neighbouring countries. Third, because of the uncoordinated response of the European Union Member States. Fourth, because the emergent social processes require a political response. Last, because the political response should have been oriented to provide solutions (even if, in some cases, they pursue the opposite, thus contributing to cause the problem).

Our societies are well-prepared to provide solutions to a refugee crisis. The Welcome and Integration of Refugees project (WIR) has revealed a considerable number of valuable experiences at local level with a significant impact in both the lives and integration experiences

of refugees. As the number of municipalities in the network is small, the experiences shared in WIR could be considered just a tiny sample of the important social response to migration provided by the European Union citizens and their institutions. The project has identified key actions in different fields, mainly covering language courses, job search support, legal support and advice, school integration, and protection of children, among others.

These actions are in line with the public opinion. When asked in opinion polls, Europeans tend to agree on the main factors that may facilitate integration of immigrants as well as on policy measures that would support integration such as, offering language courses upon arrival (88%), improving integration programmes (85%) or job search support (83%). Moreover, about seven out of ten (69%) Europeans say that integrating immigrants is a necessary long-term investment for their country and a similar proportion of citizens see integration as a two-way process in which both host society and immigrants are responsible (Special Eurobarometer, April 2018). This opinion climate coincides with the values and constitutional principles of the European Union.

This also corresponds to the opinion of the immigrants themselves (there is no specific data regarding refugees). The Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, carried out by the FRA (EU-MIDIS II, 2016), states that the feeling of attachment and belonging to Europe of the Muslim European population is high. On a scale of 1 to 10, on average, their answers reached a level of 4.1. In general, they also have a higher level of trust in the legal systems and the political institutions than the general population. As opposed to this feeling, when asked about the situation during the 12 months preceding the survey, 16 % of all Muslim respondents stated that they had been stopped by the police during that time period. Furthermore, 17% of Muslim respondents indicated they had felt discriminated because of their religion during the five-year period preceding the survey and 27% mentioned encountering discrimination based on ethnic origin or immigrant background, particularly when looking for work, on the job, and when trying to access public or private services.

Some stakeholders induce people to think about refugees in terms of crisis, problem, invasion, threat or risk, leading them to believe that refugees join criminality, terrorism and contribute to other negative social phenomena. As a result, 38% of the European citizens think about immigration from outside the EU as a problem, 31% think it is as much a problem as and an opportunity and 20% more of an opportunity.

It need not be like this. The experiences in the WIR network were useful to realize that there are important challenges, especially when the political context produces a very diverse geography of situations in every location. But, irrespective of the context, individuals can be considered assets, providing human capital and new opportunities in societies where both social innovation and new economic development are needed. Indeed, people generate social wealth through their work, cooperation in voluntary associations, and/or their daily participation in society. Again, a relevant percentage of Europeans would agree with what was mentioned above. In fact, 72% think immigrants help to fill job vacancies in the country, 61% that they enrich the cultural life, 51% that they have an overall positive impact on the economy, and 49% that they bring new ideas and innovation.

The experiences included in the WIR project reveal that the integration efforts have to face important social and cultural prejudices and stereotypes that are difficult to overcome. Actions should be taken and coordinated by different stakeholders from the public to the private sector, from the civil society to the public institutions, from the grassroots level to the international arena. Interestingly enough, this is also what we found in the public opinion: 80% of Europeans think that the EU-institutions have an important role to play in integration, followed by civil society actors (82%); the media (83%), citizens (88%), employers (88%), local and regional authorities (90%), the government (90%), educational institutions (90%) and the immigrants themselves (93%). As we have repeatedly highlighted in our meetings the key issue is about the connections between all of them, and all of us¹.

2. Dictionary

Concepts:

Asylum seeker – An asylum seeker is a person who has sought protection as a refugee, but whose application has not yet been processed.

Migrant – A migrant is a person who has chosen to move to another country by free will, and is not forced to move by external circumstances.

Refugee – A refugee is a person who has fled conflicts, war or persecution and is given legal protection from another country because he or she is not able to return safely to the home country.

EU actions:

European Agenda on Migration – is an agenda that was presented by the EU Commission in May 2015 as a response to the migration crisis. The purpose was to address immediate challenges and equip the EU with the tools necessary to better manage migration in the medium and long term with regard to irregular migration, borders, asylum and legal migration. Following the agenda, a series of legal revisions have been presented, some have already been adopted and some are still in negotiation.

The European Action Plan on Integration of Third-Country Nationals – is an action plan adopted by the EU Commission in June 2016. The purposes are to provide a comprehensive framework to support Member States' efforts in developing and strengthening their integration policies and to describe the concrete measures the Commission will implement in this regard.

¹ The data cited in this text, if not stated otherwise, are based on the Eurostat Special Eurobarometer 463 on "Integration of Immigrants in the European Union" (April 2018). Available on line (accessed 6h September 2019):

<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2169>

3. Challenges and recommendations based on the WIR project

The project consisted of different activities. Over the course of two years the partners met ten times. Some meetings were dedicated to coordination, whilst the majority were committed to the specific themes that are essential in the welcoming and integration process. During these meetings, the partners carried out study visits, exchanged information and best practices and engaged in general discussions on the topics mentioned below. The goal was to later transfer this knowledge to the local level through local discussions and replication of good practices.

The central themes in the project were the following:

- **The role of Civil Society**
- **Getting ready for the Job Market**
- **Education and Schooling**
- **Unaccompanied Minors**

Although these topics might not cover every aspect of welcoming and integration, they constitute the main foundation of this issue. It is important to not only look at the themes separately, but to understand that efforts are needed at all fronts and at all times in order to create a successful framework for welcoming and integration. A more holistic view is the key to create inclusive societies and real integration, which is something that also the EU Commission emphasises in its “Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals”²:

“Successful integration is a process that happens over time, but most importantly, across many different policy areas – e.g. education, employment, entrepreneurship, culture - and in different contexts.” (p. 5)

In this chapter you can read about the project results that pertain to each specific theme. Many of the identified challenges or best practices are not only specific to one single topic, but they often relate to the other topics as well. Within each topic, you will find an overview of the situation in Europe, the challenges identified on different levels, general guidelines and recommendations as well as some chosen **best practices** used by the project partners.

² European Commission, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. (2016). Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160607/communication_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf (2019-08-07)

3.1 The role of civil society

The civil society is and has been very important in the welcoming and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The work that the civil society carries out is a complement to existing public structures and often fills the gaps that these structures are unable to overcome. Because of the large number of asylum seekers that arrived in Europe in 2015 and the lack of a unified EU approach, the single Member States experienced a rising pressure on their systems. Against the backdrop of this burden, the civil society has been more important than maybe ever before.

The civil society in Europe contributed with housing and clothing, helped with advice on practical and legal matters, offered language courses and free time activities, arranged meetings for networking and maybe most importantly just was a friend and a link to the local society. In the EU Commission's "Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals" it is underlined that all actors have a responsibility when it comes to integration, including every citizen and civil society organisation. This inclusion of the whole society and the creation of intercultural dialogues between locals and newcomers has also been emphasised by the Commission as being **key** in achieving integration³.

Nevertheless, there are many common challenges that the civil society in the Member States face in their work. When the crisis hit in 2015 there were many people who offered their help, but as the worst crisis passed the numbers of volunteers dropped. Moreover, the majority of volunteers are older and there is a need to also engage younger people in the civil society in order to renew the voluntary support base. Another issue is the rise of far right-wing politics. This has both a direct and an indirect effect on the work of the civil society. On the one hand, there are far right-wing governments in Europe that try to directly hinder the civil society's work with migrants. This is the case, for example, in Hungary, where the government has introduced a 25% tax on civil society organisations that work in the migration sector⁴. On the other hand, the rise of more extreme views on refugees and migration in the political debate and in the society in general also leads to stigmatization of refugees and people working with them. This might make people less willing to volunteer as they might be afraid of other people's views and reactions or anxious that measures similar to those in Hungary will be implemented in the future and make their work more insecure. Moreover, there is also a challenge in the lack of coordination and overview of the many different civil society initiatives which might create unnecessary "double work".

As mentioned, the EU acknowledges that all sectors of society are responsible to engage in the welcoming and integration of refugees through, for example, volunteering, sports and culture

³ European Commission, Fact Sheet: Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals. (2016) Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/20160607/factsheet_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf (2019-08-07)

⁴ FRA: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Periodic data collection on the migration situation in the EU. (2018) Accessed at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-september-periodic-migration-report-highlights_en.pdf (2019-08-07)

and other social activities. However, the EU also encourages Member States to increasingly involve third-country nationals themselves in their local societies so they can participate in the designing and implementing of the decisions that affect them. The EU stresses that this mutual exchange between the local society and the newcomers will contribute to the society as a whole, as newcomers feel more part of the community and the society will increase its acceptance and understanding⁵.



