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BRIVĪBAS UN SOLIDARĪTĀTES FONDS

NEWCOMER INTEGRATION IN EUROPE: BEST PRACTICES AND INNOVATIONS SINCE 2015



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Published by

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With the financial support of the European Parliament

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Editor: Agnese Lāce
English language editor: Thomas J. Schmit

Cover photo: Caitlin Regan, 'Europe', 2008.

Cover design: Inta Filjipova
Page layout: Inta Filjipova

ISBN: 978-2-930769-08-0

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction <i>Agnese Lāce</i>	7
The role of civil society in the integration of newly arrived refugees in Sweden <i>Sayaka Osanami Törngren, Klara Öberg, Erica Righard</i>	13
Best integration practices in Greece <i>Vasiliki Karzi, Athanasios Theodoridis, Naya Tselepi</i>	25
Learning for Life for Refugees: The business sector involvement in labour integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland <i>Teresa Buczkowska</i>	39
Social orientation in Belgium and the CURANT project in the city of Antwerp <i>Sanne van de Pol</i>	51
Accommodation and inclusion of unaccompanied minors: An example from Berlin <i>Imke Siefer</i>	61
Refugee integration in Bulgaria: The hot potato which only NGOs dare to touch <i>Iva Lazarova</i>	75
Reception and integration of newcomers in Latvia: The role of NGOs and the issue of continuity <i>Agnese Lāce</i>	91

Refugee integration policies and practices: Legislative developments and NGO initiatives as the response to relocation and resettlement in Lithuania <i>Karolis Žibas, Giedrė Blažytė</i>	107
Integration policies at the local level in Italy: The case of Lucca and Catania <i>Sahizer Samuk Carignani, Iole Fontana</i>	127
When regional inclusion outperforms the State: case of the Spanish Basque Country <i>Tina Magazzini</i>	143
Conclusion <i>Hedwig Giusto</i>	153
Authors' biographies	159

NEWCOMER INTEGRATION IN EUROPE: BEST PRACTICES AND INNOVATIONS SINCE 2015

AGNESE LĀCE,
EDITOR

Many European Union member states have accepted newcomers in their societies for decades. However, no one was prepared for the mixed, significant migration flows that Europe has faced since 2015. Not only were individual member states not prepared, but they struggled to define an effective, common response to the arrival of asylum seekers and migrants. The media used powerful images of people crossing seas and borders to depict the crisis that Europe was facing. However, just as a troubling crisis was the lack of solidarity, cooperation and inter-state management, which continues to put a significant strain on European unity and identity.

Even though a responsibility sharing mechanism was introduced and a share of refugees was relocated from Greece and Italy to other EU member states, the commitment of individual countries has varied. Moreover, there is a large gap between the experience and knowledge of immigrant integration services among member states. Some countries, such as the Baltic States, had little or no experience in refugee integration. On

the other hand, even countries known as immigration societies with prior in-depth experience were challenged to the point that even they have had to limit the reception and integration support provided for newcomers. As we are reflecting on these experiences, it is important to understand that, while the number of arrivals has currently subsided, global displacement numbers keep steadily rising. Europe will remain an attractive region for both those aiming to improve their quality of life and those fleeing wars and persecutions.

In this context, it is critically important to promote exchange of experience and cross-fertilization among European Union member states in order to succeed in the integration efforts aimed at the newly arrived. It is through exchange of experiences, best practices and knowledge that EU countries can increase their unity in responding to similar challenges.

Therefore, the task of this collection of expert articles is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience that have already been developed in a number of European countries, as well as to share innovations developed in member states who are forming a comprehensive integration policy for refugees for the first time. As such, this publication focuses on best practices and innovations in newcomer and refugee integration, looking at various levels of activity (national, local, and urban) and of decision-making (state, municipality, and non-governmental). This collection of best practices is aimed at encouraging cross-fertilization between all member states, which is necessary to strengthen the core of true European solidarity regarding migration matters.

In a broader sense, this collection of expert articles sets forward to, first, demonstrate diverse approaches used in EU member states which have led to successful integration of newcomers; second, to enable better exchange between experts in migrant and refugee integration in the member states; third, to raise awareness in the broader public about the importance of effective and comprehensive integration programmes; and, fourth, to advocate for a genuine European solidarity in order to ensure the existence of such programmes.

This collection of articles contains examples from 10 EU member states written by academics, policy analysts and practitioners. An equal representation of old and new member states and historically immigration countries and countries facing significant asylum flows for the first time was ensured during the drafting process. Each article describes examples of successful integration approaches. Moreover, they also provide descriptions of the particular contexts of each member country, while highlighting important challenges in the process of developing integration programmes, projects or policies.

Civil society seems to provide for most innovations and flexible solutions to unexpected increase in asylum applications. Osana-mi Törngren, Öberg and Righard describe the role of civil society in **Sweden** in refugee reception in response to increased number of applications for asylum in 2015. The immediate involvement of civil society ensured practical assistance to people arriving to the city from Denmark. Concurrently, they also sought to address matters in a long-term perspective by engaging in integration facilitation through, for example, the provision of language training. The main challenge to the independent involvement of civil society actors in Sweden are linked to available funding and the relationship between the government and civil society organizations working with integration.