A picture from the support system “Integrationslotsen” or “Integration guides” in Landkreis Kassel.

Main challenges:

- **On an individual level**, there is a necessity to include the refugees in the society in order to allow them to be seen as more than someone who needs help.
- **On an organisational level**, there is a lack of overview and coordination between the many initiatives carried out by the civil society which creates unnecessary “double work”.
- **On a society level**, the biggest issue is the rise of far right-wing politics and rising stigmatization of migrants and people who work with migrants.
- **On the level of society and organisation**, the challenge lies in keeping the interest of the volunteers alive as well as attracting younger people to voluntary work.

General guidelines and recommendations on the role of civil society:

⁵ European Commission, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016. P. 12.

- Coordination measures between different civil society initiatives are useful and will allow organisations to learn from each other and find synergies and grounds for cooperation.
- People working with refugees need to find the right balance between helping people and avoid creating dependence. It is important to realise when to let go and to not hinder the refugee in taking own actions and being more autonomous.
- Organisations and individuals need to see and acknowledge the capacity and potential of the newcomers and not only see them as *victims* that need help.
- One way to naturally engage the civil society in the welcoming and integration of refugees is to create mixed spaces in the society where refugees and locals meet on a daily basis. Such spaces can for example be mixed housing areas or mixed school classes.

BEST PRACTICE NO 1.

SUPPORT GROUP NETWORK

The Support Group Network is an organisation created by and for asylum seekers in Sweden's biggest refugee camp in Vänersborg. The asylum seekers started the initiative in order to keep themselves busy while waiting for the decision from the Migration Agency, as well as to use their skills to answer to the existing needs at the camp.



The activities the Support Group Network carries out are many, but some examples are women's club, daily care, sports activities, kids' club, clothing repair and groups for academics and craftsmen. The refugees also set up a culture show "Everyone under the same sun" that they performed for the local citizens in Vänersborg to a full house.

Support Group Network is a prime example of what the civil society can do and what the **asylum seekers themselves** are capable of. Such initiatives will make asylum seekers feel important and valuable and as a **resource** instead of a victim that the society needs to take care of. Besides, many of the activities such as the groups for craftsmen, academics and language cafés prepare for future integration into the society and the job market.

The experience of the culture show, when the asylum seekers performed in front of and met the locals, also contributed to changing the prejudice towards refugees and migrants in the eyes of society. Often, it is in the encounters among individuals that the differences fade away or seem insignificant and make people realise that we are all very much the same and that we are all in fact living *under the same sun*.

The “Support Group Network” is a great example of initiatives that make newcomers get engaged in their host societies and participate in the decisions that affect themselves. This attitude is perfectly in line with the encouragement made by the EU to its Member States to



help and support the development of instruments and projects able to increase the participation of third-country nationals in the local civil society⁶.

Photo source: https://karvling.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/restadgard_show10.jpg

BEST PRACTICE NO 2.

ReKI – Regionales Kompetenzzentrum für Integration und Diversität

(Regional Competence Centre for Integration and Diversity) – short (ReKI)

ReKI exists since 2015, and since 2016 in every district throughout Upper Austria, except in statutory cities (there are only three of them in Upper Austria). ReKI was initiated and is financed by the Integrationsstelle Oberösterreich (the administrative body of the



⁶ European Commission, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016. P. 12-13.

integrational sector in Upper Austria). Two organizations are in charge of its implementation: Caritas für Menschen in Not und Volkshilfe – Flüchtlings- und Migrantinnenbetreuung GmbH.

The main objectives are:

- Strategical process monitoring of the integration process on the level of districts and municipalities.
- Support and counsel for major stakeholders (advisory boards on the communal and district level, mayors).
- Creation of platforms / adaptation of already existing platforms in order to connect crucial players.
- Continuous provision of information, support and counsel for various players on the local and regional level.

Target group:

- Municipalities, including their residents.

Activities:

- Monitoring of the integrational process on the communal level: facilitation and preparation of various events and strategies for a sustainable development on the local level.
- Project development: monitoring of project ideas and initiatives that contribute to the landscape of integration with their expertise.
- Knowledge and experience in the field of integration: ReKI offers a broad overview of already existing projects and their various actors and furthermore: competence.



BEST PRACTICE NO 3.

“ZusammenHelfen in Oberösterreich”

This platform was initiated by Integrations-Landesrat Rudi Anschober (Regional Minister of Integration, Upper Austria) to meet the challenging situation in the years 2015/2016. Throughout this period the platform has contributed with considerable support, provided aid and engaged in volunteerism within the society (over 10.000 volunteers in Upper Austria). It has also helped with the pressing need for efficient coordination and provision of adequate information.



ZusammenHelfen in Oberösterreich accumulates all necessary information with regard to “how to support refugees” (accommodation, integration into the labour market, education, integration, etc.).

The main objectives are:

- To support volunteers in this sector, facilitating their volunteerism through the provision of accurate information by means of different activities.
- To develop new approaches (demand-oriented), through direct interaction with volunteers and targeted PR in order to create and enhance awareness of volunteerism in this field, foster solidarity and mutual understanding within the society as well as appreciation and recognition of the immense contribution given by volunteers (e.g. VIELFALT.in.CONCERT).

Target group:

- Individuals interested in the topic
- Volunteers
- Initiatives/associations/NGOs
- Municipalities

Activities:

Info-Telefon: From the very first day of this project, a hotline was implemented with the sole goal to offer prompt and accurate information and support. Nowadays the hotline has been adapted into the “Info-Telefon”. The goal remains the same, although there are two main differences:

- The rush of inquiries is stable.
- Opportunity for volunteers in this sector to get legal support two days a week.

Homepage, Facebook & Instagram: These tools not only offer people all the information they need in a comprehensible way, but also enables all the different players to connect, network and work closely with each other. A great instrument for that is the “Landkarte der freiwilligen Initiativen in Oberösterreich” (map of initiatives in Upper Austria within this field). This map shows where you can find the different initiatives, what their primary focus is and how to get into contact with them.

Conferences & Workshops: In order to foster a steady flow of information between the various players in this field, ZusammenHelfen in Oberösterreich organizes three conferences per year. In addition to the conferences, volunteers have the opportunity to request workshops that are specifically designed for them, covering a broad spectrum of topics (psychosocial aspects of volunteerism, trauma, gender, legal framework of the asylum-seeking process in Austria, education, religion etc.).



BEST PRACTICE NO 4.

BUDDY PROJECT

Buddy project is piloted to link refugees and asylum seekers (RAS) with members of the local community. Newly arrived RAS are offered a volunteer “buddy” in their local community. The buddy is a volunteer who provides practical guidance, opens doors to local networking, and cultural and linguistic interpretation, easing the way into the society and community. Buddies and RAS are paired based on gender, age, common interests, etc. That way RAS are introduced to their new environment and can create social connections. Moreover, the host community buddy learns about the life story of the refugee or AS, increasing his or her understanding towards RAS. Following the refugee crisis, there has been a spontaneous movement of support for RAS. The buddy project helps to channel some of this good will and helps local communities to get to know RAS and learn about their needs, within their own community. When the pairs of buddies and RAS attend some activities together, they receive reimbursement, for example, for entrance tickets to public cultural events, transportation, snacks, etc.



Buddy project is an activity implemented by the Latvian Red Cross within the project AVAIL – “Amplifying the voices of asylum seekers and refugees for integration and life skills”, financed by the European Union, together with the British Red Cross (leading organization), the Italian Red Cross, the Irish Red Cross, under the lead of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The project is implemented in the UK, Italy, Ireland

and Latvia, and learning is shared at European level, under the lead of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The project aims to develop peer connections' support between RAS; develop social inclusion between RAS and host communities; develop service providers' and public authorities' capacity building and encourage the media to take into account the voices of RAS; and, of course, to gather and share learning⁷.

3.2 Getting ready for the job market

Getting a job in the host society is key for being a part of a country's economic and social life and start real integration into the society. However, it is also often a huge challenge for both the host countries and the refugees themselves to actually access the labour market. Only about 54% of the third-country nationals are employed in the EU, compared to 66% of the native population. And for women who are third-country nationals the situation is even worse, in fact only 45% have a job⁸.

Many of the asylum seekers and refugees stay in the host country for years before they get their first job. And when they do, they are often over-qualified or over-skilled and work with something completely different than what they have experience in. There is thus a huge challenge in not only finding a job, but also finding **sustainable jobs**, where newcomers feel comfortable and feel that they can really contribute with something. Also, there seems to be a strong link between the status of the migrant – if he or she is an asylum seeker, refugee or an economic migrant – and the chances of getting a job.

There is no doubt that there are many challenges when it comes to integrating refugees and migrants into the job market, but there are also vast **possibilities**. One of the biggest challenges facing Europe today is the demographic transition (an aging population and a decline in working-age people) which poses a threat to the European welfare societies⁹. Most of the migrants arriving in Europe are either young or middle-aged and if they are well integrated, they could actually boost the GDP and their host country's economic situation¹⁰. Hence, integration is a direct solution to one of our biggest challenges. Additionally, as the refugees come from other backgrounds and have other experiences they can also contribute with innovative and creative ideas and even develop the labour market in new ways.

The EU Commission has also expressed the need to focus on efforts for refugees' integration into the labour market as a step towards making Europe more prosperous, cohesive and inclusive in the long run. It is also underlined that merging integration policies with those of the labour market can boost countries' GDP and financial situation, as migrants contribute to the economy and tax revenue. In the “Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country

⁷ More information: <http://www.redcross.lv/en/projects/avail-amplifying-the-voices-of-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-for-integration-and-lifeskills/>

⁸ European Commission, Fact Sheet on Action Plan on Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016.

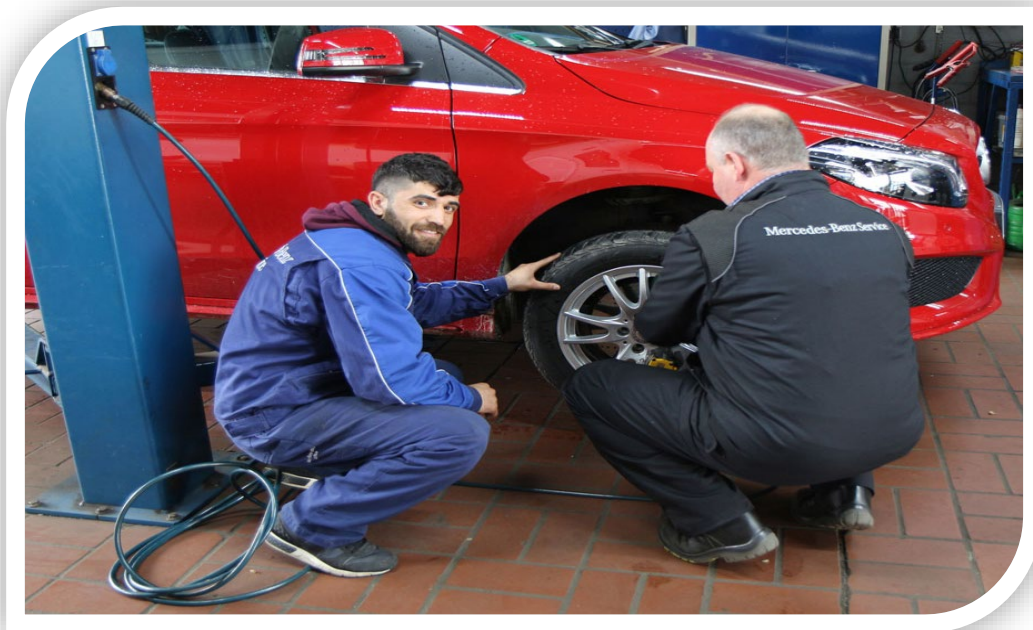
⁹ European Commission. Ageing and welfare state policies: Demographic ageing. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/growth-and-investment/structural-reforms/ageing-and-welfare-state-policies_en (2019-08-07)

¹⁰ European Commission, Fact Sheet on Action Plan on Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016

Nationals” the Commission calls for measures to ease the integration, amongst other by promoting early efforts such as “fast tracks”, putting in place targeted as well as mainstreamed labour market policies and facilitating recognition of migrants’ earlier skills and qualifications¹¹.

Main challenges:

- **On an individual level**, there needs to be more personalized efforts to job integration that take the person’s life situation in consideration, as well as his or her wishes and former experiences.
- **On an individual level**, the refugees’ lack of language skills is a huge obstacle to employment. At the same time, it is also a challenge at an **organisational level** to organise sufficient language support for refugees.
- **On an organisational level**, administrative and practical barriers need to be removed in order to facilitate access to the labour market and to qualified jobs.
- **On a society level**, the misconceptions and prejudices that people (including employers) have of refugees is a huge problem. There needs to be a shift towards a more positive outlook on migrants and the things they can contribute with.
- **On all levels**, the issue is a lack of sustainable jobs for refugees.



A picture from the “Refugee Day” in Kassel which is a job market directed towards refugees. Source: <https://refugees-day.de/>

¹¹ European Commission, Fact Sheet on Action Plan on Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016. And European Commission. Press Release Database: Questions and Answers: An improved EU Blue Card scheme and the Action Plan on Integration. (2016) Accessed at: https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-2071_en.htm (2019-08-07) and European Commission, Fact Sheet on Action Plan on Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016.

General guidelines and recommendations on getting refugees ready for the job market:

- Language is key for refugees to access the job market and efforts should help refugees learn the language as quickly as possible. It is an especially good practice to focus language courses on “work lingo” for the specific sectors that the person wishes to enter.
- Mentor programs which connect refugees with employers is a good practice in order to integrate newcomers professionally in the society. Mentors can, for example, help with concrete advice but also networking. The mentors should preferably be in the same field of expertise as the newcomer or the area should coincide with his or her interests.
- In order to create sustainable jobs, it is important to understand and find ways to validate refugees’ former education and professional skills as well as to scan the needs of the society and the economy and create efforts to integrate people into sectors that have a shortage of skilled employees.
- Special measures or incentives to target underrepresented groups should be put in place, such as providing child care, so that women, who are underrepresented on the job market, can attend training programs. The focus on gender aspects and women’s access to the labour market and participation in forming policies is also something that the EU Commission encourages Member States to do.¹²

BEST PRACTICE NO 5.

REFUGEES’ DAY

Refugees are looking for a job and a place in our society. Employers are looking for motivated workers and trainees. We bring both groups together with our tool “Refugees’ Day”.

The personal meeting in German daily work life and the direct exchange are a win-win for both sides. This has resulted in many internships, work and training contracts.

The Refugees’ Day is organized in 5 steps:

1. Creating a profile of the refugees
2. Selecting work sites in the network
3. Matching one refugee to one employer
4. The day of action itself
5. Aftercare and advice for both sides.

So far over 400 contacts have been created. That is a good record and shows that the domestic economy is heading in the same direction as us¹³.

¹² ¹² European Commission, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016. P. 9.

¹³ For more information: www.refugees-day.de



Done by Bijan Otmischi, Integrationmanager of district of Kassel.

BEST PRACTICE NO 6.

TANDEMS AUF ZEIT

This mentor-project is also carried out in the state of Hessen in Germany and aims at helping refugees getting access to the job market.

The project supports tandem-partnering between one established professional and a newcomer. The professional works as a mentor for the migrants or refugees and helps with for example career orientation, searching for internships or vocational trainings and assist with applications and other administrative proceedings. The contact with the mentor also allows the refugees to create a network in the host society. This is an important part in finding a job and something that the refugees are usually missing since they are new in the country and haven't had the time to build up connections yet.



The “Tandems auf Zeit” program also offers the mentors training courses and a recognition letter from the State of Hessen at the end of the tandem-partnership. This can be an incentive for people to take part in the program and thus create more mentoring-partnerships, because it is also a good qualification for the mentors to have it in their CV.

Although most importantly, this project helps with the overall challenge the refugees have to take on to get access to the job market. Getting help with applications and administrative matters and with the creation of a network might shorten the time they have to wait to find a job. This

voluntary-based service is a positive complement to the official structures which might not be able to help with everything, for example not with the creation of a network.

BEST PRACTICE NO 7.



Regional Integration Accelerators (RIAC) VP/2016/015 A transnational project to make integration faster and more effective

Since the beginning of 2018, Pro-Arbeit Kreis Offenbach has been coordinating the transnational RIAC project funded by the European Commission.