In the case of **Greece**, as examined by Karzi, Theodoridis and Tselepi, NGOs have also played a crucial role in developing assistance for education, housing and social integration of newcomers, and the national government is learning from the experience of civil society to develop a comprehensive integration policy. However, this process is just at the outset.

Teresa Buczkowska showcases that nongovernmental organizations in **Ireland** have been delivering a variety of tailored projects aimed directly at labor market integration of refugees ranging from assistance in preparing job applications to entrepreneurship courses for refugee and migrant women. She describes an initiative called 'Learning for Life for Refugees', a program initiated by the business sector that offers

training and work placement in the food and hospitality sectors.

The case of Antwerp, **Belgium**, discussed in this collection by Sanne van de Pol, highlights the importance of cooperation between civil society actors with other stakeholders, *inter alia*, public institutions and the academia, in developing an innovative social integration project called CURANT - an initiative that focuses on social integration of young adult refugees through cohousing. This multifaceted cooperation incorporates a truly integrated approach through experience and knowledge-sharing.

Imke Siefer's article focuses on temporary reception of unaccompanied minors in Berlin, **Germany**, detailing the experience of Malteser Werke gGmbH during the height of the so-called refugee crisis. While the emergency situation has simmered down, the experience gained during their operation of the temporary shelter was a learning experience for both activity planning on an institutional level and the coordination of cooperation with other actors.

Some countries had to essentially create a comprehensive asylum system from the ground up. This collection contains three such examples. The cases of Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania highlight the importance of policy and project innovation to ensure service provision at the earliest moment possible.

Bulgaria, as discussed by Iva Lazarova, scrapped its asylum policy in 2013. Since then, the country has not had a stable state-run integration program and no targeted integration measures for refugees are in place. In this void, projects designed by various NGOs highlight the potential of innovation also in situations where no official infrastructure policies exist.

Regarding the case of **Latvia**, I argue that while several innovative practices were introduced in response to the relocation process from Greece and Italy, the lack of medium and long-term policy planning led to a fragmented refugee integration policy and failed to ensure continuity. A clearer coordination

mechanism in cooperation with NGOs and a departure from 'projectization' of services might provide viable solutions.

Žibas and Blažyte provide a detailed description of refugee integration in **Lithuania** and highlight innovation on various levels of policy implementation, ranging from state to municipality to NGO/grass-root levels. The authors highlighted that the so-called refugee crisis provided an opportunity for many countries to strengthen their integration infrastructure and to create a more welcoming environment for all newcomers.

Regional and municipal solutions can take prevalence over national solutions, ensuring speedier policy planning. By analyzing the practices in two localities of **Italy** - Lucca and Catania - Samuk Caragnani and Fontana conclude that a lack of national coordination might lead to uneven implementation of main integration policy principles, such as two-way integration, as the capacities of local actors vary across the country.

Finally, the **Basque** case described by Tina Magazzini highlights how due to the fact that migrants in general, and, refugees in particular, often belong to the most vulnerable sectors of the host society, integration policies must be closely linked with inclusive welfare policies that can function as temporary safety nets. Thus, as Magazzini puts it, "practices [of solidarity] need not necessarily be aimed at the migrant population in order to benefit migrants". As a result, embracing the cross-sectoral interlinkages between policies can provide for more efficient and effective integration practices.

We hope that this collection of expert articles, describing a multitude of innovative approaches to assisting newcomers in Europe becomes useful for future policy and program development.¹

¹The articles were submitted in March 2018, therefore some legal and political changes that have taken place since may not be reflected in the analysis.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE INTEGRATION OF NEWLY ARRIVED REFUGEES IN SWEDEN

SAYAKA OSANAMI TÖRNGREN

KLARA ÖBERG

ERICA RIGHARD

Short overview of immigration history and coordination of reception and integration

Sweden was a country of emigration in the second half of 1800s up to the first decades of the 1900s. 1930 marked the first year Sweden recorded more people immigrating than emigrating, turning the country into a place for immigrating to. Swedish industry experienced a golden period and a labour force shortage in the early post-Second World War period, calling for labour migration mainly from other Nordic and European countries. Immigrants came to Sweden to work, until the oil crisis in the early 1970s. From the 1980s, the predominant categories of immigration became asylum seekers and those seeking family reunification. As the dominant category of migration shifted from labour migration to refugee migration, countries of origins have also shifted from within to outside of Europe (with an exception of asylum seekers from states that had been part of Yugoslavia). The number of asylum seekers arriving in Sweden has steadily grown since the 1980s. However, 2015 was a unique year in that Sweden experienced the arrival of an unparalleled number of asylum seekers and 162 877 people applied for asylum in Sweden.¹

In the mid-1980s, because of increased refugee and family reunification migration, there was a shift in how immigration and integration was organized. The Swedish Immigration Agency², a state authority, became responsible for the reception of immigrants including asylum seekers, while the integration of newly arrived and their families became the responsibility of local authorities, especially the municipalities where the refugees settled.³