According to the goals of the EaSI program it intends to promote a high level of quality and sustainable employment, fostering social protection and supporting inclusion for refugees and asylum seekers in Germany, Denmark, Italy and Turkey.

The project aims at developing instruments, expertise and strategies for a fast track integration in the labour market for refugees and asylum seekers in the above-mentioned countries.

Starting from the implementation of the planned actions, we are able to outline a scalable and transferable model for an optimized integration in the labour market on a regional scale.

RIAC provides concrete target jobs for refugees. The participants receive a concrete job perspective early on and are integrated into the process of the cooperating employer, right from the start. Each RIAC is a small and clear unit and provides a clear framework for the participating employers and up to 12 participants. Coordinating and adapting the RIAC is indispensable to reach the aim of fast and accurate integration.

The issues:

- ✓ Innovative ways to combat long term unemployment and youth unemployment through the strategy of self-employment: With the theme of self-employment RIAC's aim is to enhance refugees' entrepreneurship (self-employment) skills in order to increase their employability. Within the theme of employment; in a partnership with employers, the target group's employability skills are enhanced to combat long-term unemployment.
- ✓ Provide social cohesion to build more liveable and sustainable societies.
- ✓ Develop inclusive business circles for refugees with the contribution of employers.
- ✓ Break the language barrier between host communities and refugees.
- ✓ Provide standardized implementation that is based on the different dynamics of the countries.
- ✓ Increase women's participation in the labour market.

For more information regarding the project please read the descriptions in the footnotes¹⁴.

Social media:



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/riaceurope/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/riaceurope/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/RIAC64139451>

BEST PRACTICE NO 8.

FAST TRACKS

“Fast Tracks” is a practice used by the Municipality of Vänersborg in Sweden. The program’s objective is to match the newcomers desire to quickly get a job with the existing and future needs of the labour market.



Vänersborgs kommun

The program has been designed through a cooperation between the Municipality and the Public Employment Agency. They found that certain industries and businesses in the area have a demand for employees and thus created three “fast tracks” aimed to quickly educate and train people to work in these specific areas. For Vänersborg, the three different tracks that have been created are “health and social care worker”, “butcher” and “auto glass worker”. But of course, every region has to scan its own needs and demands in order to have a functioning program. In the “fast tracks” the newcomers benefit from a mix of actions in order to prepare for the entrance in the labour market. The preparation in the “Fast Track” consists of education and practical training at the site, combined with language courses.

“Fast Tracks” is a good example of targeted measures/early efforts that quickly get the newcomers into work, which is something that the EU Commission has recommended the Member States to focus on in the Action Plan for Integration of Third-Country Nationals. It is also a good example of how both the newcomers and the society can **mutually benefit** from such targeted measures.

¹⁴ Homepage: www.project-riac.eu

Homepage: <https://www.proarbeit-kreis-of.de/de/privatpersonen/auslaender/transnationale-projekt-riac/>

Audio-visual contents <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuz54mAuH3g&feature=youtu.be>

3.3 Education and schooling

As already mentioned, getting a job in the host country is essential for refugees to start their new life. However, in order to be able to find a job, there also needs to be sufficient efforts in education and schooling.

Children's future starts in school. What they learn there will follow them throughout their lives. Many of the decisions made in school will determine their future. And the conditions for their education will make a huge difference, either for the better or for the worse. In almost all European countries, migrant students have lower results and experience less well-being in school than native born children¹⁵. It is also more common that they quit education or training earlier¹⁶. We need to make sure that we turn this trend around and create the best **settings** and **possibilities** for these children to succeed, just like any other child.

Adults too, need support to be able to build their life in the host country. Even though they are already grown-ups, they need the right support to start their **new life**. The degree of former education and experience varies a lot among the refugees and migrants residing in Europe. For that reason, it is important that our systems work to accommodate everyone. The ones who have former education or experience in specific areas should be able to get recognition for it and continue their work here, and the ones who are lacking specific skills and knowledge should receive the right training in order to start working. Any such efforts should, if possible, also be more individualized and take into account the person's life situation and psychological wellbeing, considering that many of the refugees have experienced trauma.

Whether or not the refugee is a child or an adult, one thing that all project partners agree upon is the importance of starting these integration measures immediately. This is also emphasised in the EU Commission's "Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals" where education is one of five key areas for achieving integration. According to the Commission, education is the foundation and gateway to employment and social inclusion and should thus be started as quickly as possible¹⁷. They have also set out three priorities that should be the focus of the EU and Member States' efforts, namely (1) integrate newly arrived migrants into mainstream education structures as early as possible, (2) prevent underachievement among migrants and prevent social exclusion and (3) foster intercultural dialogue¹⁸.

¹⁵ EACEA. Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe. (2018) Accessed at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/integrating_students_from_migrant_backgrounds_into_schools_in_europe_national_policies_and_measures.pdf (2019-08-07) and OECD, 2016. PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education. Paris: OECD Publishing

¹⁶ EACEA. Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe, 2018.

¹⁷ European Commission, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016.

¹⁸ European Commission. Education and Training: Education and migrants. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/education-and-migrants_en (2019-08-07)

Main challenges:

- **On an individual level**, there are long waiting times for a decision to be made before the refugees can start language or integration courses.
- **On an individual level**, there is a difficulty in finding easily accessible information in a language the refugees understand.
- **On an organisational level**, there is a general lack of intercultural competence and well-trained staff working with the refugees.
- **On an organisational level**, administrative barriers are an obstacle in the validation of former skills and education.
- **On an organisational level**, some countries are not offering funded language courses.
- **On society level**, the obstacles in integrating refugees and the long processes for integration create dissatisfaction and more divided societies.

General guidelines and recommendations on schooling and education:

- It is important to start with integration and language courses from **day one** in order to integrate the newcomers into the society as fast as possible. This will also activate the refugees and prevent them from losing their motivation for integration, which is a risk if they have to wait for too long before the process starts.
- The language courses should also contain basic knowledge of the hosting country's society, such as social and cultural elements, in order to help refugees acquire knowledge about their new society and speed up integration.
- Education and courses should as much as possible be adjusted to the refugee's skills and ability. For instance, language courses should be provided at different levels and speeds to allow refugees who need more support to receive what they need and enable those who are fast learners to proceed more quickly in mastering the language.
- Special measures should be put in place in order to facilitate access to language courses or training programs for everyone. In particular, it is important to have childcare in place so that women can attend classes. To pay special attention to gender aspects is also in line with the EU Commission's appeal for integration policies¹⁹.

¹⁹ [European Commission, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016.](#)

BEST PRACTICE NO 9.

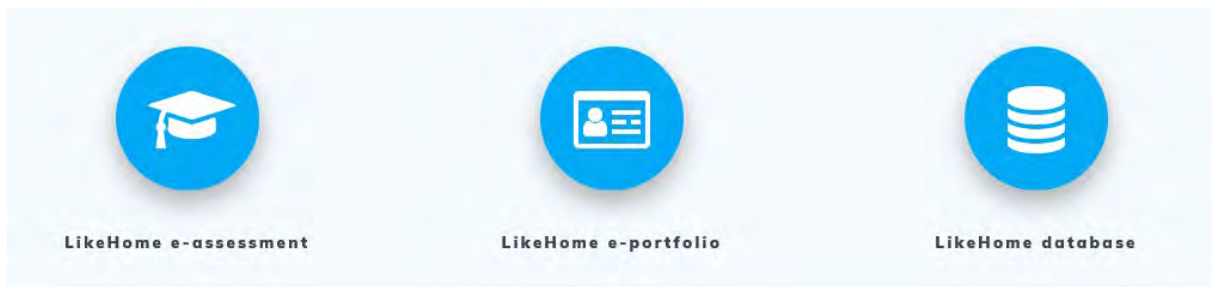
LIKE HOME TOOL

Getting a job in the host society is one of the biggest challenges for refugees, especially finding a job that the person is qualified for and feel comfortable and satisfied with. Today, there is a huge gap between recognizing the refugee's former education and matching the person's knowledge and skills with the needs of the labour market. The "Like Home Tool" has been created as a step in the right direction to solve this issue.



The Like Home program started out as an EU project between seven partner countries that were committed to fostering migrants' inclusion in the host countries' education and training systems as well as in the economy and society in general. The main objective of the project is to speed up the access to the labour market by creating a tool that assesses and validates newly arrived migrants' prior education.

The result of the project has been the creation of an e-portal with three different e-tools that refugees and migrants can use freely. The main tool is the e-assessment which is a test based on self-reflection. The test examines skills of 8 different fields that have been defined as the most important ones for successful work integration; literacy, willingness to learn, language skills, digital skills, creativity, social and civic responsibility, sense of initiative and cultural awareness. After the test, the user will get a pdf-file with a "record of achievement" that he or she can use when applying for education, training and jobs. This will help the newcomers to avoid starting from scratch and shows training centres and employers what useful skills they already have and what they can contribute with. In addition to this tool, the project has also developed an e-portfolio, where one can create a personal job-profile, and a database with descriptions of how different countries' education, training and certification systems work.



All the tools have been well thought out by stakeholders and organisations in the partnering countries and then tested by an "Expert Advisory Board", that consisted of high-profile experts in the fields of labour market and education, in order to ensure the applicability of the tools.

The e-tools are available in English, German, Spanish, Greek, Swedish, French, Italian and Arabic.

The EU has identified the lack of recognition and validation of refugees' former experiences and education as a main obstacle for the integration of third-country nationals into the labour

market as well as into the society as a whole. One of the EU Commissions key recommendations to Member States in the area of labour market integration is to create solutions to address this issue and the “Like Home Tool” is a good example of a tool that helps overcoming this obstacle.

BEST PRACTICE NO 10.

CIAC LANGUAGE HELP DESK + GENERAL ORIENTATION COURSES



CIAC is a non-profit organisation based in Parma that since 1993 works for and with refugees and asylum seekers. From 2003, it works with various municipalities in the Parma Province to organise information desks for newcomers. One of their main objectives is to support integration and inclusion through language and job orientation courses.

Since 2013 they have organised innovative courses for job orientation, involving more than 200 people. This project started as a language laboratory to teach Italian to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and its added value comes from the fact that today it is not only a language course any more but an actual job orientation course.

The job orientation courses have two focus points:

1. How to look for a job in Italy, how to read a contract, how to finalize a contract; how to fight against illegal jobs, illegal environments; how to survive legally in the Italian labour market, which can be compared to a confused jungle.
2. How to overcome cultural and emotional barriers and obstacles during job interviews or within a group of work.

Learners follow both a language course and role-playing activities with a sociologist and a theatre director to create a fluent relation in the process of job search.

This concrete (Learning by doing is the motto) and innovative process is based on a challenge: being able to implement a real social dialogue to start change, integration and inclusion in the society.

The second step of the project is to directly involve local businesses of a certain importance in the Parma area to create a shared job orientation course based on the analysis of the students and the enterprises. In 2018, CIAC organised joint trainings inside some of the companies' plants. This process helped to bring migrant students closer to the job framework and, at the same time, allowed companies to find a new way to involve migrant workers in their activities.

After this experience, that broadened the creation of a network of companies, it is possible to say that Diversity is the engine of social mobility and an elevator for social improvement.

BEST PRACTICE NO 11.

CASA DELLE CULTURE

“Casa delle Culture” or the “House of Culture” is an intercultural centre located in Ravenna in Italy. The centre was created in 2001 in order to support the Municipality’s work on matters related to migration, in particular in regards to education and schooling.



Casa delle
CULTURE

The goal of “Casa delle Culture” is to reach a stage where diversity is an accepted and natural part of society. This is made through a range of different activities mainly aimed at education. Activities are carried out both for migrants and for Italians to allow them to learn about each other’s cultures and to promote the value of intercultural-dialogues.

Much of the centre’s work is aimed towards schools and children. For example, there is a class program that introduces a cultural mediator into the classroom for the whole first year when a migrant child first arrives in a school. The mediator is supposed to work closely with the teacher and support dialogue and cultural exchange between the pupils. The program has also introduced inter-class study groups where children are allowed to use their mother tongue. This gives the children a break from learning the new language while still being able to focus on school subjects and learning.

Another central activity carried out by the “Casa delle Culture” is the Helpdesk. This is a service for all migrants who need information or advice concerning elementary school or higher education. The service helps, for instance, with the enrolment of children to their first school and sets up a plan for the first reception together with teachers and cultural mediators. It also offers support and advice for migrants who wish to enrol in higher education or apply to university.

These are only a few of the activities carried out. The centre also organises intercultural education for teachers, language courses, a yearly culture festival and offers a library-service with a collection of information about migration and different cultures.

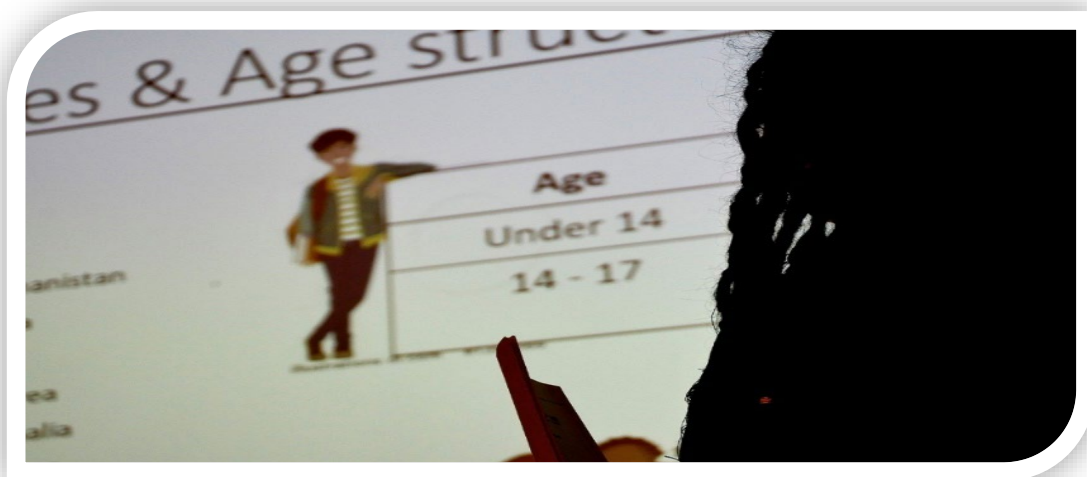
“Casa delle Culture” offers great support to refugees as it tries to **integrate** migrants into the society and **not only assimilate** them. This is possible since cultural dialogue is highly promoted and the migrants are viewed as assets to the society. Promoting intercultural dialogue is also one of the EU Commission’s examples of positive actions that supports social inclusion and leads to integration, and the “Casa delle Culture” is a good example of such an action. Moreover, the Helpdesk provides the solution to a difficulty that many refugees experience, that is, finding easily accessible or understandable information. The Helpdesk answers all questions migrants have and uses language support to allow everyone to understand the answers. Lastly, this is also a good example of how to enhance the intercultural skills of the staff working with migrants, since for example teachers work closely with cultural mediators and get access to other forms of education.

3.4 Unaccompanied minors

In 2015, there were 96 000 unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the EU²⁰. Children and youths under the age of 18 have a special status of protection in the asylum process since they are younger and thus more vulnerable and exposed to risks. Although the increasing number of asylum seekers and asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in Europe put pressure on the Member States' systems, it is important not to forget the responsibility the Member States have to follow and respect European values, human rights and international law, not least in relation to the *United Nations Declaration of Children's Rights*. In response to the migration situation in Europe in the last years, the European Commission has also published a communication with recommendations on how to protect children in migration, throughout the reception and processing of applications to integration²¹.

Most of the unaccompanied minors that have arrived in the partnering countries in the last years are male and in the upper teenage years. The whole situation is a great challenge for the minors as many of them have experienced and have to deal with trauma at the same time as they have to go through an often long-spanned asylum process and cope with other normal teenage problems. It is thus of utmost importance that the societies create welcoming, safe and consistent environments for the children and youths to grow up in and develop. The EU Commission's communication explicitly says that children should be given all the necessary support, such as psychosocial care and free time activities, in order to ensure their wellbeing²².

Another big issue for unaccompanied children is the lack of safety and fear of the future. The circumstances in each Member State differ, but for UAMs in many EU countries the situation after the child turns 18 is insecure. This is a constant stress for many youths and children and is also a hinder to integration as they might not want to get too attached and start a life in a country in which they are not sure they are allowed to stay.



²⁰ European Commission. Children in migration: EU actions to protect children in migration. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/children-migration_en (2019-08-07)

²¹ European Commission. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on The protection of Children in Migration. (2017) Accessed at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0211&from=DE> (2019-08-07)

²² Ibid.