The focus of the current Swedish integration policies is on areas of education and employment. The Government uses mainstreaming as a method to reach greater integration. This means that the overall integration goal should be realized by general measures, and be designed to benefit the whole population of Sweden. Integration policies should thus cover all areas of social development and be incorporated as part of all policy areas.⁴

Recognizing that refugees face specific barriers during their first years in Sweden, the government presented an introduction programme for the first time in 1992. This meant that municipalities could grant an introduction allowance for those following an Individual introduction plan agreed to with the local authority.⁵ Since 2010, the Swedish Public Employment Service has operated the programme that coordinates and manages the introduction programme for refugees and their families on a local level.⁶ The introduction programme includes courses in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) and employment related training, and lasts for 24 months with financial benefits. The role of the municipalities is crucial in the implementation of the introduction programme since they provide practical assistance such as housing, day-care and schooling for children and youth, income support, and other social services. Municipalities are also responsible for organizing courses in SFI and civic orientation to newly arrived refugees. Municipalities receive single payment compensation per refugee and per year from the state, which should cover the costs for SFI, civic orientation, interpreters, and special introductory activities within schools and preschools. Since March 2016, all municipalities are responsible

for refugee reception and a certain number of refugees are allocated to each municipality depending on the housing, job availability, and employment prospects.⁷

Until recently, integration efforts during the decision waiting period for asylum seekers has been weak. It became stronger in 2015, when the government introduced Swedish From Day One, so that asylum seekers could access Swedish language training. Swedish From Day One is organised by study associations, a form of civil society organizations working with non-formal adult education. Today, asylum seekers can access various activities for the purpose of integration organised by various civil society organizations through the governmentally funded Early Activities for Asylum Seekers which is coordinated by the County Administrative Boards.⁸

Role of civil society institutions: practices and challenges

Civil society's role in integration of newly arrived in Sweden

The role of civil society organisations in reception and integration activities for asylum seekers and newly arrived in Sweden must be understood in relation to the Swedish welfare state model and its political ideology. Sweden has, by tradition, a strong public sector which has taken on an extensive social responsibility and provided its citizens with welfare services. The reception and integration of asylum seekers and newly arrived has been the responsibility of the national, regional and local public authorities. While civil society organisations in Sweden have been strong and engaged in recreational activities such as culture, sports, politics, they have been less engaged in the production of social services which were taken care of by the state.⁹ However, this has been changing. The governmental policy on integration identified civil society as an actor that should participate in the introduction and integration programmes.¹⁰ Moreover, the government also adopted a policy in 2010 explicitly aiming at engaging civil society organizations

in the production of social services.¹¹ More recently, an agreement between the state, civil society organisations and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions was also established¹² that further identifies civil society as an important actor in the integration efforts. These developments entail a growing emphasis on the engagement of civil society in social service production through dialogues and agreements with relevant public organisations.

The Swedish government bill for a new policy on civil society¹³ says that civil society is different from the state as well as private households and interests – it is people and groups that act out of common interests. Civil society organisations in Sweden, however, are dependent on the state, as they receive funding through the state on a national, region and local level.¹⁴ A strong civil society can be argued to be crucial for a strong democracy but the intensified relationship between the state and civil society in the 1990s can also be understood as a technique of state governance. As Dahlstedt argues, the individual carries a moral responsibility towards the society.¹⁵ The question of civil society's dependency on and independence from the public authorities is thus far from new, and it is specifically a crucial issue in the field of integration and of production of social services.¹⁶

When the government increasingly provides different financial incentives for civil society organizations to become involved in the reception and integration activities for asylum seekers and refugees, we also need to ask about the transformation of the forms of governance. We also need to know how this affects who carries the responsibility for social integration and social services in society. So far, civil society's involvement mainly is targeted towards asylum seekers and those who have received residency permits but are still living in reception centres and waiting for their relocation into a municipality, where previously the publicly provided integration services were not sufficient. Early Activities for Asylum Seekers is one such example in which the County Administrative Boards are expected to promote collaboration between public institutions, civil society

organizations and other relevant actors on the regional level. This state funding aims at engaging civil society organizations in activities promoting knowledge of Swedish language and society, labour market integration, and health.¹⁷ Another arena of involvement is connected to leisure time and adult education activities, which civil society has a long tradition of providing support for.