Main challenges:

- **On an individual and organisational level**, there is a huge challenge in supporting and caring for the children and youths in the ways they need and create a safe and supportive environment which takes into consideration the UAMs life situation, including former traumatic experiences.
- **On an organisational level**, there is a challenge in protracted asylum processes and legislation that does not provide safety for children once they turn 18. This is also a challenge on **an individual level**, as it affects the mental health of the minor and is an obstacle to integration on a **society level**.

General guidelines and recommendations on unaccompanied minors:

- With the usually unsafe and traumatic experiences that the minors have faced, safety and continuation is key in helping them cope with their situation. In practice, this can be translated into actions such as placing the child from the beginning in the place they will stay (family, institution, private accommodation), keeping the same guardian throughout the whole process and provide legal safety for children once they turn 18.
- Some countries have some sort of a “transition period” after the unaccompanied minor turns 18. This could be good practice in order to avoid abrupt changes and reduce the stress that UAMs feel for the future.
- It is helpful to engage the children and youths in different activities such as sports and culture to keep them active, increase their self-esteem and improve their overall quality of life. This will also allow the minors to meet other children and youths from the host country and helps them start creating a new life in the host country. These types of free time activities could for example be organised in cooperation with the volunteering sector.

BEST PRACTICE NO 12.

Guardians for Asylum seeking children (NGO)

ETU ry. is a registered national association supplying guardians for unaccompanied minors around Finland. It allows and develops policies related to guardian activities and duties. Additionally, the association organises the organisation of guardians as well as it improves the contexts in which guardians operate. The purpose is to enhance the best interests of unaccompanied minors in various ways.

The Association’s main tasks include:

- Follow up current development, legislation and instructions
- Statements, initiatives and networking
- Sharing of knowledge related to the field
- Contribution to the education of people working within the field
- Advice of guardianship for members of the association
- Co-operation with governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as other parties



The Unwritten-exhibition

Who has permission to feel at home where they are? Do we leave our homeland behind us, letting it disappear, or does it live within us as stories, values and experiences? Or is it about feeling at home somewhere else? Can someone deny you from getting to know or live in your area and feel at home there?

The Unwritten is an exhibition that challenges visitors to ponder these questions and create a story where the point is not where we come from, but that we are all here!

The exhibition can be organised together with the MAMA'S DEAR - group. In connection with the exhibition, a pedagogical learning environment has been designed for both children and adults. Special attention is paid to schoolchildren, children from kindergarten and high school students.

Particularly important for kindergarteners are the workshops, where children can explore their own home region and what it consists of. At the same time, these workshops explore emotions and how we are. The purpose is to give children the opportunity to explore and imagine the feelings of the children in the pictures and hence their own feelings.

Adults and students can independently tour the exhibition and do image analysis and participate in a mission to arouse thoughts and reflections on the home region, on identity, tolerance and diversity and who has the right to feel at home where they are.

All visitors have the opportunity to participate in a "functional wall", that allows for a small-scale study of their own experiences in connection to the theme of the exhibition. This is a qualitative research method called "probe". The probe can be used to observe the reflections of each visitor. The probe can also stimulate reflections on the subject of the exhibition by asking visitors to answer the probe's questions.

4. Communication, misinformation and stereotypes

Global migration presents complex opportunities and challenges for local communities in the European Union. The sense of who 'we' are is challenged due to immigration, and consequently who 'I' am. This, in turn, leads to societal issues of belonging and identity. 'Otherness' strikes the fear in the minds of individuals and collectives and invites shadow projection, fuelled by a dichotomy-ridden debate on migration. The complexity this situation generates suggests that we ought to view public and voluntary leadership and communication as intrinsic and interwoven elements in the shaping of cohesive and resilient local communities of co-existence.

We have learnt, as practitioners partaking in the WIR project, that communication is an essential ingredient in all stages of a relationship. It is ever-present through the use of language, stories, images and, something we constantly tend to forget, our non-verbal actions.

The world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement ever, an unprecedented 70.8 million people around the world have been forced from home, and among them are nearly 25.9 million refugees, over half of whom are children (UNHCR, 2019). This is described by Professor Ravi Kohli (p. 84, 2014), keynote speaker at the WIR opening conference in Vänersborg, Sweden, in April 2018, as '[...] a form of human global warming that is arguably irreversible. Its consequences leave deep traces on everyday life for those who move, and those who receive

them [...]'. Hence, global events inevitably turn into local challenges to be addressed by local communities across Europe, by public and voluntary sector leaders, like us participating in this project.

In this booklet we share our experiential learning from communicating the alleged 'refugee crisis' in 2015 and onwards. The specificity of this period in time, with its vertiginous increase in migrants reaching Europe, brings philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' (Davis, 1996) thoughts on the 'other' to mind. According to Levinas, meeting another human being face-to-face is an irreducible relation. The most challenging questions of communicating community cohesion are thus about deep considerations of our values, ethical posture and approach to life.

In 2015, Sweden received more migrants per capita than any other European nation. In the wake of the ensuing dehumanization of the 'other' that followed, work was carried out allow the voices of the newly arrived to surface through 'face-to-face' storytelling and images on social media. One photo alone, of a refugee toddler, went viral and peaked at 150 000 viewers and a storytelling film about the friendship between Swedish and Syrian men reached 90 000 viewers on social media.

Envisioning cohesive communities of diversity, as suggested by the WIR-project, calls for an open-minded, curious inquiry into the life story of the 'other'. Because, it is only through meeting face-to-face and sharing our life stories that we can become fully human²³.

Newspapers, social media and word of mouth are all means of communication.



In recent years the refugee situation in Europe has been widely covered in all of these forms. The refugees and the asylum seekers are more than often pictured as strangers, criminals, enemies and people who are not welcome in "our Europe". The society is getting more and

²³ Pascal Tshibanda, MSc in Sustainability, Sweden.

Davis, C. (1996). Levinas: An introduction. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Kohli, R. K. S. (2014). Protecting asylum seeking children on the move. *Revue Européenne Des Migrations Internationales*, 30(1), pp. 83–104.

UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency. (2019). Figures at a Glance. [online] UNHCR. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html> [Accessed: 9th of August, 2019].

more polarized and the language used has gotten sharper. We often talk about numbers, not people. About costs for the society, not possibilities and opportunities. About a crisis for Europe, instead of a crisis for the people who have fled.

A study in Upper Austria sheds light on the skew reporting of newspapers on the issue of immigration. The study showed that more than half of the analysed newspaper articles transported an alarming effect on readers about migration and that almost half of these were about crime. Also, there were only about 3% of the articles that gave migrants and asylum seekers a voice, all the rest of the them only talked about refugees in third person.

How media and we ourselves talk about people creates stereotypes. These labels can be straight out damaging for the people affected by them. It can, for example, hinder people from an honest chance of getting a job or create even deeper cleavages in the society, as different groups of people are put against each other in anger.

The majority of cities and countries in Europe have to tackle prejudices, negative stereotypes, hate speech, racism and bad news coverage of refugees. The important challenge is to give a more nuanced picture of the situation and the reality and to mirror the **diversity** of the refugee people and their lives. One lesson learned in this project is that personal meetings are key to combat prejudices, because they makes people see the **reality** instead of trusting the stories and rumours spread by media.

Hate speech and racism as well as unequal opportunities for people as a consequence of negative narratives is seriously harmful and actually breaches the fundamental rights of the European Union. In the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union” it is established that all EU citizens and people residing in Europe have the right to equal treatment and non-discrimination. The Commission has identified this as a major problem in integration of third-country nationals and calls on Member States to target xenophobia, discrimination and unequal treatment through legislation and targeted measures²⁴.

Main challenges:

- **On an individual level**, there is a huge challenge for the refugees and asylum seekers to face prejudices, stereotypes and sometimes even racist claims and to constantly have to deal with the society’s labels that are placed on them.
- **On an organisational level**, it is a challenge to find effective ways to address the issue without being perceived as too regulatory or too politically correct.
- **On a society level**, miscommunication and negative stereotypes become a problem when different groups in the society are put against each other.

General guidelines and recommendations on communication and stereotypes:

- To tackle stereotypes and negative narratives of refugees and migrants there is a need to educate and spread right information. When the citizens themselves have the right

²⁴ European Commission, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016. P. 13-14. And Official Journal of the European Union. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. (2012) Accessed at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT&from=EN> (2019-08-08)

information or know how to look for trustworthy facts, it is easier to resist wrong information.

- Encourage the journalists and publishers to regulate their sector and take responsibility for good professional practice when it comes to news coverage and reporting.
- Create a “Code of Conduct” for communication in general and in particular on issues of migration and refugees.
- The creation of information campaigns at both voluntary and public levels about refugees and integration can be a way to tackle misinformation and stereotypes in our everyday life. Photos in official brochures and posters featuring people with different backgrounds can promote integration as they help people embrace the diversity of the population.