Responses by the civil society during the “refugee crisis” 2015

2015 became a significant year when civil society's involvement regarding not only reception but also integration of asylum seekers and refugees became more intensive. According to the government official report on what happened in the fall of 2015, civil society's engagement can be broadly categorized in two types of activities. The first was to give immediate help, such as support and assistance to those asylum seekers that arrived at train stations and ferry terminals. Offering clothes, food, drinks and medicines and arranging transportation and transit accommodation were the main tasks. For example, in Malmö, civil society organizations stepped in to assist in the immediate and acute reception situations. When thousands of refugees in need of food, health care, hygiene products, mobile phones and a place to sleep, arrived at the Malmö central station, civil society's involvement was at a historically unprecedented high.¹⁸ The second type of engagement was in facilitating integration. These efforts were made through organizing language training and study groups in different subjects, and can be seen as part of an introduction to Swedish society. Related to this second type of engagement, the government provided grants to civil society organizations for them to be able to ensure these services. For example, the Swedish National Council of Adult Education received funding in the fall of 2015 to provide language courses to asylum seekers and newly arrived living in transit accommodation, and the Swedish Red Cross received funding to strengthen the support for people in flight. The government also revised the budget and gave approximately 20 million euros to civil society organizations to strengthen their support work for asylum seekers and newly

arrived refugees.¹⁹ These were distributed to different organizations on national and local levels.²⁰

It took two to six weeks before government authorities found routes to help the efforts of municipalities. During the absence of public assistance, civil society organizations played an urgent bridging role as they complemented the authorities' work. The official government report identifies that a functioning collaboration between municipalities and civil society organizations prior to 2015 was of crucial importance during the crisis. One problem that the government official report highlights was that there was a gap between the authorities' capacity to provide the right information and people's need to get the right information. Although there were knowledgeable lawyers, other legal advisers, doctors and other occupational groups that made voluntary efforts and provided adequate and accurate information, many volunteers did not have sufficient and correct knowledge in all areas, which led to people getting different and sometimes incorrect information.²¹

Another issue was the responsibility for social service provision in Sweden. While this critical question was assessed, civil society organizations experienced a positive change in attitude by the government, both on a national and local level in terms of civil society's role and value in critical situations.²² Some organizations stressed that parts of the municipal sector began to consider collaboration with civil society actors in a more strategic and long-term manner. This has also affected the discourse regarding the strong social welfare state as the main provider of social service. Nationally established civil society organizations experienced that the collaboration during the reception crisis led government authorities to treat civil society organizations as more equal partners with the public sector. And, different forms of collaborative constellations were established and their views and opinions were sought and heard to a greater extent.²³

Future role and challenges of civil society in Sweden

The division of responsibility and roles between the public sector and civil society is complex. This issue and others were discussed with twelve representatives from ten different civil society organizations²⁴ involved in reception and integration support activities for asylum seekers and refugees in the Scania region, the southernmost part of Sweden where many asylum seekers arrived. The representatives confirmed that there is tension in relation to who provides social services and who is responsible for the organization of reception and integration activities. The participants were clear about the fact that the responsibility for providing integration efforts lies with the public sector, and the civil society organizations only have certain roles in the integration activities. The representatives argued that there is a need to push back the responsibility for specific social services towards the state, such as issues related to employment, welfare and the basic rights that should be equal for all citizens regardless of whether the person is an immigrant or a native.

The issue of responsibility and roles is directly connected to the organizational framework. As the state is allocating resources to civil society organizations, the role of the organizations is determined directly or indirectly through political decision-making.²⁵ Today there are several ways that civil society organizations can acquire funding such as project-based funding, commissioned funding, or partnership funding. Project-based funding requires organizations to produce results and achieve goals, and commissioned funding is based on the market bidding process, which places the civil society organization in a customer-executor relation with the state. On the other hand, partnership funding is built on an agreement between the civil society organization and the public sector, which deviates from the market mechanism.²⁶ One conclusion to be made from this is that the availability and type of funding is of high relevance for an efficient involvement of civil society.

For example, the direct linking of resources to specific needs might be inefficient due to local difference. Moreover, the representatives were critical of partnership funding when it does not result in a collaboration but only as an economic partnership.

Civil society representatives, thus, preferred a partnership funding model, while they were more critical about the project funding and commissioned funding systems. It was clear that the relationship between the public sector and civil society organizations should never be a dependent one based on customer-executor relations. Therefore, even though partnership funding was preferred, the representatives were very careful in observing that it is important to understand whether the funding leads to cooperation in service provision and a simple economic partnership or a collaboration between the civil society and the public sector.

Moreover, the representatives also stressed the importance of focusing on the high quality of the activities and support the civil society provides, because it is driven by ideology of an equal society, diversity and a will for integration on the first hand - not driven by economic incentives.

The challenges raised by civil society representatives reflect the differences between the public and the third sector's principles. For example, the representatives from civil society organizations stressed that they work with integration more comprehensively. While the public sector divides the responsibility towards integration in different areas such as housing, employment or language learning, there was a resistance among the representatives of civil society against dividing the subject of integration into different domains. They argued that by doing so the actions became inefficient and sometimes absurd, for example focusing on writing CV's while the newly arrived refugee primarily needed to resolve basic issues with housing. The representatives focused on how they work with integration as a whole and focus on the well-being of the individuals, providing a more targeted approach.

It was also very clear that civil society organizations find it important to maintain their flexibility and their own voice, which can sometimes be a cause for tension in their relationship with the public sector. The different organizational nature allows civil society organizations to be flexible whereas the public organizational structures are perceived as "slow" and putting obstacles in providing efficient support to refugees. This perception of different methods of working is not only negative. There are also aspects of this heterogeneity that stand in direct relation to guarding civil society's political voice, freedom at operational level, and not being dependent on the public sector. Thus, although low speed on the public sector's part is not in itself something positive, there are certain benefits related to the perception of these distinctive characteristics that could be related to the maintenance of the identity of the civil society.