BEST PRACTICE NO 13.

“MAMA’S DEAR” -concept for children and their families

Mama's Dear Circling the World is a pedagogically constructed sensory journey for children and their parents. In the group, children gather to travel with their imagination to a chosen destination, usually a country of origin of a group member or one he or she has recently visited. In this way, different backgrounds are interlinked into activities of practical implementation. The design of the group is based on the triangle of experience and experience pedagogy. The action concept is scripted and always guided by a character called Kitty-Cat, who takes the kids on an imaginative adventure. The character not only provides security but has also played a key role in ensuring the commitment of the group members. Repeated formula, food, sounds, passport, airline tickets, gestures, movements, maps and play are all combined to create the basis for a meaningful and memorable experience. The aim is to increase not only the courage of children to face diversity, tolerance and open-mindedness, but also the participation of migrant women who are often difficult to involve in local communities.



BEST PRACTICE NO 14.

COUNCIL FOR MASS MEDIA

The Council for Mass Media is a self-regulating committee in Finland, established by publishers and journalists in the field of mass communication.

The purpose of the council is to interpret good professional practice and defend the freedom of speech and publication. Although the committee has no legal power, their decisions are closely observed and followed up.



The Council of Mass Media works as follows: anyone who considers that the media (print, internet, radio, television) has breached good professional practice can bring a complaint to the Council. The case is then investigated by the Committee. If they believe that the media has overstepped good practice, they issue a notice to the violating party, that needs to publish a correction within a short time. If this is not followed the notice by the Committee will be made public.

In Finland, the majority of the media actors have already signed the Council's Basic Agreement. Similar Councils can also be found in other countries. Although the Council is not exclusively committed to supervising good professional practice in relation to the issue of migrants and refugees, it can certainly contribute positively to this topic. The Council of Mass Medias is dedicated to good professional practice in general and aimed towards spreading **right and true information**, which is extremely important regarding the refugee situation. This is a good practice for creating well-informed citizens and contribute to better communication on all society issues, including migration.

The work carried out through the "Council for Mass Media" is also in line with the EU call for measures that target xenophobia, racism and hate speech as well as fight discrimination²⁵.

5. The WIR Project – short description and partners

In 2015, Europe faced great challenges as migration rose to unprecedented levels. In 2015 alone, one million refugees entered the EU. Border controls at European outer borders faced great constraints and there was a need for fast and collective actions from both European Member States as well as the EU as a whole. Nevertheless, a concerted approach has been slow or even missing in some aspects. At the same time, there are growing misperceptions and negative stereotypes on immigrants which create social and economic clashes within societies and between European Member States.

Yes, migration can be seen as a challenge – but also an **opportunity**. The European population is aging, and immigration and an increasing working age population can be a solution to the future of the European welfare states. Moreover, intercultural interactions also allow

²⁵ European Commission, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, 2016. P. 13-14.

individuals to grow and learn from each other and go beyond their initial perceptions and prejudices.

In order to move beyond the initial crisis and accommodate and integrate people in need, structural measures at EU and national levels should be set up. We also need to learn from other Member States in order to find the best solutions and best practices on how to welcome and integrate refugees into our societies. A well-managed approach will also allow to combat dangerous stereotypes and negative narratives on migrants. This is essential in order to build prosperous and inclusive societies.

The “Welcome and Integration for Refugees” project was set up in order to cope with the common challenges we face on a European level as well as learn and share from each other how to best integrate and welcome refugees into our societies. The project partners come from all parts of Europe – from North to South and East to West – and have very different experiences and approaches to the refugee situation. This extensive transnationality allows for great learning opportunities.

Moreover, the project was also thought to be a complement to the EU discussions on the creation of the European Agenda for Migration. Whereas the agenda mainly focuses on the national and transnational aspects of migration such as relocation, border controls and asylum processes, this project instead pays attention to **local approaches** to welcoming and integration of refugees.

The project’s specific objectives are to:

- Increase knowledge about the EU strategy and approach towards refugees and asylum seekers based on the European Agenda for Migration
- Increase knowledge about the processes of welcoming and integrating refugees in the partnering countries
- Exchange best practices and compare European experiences on focus themes like, education and schooling, getting ready to work, cooperation with civil society and unaccompanied minors
- Transfer or adapt new models for welcoming and integrating refugees
- Create a tool explaining to the citizens the different approaches at work in the different EU countries.

Presenting the partners



The project has a great spread over Europe with partners coming from all over the European continent. The partnership consists of six public authorities, two associations, one transnational network and one university from seven different European countries.

To involve partners from all over Europe as well as different types of organisations has been one of the projects strengths. This has allowed for a broad understanding of the systems in different countries as well as it has brought up many important and diverse aspects and ideas on welcoming and integration of refugees.

In this chapter the partners will be briefly presented together with an overview of the welcome and integration processes in place in the single partner countries.



Lead partner

Municipality in South-West Sweden

39 000 inhabitants



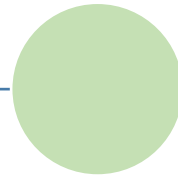
- The temporary law changes in Sweden in July 2016 limits asylum seekers possibilities of getting asylum and is now adjusted to the EU minimum. The law will be in place until at least July 2021.

- In 2015, 162 877 people applied for asylum in Sweden. In 2016 the number was 28 939, in 2017 there were 25 666 applications and in 2018 a number of 21 502.
- Most people seeking asylum in Sweden are from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Eritrea.

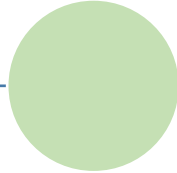


- Refugees have full access to labour market.
- Asylum seekers are allowed to work if they have their case tried in Sweden, can confirm their identity, and have written a well-founded application.

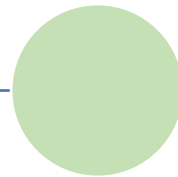
- Refugees start with integration courses and Swedish language courses when they get their residence permit.



Finish Youth Association



3 700 members



800 local associations all over the country



- Between 2015-2016 there were about 38 123 asylum seekers in Finland.
- Most asylum seekers came from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria.

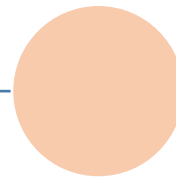
- Asylum seekers are allowed to work 3 months after arrival if they have their passport.
- Asylum seekers without passports are allowed to work 6 months after arrival.
- All refugees are allowed to work.



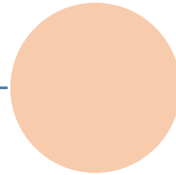
- After the person receives refugee status, he or she will get appointed to a foreigner's course.
- Finish language courses and adult education courses are available to asylum seekers.
- The official integration process in Finland takes 3 years.



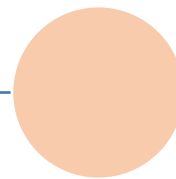
City of Daugavpils



Latvian Municipality



Country's second biggest city



94 000 inhabitants



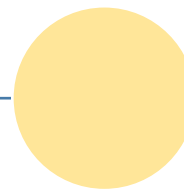
- Latvia received 328 refugees in 2015.
- As part of the Relocation scheme, Latvia has also agreed to welcoming 531 refugees from refugee camps.
- About 90% of the refugees from the relocation scheme has left Latvia to seek better life in other European countries.
- Most asylum seekers (in 2017) came from Syria, Vietnam, Russia, Eritrea and Kazakhstan.



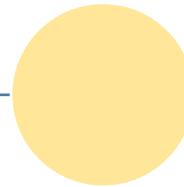
- All refugees have the right to work.
- Asylum seekers are only allowed to work if they have waited for a decision more than 9 months.



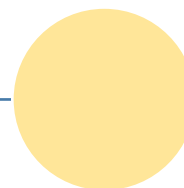
- Integration starts when a person has received refugee status.
- Latvian language courses are not state funded, but can be founded privately. Some municipalities, like Daugavpils, also finance language courses for refugees.



An association on Upper Austria



Stands for "Verein für Sozial – und Gemeinwesen-projekte"



60 employees



- In 2015, there were almost 90 000 people seeking asylum in Austria. In 2016, there were about 40 000 and in 2017, circa 25 000.
- Most asylum seekers in Austria come from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Russia.