Conclusion

As the role of the civil society organizations in the integration efforts are identified on the policy level, and as the governmental funding for organizations to get involved increases, the traditional roles the two sectors have had are being negotiated. The maintenance of the two sectors' principles is crucial in sustaining the traditional role of the welfare state and civil society organizations in working with refugee integration in Sweden. As discussed earlier, the question of civil society's dependency on and independence from the public authorities is far from new, and increased governmental funding does not automatically lead to more dependency. The state's acknowledgment of civil society as an equal actor in integration efforts should not always imply that the state and the civil society have similar political goals and values. It is important that the public sector has the correct knowledge of the civil society organizations' voices and what they stand for. Civil society organizations should maintain a role that is independent from any state political perspectives. This paradox is of value and allows civil society to have flexible organization structures. This

flexibility is one of the important aspects of promoting civil society's involvement in working with refugee integration. For the public sector to understand the civil society's independent role, it is crucial that an open and constant dialogue between the public sector and the civil society is kept, as it is identified in the government official report (SOU 2016:13).²⁷ New forms of economic partnership and the state funding of civil society, such as the partnership funding seem to be in direct relation to this. As mentioned earlier, it is important that this funding leads to cooperation across different sectors, and not a simple economic partnership where the results will be measured by the state organizations' values and where the civil society merely becomes an implementing actor within state management.

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²⁴ The meeting was organized on the 27th of February, as the second coalition meeting for the EU AMIF project, NIEM (National Integration Evaluation Mechanism). Participants represented the following organizations: Ibn Rushd studieförbund, Malmö ideella, Mångkulturellt center Helsingborg, NÄTVERKET, Refugee Welcome Housing Sweden, Rädda Barnen, Röda Korset, RådRum/HUT-Skåne, Sensus Studieförbund, Svenska kyrkan

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BEST INTEGRATION PRACTICES IN GREECE

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& THE RESEARCHERS TEAM OF 'ANTIGONE'

Greece, located in an ideal geographical position, has since the 1980s been a transit country.¹ At first, it was used as an entry point for Eastern Europeans, Middle Easterners and Africans into the European Union (EU). In the 1990s, Greece experienced economic development which attracted a large number of migrants in pursuit of better living and employment conditions.² Most migrants arriving in Greece were mainly from Central and Eastern Europe. New legislation regulating the entry and stay of third-country nationals was adopted (Law 1975/1991³) and subsequently amended a number of times.⁴ After 2007, irregular migrants and asylum seekers started entering Greece via the Aegean Sea and briefly through the Greek-Turkish border. Asian and Africans viewed Greece as the ideal entry into the European Union.⁵

Following the outbreak of war in Syria, the subsequent closure of EU borders, and, up until the EU-Turkey Agreement (March 2016), Greece experienced for the first time a large surge of migrant and asylum seekers.⁶ In 2014, Greece adopted new legislation which codified the laws on migration and provisions for the integration of third-country nationals (Law 4251/2016⁷). During 2015 and 2016, 817,175 people crossed the Greek-Turkish border, 410 drowned and 176 were considered missing according to UNHCR official data.⁸ The unofficial number of refugees who arrived in Greece is estimated at 1 million people.⁹ This

population initially headed for Piraeus and then crossed the country towards the border between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and the passage of Idomeni. Upon the closure of the border and the EU-Turkey agreement in March 2016, some 60,000 refugees were trapped in Greece. As a result of the EU-Turkey deal, Refugee inflows in 2016 were recorded to have declined according to the data of the General Secretariat for Media and Communication.¹⁰

Though most asylum seekers and migrants entered Greece with the objective of moving on to other mainland EU countries, the situation did not allow for a direct transition and many were 'stranded' in Greece for an indefinite period. Thus, it soon became evident that Greece could no longer see itself as a transit country. It had to start adopting measures and policies that would help with the integration of refugees and asylum seekers into Greek society. In the main body of the text, a number of important practices concerning the integration of refugees and asylum seekers are discussed, concerning the fields of education, housing, and social integration. Examining these practices, it is evident that the activities of NGOs play a crucial role in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

Efforts for migrant and refugee integration

Best practices for education

As we saw earlier, one of the main challenges the Greek State has been facing is the integration of all those recently arrived refugees and other migrants into Greek society. To this end, high priority has been given to actions aiming at ensuring access to education for refugee and migrant children (whose parents are third country nationals, irrespective of their legal status).¹¹ The integration of migrants into the education system has been functional in primary and secondary education, yet legal migrants face difficulties entering tertiary education. Below we can see practices carried out by the State and practices by various NGOs.

It should, however, be mentioned that, according to Article 9 PD 220/2007,¹² minor children of applicants and children seeking international protection, have access to the education system under conditions similar to those of Greek nationals, as long as there is no pending enforceable removal measure against them or their parents.