- There is full access to the labour market when the person has received refugee status.
- For asylum seekers, there is limited access to the job market. The first 3 months they are not allowed to work at all, and after that they are only allowed to work within certain sectors and have to respect certain time limits of the job they are eligible for.



- Language courses are only subsidised to refugees with a certain nationality. In Austria, only Syrians get free government funded classes.
- In Upper Austria, the federal state is financing classes for certain other nationalities as well, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Somalia.



University of Alicante

A Spanish university

Approximately 32 000 students

3 800 staff working



- In Spain, there were about 14 000 asylum seekers in 2015 and 16 000 in 2016.
- People coming to Spain are mostly from Venezuela, Syria, Ukraine and Colombia.
- Moreover, Spain has agreed to receive 17 337 refugees from the resettlement program.



- Most asylum seekers receive a work permit after 6 months of their arrival.



- There are limited integration policies from the official structures, but migrants seem to integrate well anyhow.



Located in Northern Italy

A union of five municipalities

50 000 inhabitants



Italian municipality

Located in the North-Eastern part of the country

90 000 inhabitants



60 members

A transnational network between Italian and Swedish partners based in Italy

113 projects cofunded by the EU since 2005

- A recent law change in Italy removes humanitarian grounds for granting protection to refugees. It is thus currently only possible to seek asylum on the grounds of war and political persecution.



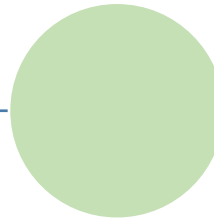
- In 2015, there were about 84 085 asylum seekers in Italy. In 2016, it rose to 122 960 and in 2017 to 128 850. In 2018, there were about 59 950 applications.
- Most refugees in Italy come through the routes from Central and Eastern Mediterranean and Eastern Balkan.



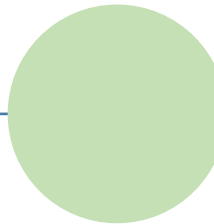
- Asylum seekers are allowed to work 60 days after their arrival.



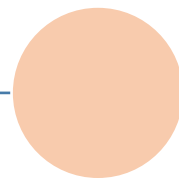
- The CAS and SPRAR projects, which are the accommodation where asylum seekers and refugees live, offer language courses and help with integrating into society.



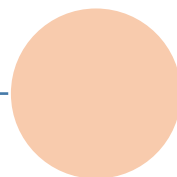
District in
central
Germany



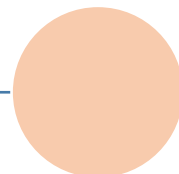
235 813
inhabitants



District
in
Germany



Located
close to
Frankfurt



351 692
inhabitants



- In 2015, about 479 649 people sought asylum in Germany. In 2016 the number was 745 545.
- Most refugees in Germany are from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria.



- Generally, asylum seekers have to wait for at least 3 months, and until they are no longer obliged to stay in initial reception centres, before they are allowed to start working.
- The access to the labour market also depends on the status of the person. For example, in practice asylum seekers from safe countries need to wait longer.



- The integration process for asylum seekers starts from the first day, when they arrive in their accommodation, with integration classes consisting of learning of German language and German culture.

6. Summary

The experience of the WIR project has come to an end after two years of activities. When the project idea was initiated in early 2017, the partners were hopeful for a common EU approach on migration and asylum and saw the project as a way to enhance EU policy. However, in 2019

we still haven't reached a final agreement concerning a common EU framework for migration. Only some parts have been agreed and implemented, whereas other parts are still being deliberated or even stalled at the EU level.

Although it has sometimes been hard to find a common approach on migration and asylum for the legislators in Brussels, the WIR project has been a success in **local EU cooperation**.

Ten partners from seven different countries met at nine transnational meetings and discussed the best ways to welcome and integrate refugees into our societies. The meetings involved stakeholders, civil society, politicians and refugees themselves and about **350** people are estimated to have had a part in the project's development. Even more people are expected to be reached by the project as the results are disseminated.

The work of the project resulted in the gathering of **14** best practices from all the partners. The practices have come from North, South, East and West and everyone has contributed with important lessons and ideas. Although the situation looks different in every Member State, there are some lessons that seem to be universal in regards to the welcoming and integration of refugees and that should be kept in mind when transferring the practices presented in this Handbook. To begin with, there needs to be a mix of different efforts at different fronts in order to achieve successful integration. A holistic framework is key since the situation is highly complex. In relation to this, it is also important to emphasise that everyone needs to be involved in the process, directly or indirectly. Public authorities, companies, civil society, neighbours and friends, all need to be a part of the development in order to create inclusive and open societies that can continue to prosper and develop. After all, it is all about integration – and not assimilation – which implies that we have to meet each other somewhere in the middle. Moreover, integration efforts should start as early as possible, either from the first day the person is granted asylum or even earlier. This will speed up integration and makes the refugee able to integrate into the job market and society in general as quickly as possible. Lastly, in order to achieve inclusive societies and successful integration we need to see the refugees' potential and capacity. Instead of looking at the situation in Europe as a crisis, we need to see it as an opportunity. The refugees can contribute to and enrich our societies if we choose to embrace this development.

7. Links and references

Links to all organisations and initiatives presented in the Handbook:

Buddy Program: <http://www.redcross.lv/en/projects/avail-amplifying-the-voices-of-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-for-integration-and-lifeskills/>

Caritas: <https://www.caritas-linz.at>

Casa delle Culture: <http://casadelleculture.comune.ra.it/>

City of Daugavpils: <https://www.daugavpils.lv/en/>

Council of Mass Media in Finland: <https://www.jsn.fi>

ETU: <https://www.edustajuus.fi/in-english/>

Landkreis Kassel: <https://www.landkreiskassel.de/>

Landkreis Offenbach: <https://www.kreis-offenbach.de/>

Like Home Project: <http://likehomeproject.com/>

Like Home Portal: <https://likehomeportal.dieberater.com/#portal>

Municipality of Ravenna: <http://www.comune.ra.it/>

Pro Arbeit: <http://www.proarbeit-kreis-of.de/>

SERN: <https://www.sern.eu/>

Share Your Story: <https://www.facebook.com/storyzusammenhelfen/>

Support Group network: <https://www.supportgroup.se/>

Ravenna Municipality: <http://www.comune.ra.it/>

Refugees' Day: <https://refugees-day.de/>

Reki: <https://www.caritas-linz.at/hilfe-angebote/migration-integration/reki-regionale-kompetenzzentren-fuer-integration-und-diversitaet/>

Restad Gård: <http://restadgard.se/>

Unione Pedemontana Parmense:

http://www.unionepedemontana.pr.it/servizi/notizie/notizie_homepage.aspx

Universitat d'Alacant: <https://www.ua.es/en/>

Volkshilfe: <https://www.volkshilfe-ooe.at>

Vänernsborg Municipality: <https://www.vanersborg.se/>

VSG: <https://www.vsg.or.at/en/home/>

[Wir Sind Oberösterreich]: <https://wirsindooe.at/>

Zusammen Helfen in Oberösterreich: <https://zusammen-helfen.at/>

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(2018) Accessed at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/integrating_students_from_migrant_backgrounds_into_schools_in_europe_national_policies_and_measures.pdf (2019-08-07)

European Commission. *Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the*

Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions:

Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. (2016) Accessed at:

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160607/communication_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf (2019-08-07)

European Commission, *Fact Sheet: Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country*

Nationals. (2016) Accessed at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/20160607/factsheet_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf)

[affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/20160607/factsheet_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/20160607/factsheet_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf) (2019-08-07)

European Commission. *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament*

and the Council on The protection of Children in Migration. (2017) Accessed at:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0211&from=DE> (2019-08-07)

FRA: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. *Periodic data collection on the*

migration situation in the EU. (2018) Accessed at:

https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-september-periodic-migration-report-highlights_en.pdf (2019-08-07)

European Commission. *Education and Training: Education and migrants*. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/education-and-migrants_en (2019-08-07)

European Commission. *Press Release Database: Questions and Answers: An improved EU Blue Card scheme and the Action Plan on Integration*. (2016) Accessed at: https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-2071_en.htm (2019-08-07)

European Commission. *Children in migration: EU actions to protect children in migration*. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/children-migration_en (2019-08-07)

European Commission. *Ageing and welfare state policies: Demographic ageing*. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/growth-and-investment/structural-reforms/ageing-and-welfare-state-policies_en (2019-08-07)

OECD. *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*. (2016) Paris: OECD Publishing.

Official Journal of the European Union. *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. (2012) Accessed at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT&from=EN> (2019-08-08)