Reception/Preparatory classes at public schools:

One of the most important policies to be promoted for education of refugees and asylum seekers concerns the introduction of preparatory classes. A special educational programme targeting these children was launched in October 2016.¹³ It concerns the establishment and operation of "Reception/Preparatory Classes for the Education of Refugees" (DYEP) in certain public schools (during afternoon hours) in the mainland of Greece,¹⁴ in areas that are accessible from the various official refugee sites. These classes are part of the mandatory formal educational system (primary and lower secondary education), and are operated by teachers selected from the list of "substitute teachers" of public schools appointed by the Ministry of Education; and are geared towards refugee and migrant children (aged 6-15 years) who live in the official refugee sites.¹⁵

The educational programme aims to facilitate the integration of refugee and migrant children into the educational process in a way that will gradually allow them to join mainstream classes in Greek schools. Implementation of the programme's first year entailed a weekly educational session of twenty hours covering four main subjects: Greek, Mathematics, English and Information Technology. Arts and sporting activities were also included. It is estimated that, in the school year 2016/17, 2,643 children joined 145 afternoon classes in 111 public schools.¹⁶ The financial resources used were secured mainly from the European Asylum, Immigration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the funding of which amounts to €7 million for the period 2016-2018 (75% EU contribution and 25% national contribution).¹⁷ The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) also secured funding (€2.8 million) from the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian

Aid Operations (DG ECHO) for the transportation of children between the accommodation sites and the schools.

Apart from providing access to education for children located in the camps, refugee and migrant children who live in apartments or other premises in urban areas, were allowed to attend morning “Reception Classes”, which are part of the formal educational system and are for pupils with limited knowledge of the Greek language. Such classes have been in operation in certain public-school units since 2010 and are located in areas characterised as Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP).¹⁸ According to the Ministry of Education, approximately 2,000 refugee and migrant children attended such morning “Reception Classes” in the 2016/17 school year.

The implementation of the educational programme (DYEP) followed a slow pace, especially in the initial phase. This could be justified by the very short preparation period for the hosting schools and the lack of proper official information to the local communities.¹⁹ Moreover, a number of shortcomings of this programme were identified by the recent official assessment report of the programme (Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, 2017).²⁰ These include: absence of afternoon Reception/Preparatory Classes on the islands (which implies that refugee and migrant children living on islands did not have access to any formal educational activities), lack of cooperation (in both administrative and educational terms) between the school and the Reception/Preparatory Classes, insufficient numbers of teachers with relevant experience and appropriate skills, non-regular attendance of many pupils along with the fact that many dropped out of school (mainly due to change in their residency and/or difficulties with the Greek language). In addition, there has been a significant lack of provision of pre-school education, upper secondary education and vocational training. Nonetheless, the project is considered an important step in the right direction and constitutes a foundation on which many improvements can be made.

NGO practices:

NGOs have always played an important role in the education of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These actions include: Greek language courses for adults.²¹ Since September 2010, the NGO “METAdrasi” has been active, either through the implementation of ERF projects, or voluntarily, in teaching Greek as a foreign language to asylum seekers and refugees. This activity differs from the usual language teaching methods since it has been specifically designed for the needs of the target group: the courses are intensive and adjusted to the language particularities/abilities of the participants, as well as to their subsistence and integration needs.

The main aim of the courses is to achieve fluency in oral communication for beginners (mostly in order to facilitate access to the labor market) in a short period of time, and to certify proficiency in Greek through the appropriate University exams at an advanced level. This action is implemented in cooperation with the Modern Greek Language Teaching Centre of the University of Athens (an institution with significant experience in the Teaching of Modern Greek as a Foreign Language). The cooperating professors, the methodology and the teaching material all come from this particular University Department.

“Stepping Stone” Educational Integration Programme:²² “Stepping Stone” is an innovative programme, initiated by METAdrasi in May 2017, aiming at facilitating the integration of refugees and migrants through educational activities and paid internships. METAdrasi supports the beneficiaries’ efforts by evaluating them, strengthening their skills, and preparing them to find employment, through practical placement experience.

The project offers: Intensive Greek language courses, counselling and support with legal issues related to employment, a curricula to strengthen social skills, support workshops with a mentoring approach to professional ethics and CV preparation, technical vocational training (for example, sewing and cooking seminars), and computer courses.

In the first 7 months of the Stepping Stone project, 75 beneficiaries have participated, of whom more than 19 people have already started their practical placement and two of them were granted degree scholarships.

Best practices for housing

During the second semester of 2015, as Greece was facing large-scale arrivals of refugees, shortcomings concerning the housing of refugees and asylum-seekers became increasingly apparent.²³ What is more, the imposition of border restrictions and the subsequent closure of the Western Balkan route in March 2016, which left about 50,000 third-country nationals stranded in Greece, created *inter alia* an unprecedented burden on the Greek reception system. Parallel to the official reception system managed by the National Centre for Social Solidarity (Εθνικό Κέντρο Κοινωνικής Αλληλεγγύης, ΕΚΚΑ), a number of temporary camps have been built on the mainland in order to tackle the dire need for accommodation.²⁴ However, only “few sites meet humanitarian standards as basic needs and essential services are not always delivered”.²⁵ Given that the camps were set up for temporary accommodation, a more permanent solution for the housing of refugees and asylum seekers had to be introduced so as to allow for their gradual integration. Below are the most promising practices.

The UNHCR “ESTIA” project

The UNHCR, in collaboration with an alliance of organizations, introduced the ‘Emergency Support to Integration & Accommodation’ (ESTIA).²⁶ This is a programme to help refugees and their families rent urban accommodation and provide them with cash assistance in Greece. This marks a change from previous humanitarian projects which mainly provided support for accommodation in camps and gave direct supplies. The European Commission on 27 July 2017 announced a new wave of emergency support projects worth €209 million (including ESTIA) to help refugees in Greece.²⁷

The ESTIA programme has a budget of €151 million and has two major components. The first is rental accommodation for

up to 30,000 people. The €93.5 million project under the “ESTIA” programme set up a large-scale rental project to improve living conditions of refugees by providing 22,000 urban accommodation places. It increased the number of refugees living in rented apartments in Greece up to 30,000 by the end of 2017. Some 2,000 rented accommodation places were to be located on the Greek islands, with the bulk of apartments rented in cities and towns on mainland Greece and local landowners receiving a stable and reliable income for these apartments. A number of municipalities in Greece are also formally part of this project. The programme also provides cash assistance. A further €57.6 million project under the ESTIA programme set up a basic social safety net for all asylum seekers and refugees in Greece by providing them with pre-defined monthly cash allocations through a dedicated card. It aims to enable refugees to meet their basic needs in a dignified manner. The allocations are consistent across the country,²⁸ and pegged to the Greek emergency social safety net, as well as based on the refugees’ family size. Using this card, refugees can fulfil their basic needs such as food, medicine and public transportation. At the same time, this assistance is re-injected into the local economy, family shops and service providers.

Therefore, as we see the accommodation scheme provides rented housing to vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece. Urban accommodation also provides better access to services, including education and health. People are additionally supported by social workers and interpreters who help them access medical services, employment, language courses and recreational activities. In total, since November 2015, 43,798 individuals have benefited from the accommodation scheme.²⁹ In January 2018, 39,233 eligible refugees and asylum-seekers (17,903 households) received cash assistance in 94 locations Greece. In total, since April 2017, 58,725 eligible individuals are estimated to have received cash assistance in Greece at least once.³⁰ Cash assistance restores dignity and empowers asylum-seekers and refugees who can now choose how to cover their basic needs. Cash assistance also contributes directly to the economy of the host community through the purchase of ser-

vices and goods. The UNHCR in Greece works with the Greece Cash Alliance partners - The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Samaritan's Purse, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and Mercy Corps.

Best practices for social integration

Social integration has never been a strong point of Greek integration policy.³¹ With the exception of Albanian nationals, who probably constitute more than half of all migrants in Greece and first came to the country after the fall of state socialism in Southeast Europe, the rest of the country's migrants - including migrants from Asia and Africa - are systematically excluded from Greek society. The same holds true for refugees.

Many volunteer and social organisations are making an effort to help and provide actual solidarity to immigrants and political refugees by teaching them the Greek language.³² Apart from teaching the Greek language, these initiatives are generally aiming at the legal support of immigrants, their integration into Greek society and the development of personal relationships between nationals and non-nationals. Below is an indicative list of actions.

The Greek Forum of Refugees created an online platform, that provides information for every refugee and migrant who needs to come into contact with organisations, that offer all kinds of social benefits. That can be achieved with direct access to these organisations through the online information platform, which is displayed in a special category on the site of the Greek Forum of Refugees in the Social Services category.³³ The basic services/benefit categories that make up the backbone of the programme include Greek language lessons. There is a database of 40 NGOs, volunteer organisations, social organisations and universities which provide lessons either free of charge or paid. Information on those was gathered in April-June 2016.

As mentioned earlier, since September 2010, METAdrasi has also been active, either through the implementation of ERF

projects, or voluntarily, in teaching Greek as a foreign language to asylum seekers and refugees. According to METAdrasi, this activity differs from the usual language teaching methods since it has been specifically designed for the needs of the target group: the courses are intensive and adjusted to the language particularities/abilities of the participants, as well as to their subsistence and integration needs.

The "Sunday School for Migrants" (Κυριακάτικο Σχολείο Μεταναστών) is an initiative organised by Greeks and migrants which provides Greek language courses for migrants, targeting migrant integration.³⁴ Every Sunday, and on a voluntary basis, Greek language courses are offered in the premises of an elementary school.

The Open School for Migrants is an association that operates in the 14th high school of Piraeus and was established in 2005 by teachers. The aim of the Open School is to "promote the cultural and social development of migrants and refugees"³⁵, by offering Greek language courses, providing legal support, assistance in cases of racist violence and bringing migrants and Greeks into contact with each other. The volunteers of Kypseli "GEFYRES" and the Social Center "Steki Metanaston" in Thessaloniki are also active in providing Greek language courses. ARSIS - Association for the Social Support of Youth implements the project "Organizing the supporting network for social integration and empowerment of minor refugees and their families in the Thessaloniki area" in collaboration with ASB (Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund), funded by the German Federal Foreign Ministry.³⁶ The implementation period was from 1st February 2017 to 31st May 2018 and the project aimed at organizing supporting activities for refugee children, youth and their families through the operation of a Youth Support Centre (YSC), Thessaloniki. The Youth Support Centre (YSC) is an existing structure of ARSIS that adopts a holistic approach in the child protection sector.

The interaction between refugees and the Greek society is a two-way process, essential for both their effective integration

into society and for public awareness regarding issues that concern refugees. Working in this direction, the Greek Refugee Council's approach to integration is guided by the principle of multiculturalism that advocates the maintenance of a balance between the development of activities aimed at facilitating refugee integration in the local cultural context and a simultaneous encouragement to highlight their own culture and share it with Greek society, by respectively developing the principles of mutual respect and an understanding of diversity. During the past ten years, the Intercultural Centre "PYXIS" has been working in this direction, developing various reinforcing activities of consultative, educational and cultural nature.³⁷

PYXIS' activities are mainly aimed at refugee children by helping them to cope with the demands of Greek schools, so as to not prematurely discontinue their education. It constitutes a place where their talents are cultivated, their knowledge horizons are broadened and solid foundations for their future are established. The centre provides children with, among others, music lessons, extra language classes, and sports and cultural events, according to their needs and interests. At the same time, it encourages the involvement of the local community by employing not only the existing structures but also the population's solidarity and help and thus creating an important network of support with individuals and local institutions, a network that provides essential support to refugees.

Conclusion

The present essay displays only a limited number of good practices aimed at improving the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece. These practices are indicative and should not be interpreted as a sign of inactivity. In fact, the NIEM Project³⁸ has shown that NGOs in Greece are highly active and carry out a number of very effective projects. The State has been struggling to catch up, yet during the past years it has presented a heightened interest in addressing integration issues and actively cooperates with NGOs, by try-

ing to draw from their experiences. National coalition meetings held within the NIEM Project's framework have been crucial in not only identifying best practices but also in pin-pointing the areas that are in need of further action. Even though Greece has legislation in place which provides for access to various fields such as education, health, employment and vocational training, there are still restrictions in practice that need to be overcome through policy measures. Greece also has to overcome systemic discrimination issues and has to promote a dialogue between the local population and the State in an effort to combat racism. What is more, little attention has been provided to a very crucial part of refugee integration which is empowerment of the refugee community itself. Integration in Greece is far from complete, yet the right foundations exist and the only thing needed is further cohesive and defined action and cooperation between civil society and the state.

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¹⁴ In relation to asylum seekers on the islands, education is provided either in the camps or at nearby schools, as explained later in the paper.

¹⁵ *Refugee Education Project, op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁶ *ESPN Flash Report 2017/67, op. cit.* According to the Refugee Education Project: “The number of refugee children was recorded in May 2016 as part of the findings of the Scientific Committee. In 40 accommodation centers housing 36,890 refugees across the country, it turned out that minors (0-18 years old) made up 37% of the total population (13,677 individuals). According to the record, 4-15 year-old children (for whom compulsory education is intended as preschool and school education) numbered approximately 8,000- 8,500. UNHCR data on Refugees confirm that around 37% of the incoming aliens (January-August 2016) were minors.”, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Refugee Education Project, op. cit.*, p. 37-64.

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³⁸ Find more information on NIEM at <http://www.forintegration.eu/>.

LEARNING FOR LIFE FOR REFUGEES: THE BUSINESS SECTOR INVOLVEMENT IN LABOUR INTEGRATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN IRELAND

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Migration dynamics and policies in Ireland: An Overview

Ireland traditionally has been a country of emigration, experiencing patterns of departure of people since the Great Famine. The causes of Irish emigration can be found in the social and economic history of Ireland that was marked by cycles of economic depressions, unemployment, struggle for independence, and militant violence. However, since the mid-1990s the Irish economy entered a period of rapid economic growth and expanding labour market. That period was referred to as the 'Celtic Tiger'. New economic opportunities and the vibrant labour market prompted not only return migration but also stimulated immigration. 1996² was the first year that Ireland registered a higher number of inward migrants than emigrants. It is widely regarded that Ireland became a country of immigration that year. Since the mid-1990s, the number of asylum application also rapidly increased. In 1996 1,179 new asylum applications were received by the Irish state, and that number tripled the next year to 3,883 new applications. The number of new applications steadily grew each year and reached a peak in 2002, when the Irish state received 11,634 new applications for asylum. The next year the number

dropped to 7,483 and kept gradually dropping to 2,244 in 2017. Despite the increased asylum applications during the Celtic Tiger era, refugees are not a new phenomenon in Ireland. Since ratification of the UN Convention on Status of Refugees in 1956, Ireland has accepted programme refugees from Hungary (1956), Chile (1973), Vietnam (1979), Iran (1985), and Bosnia (1991). Until the mid-1980s, Ireland had isolated cases of spontaneous refugees who were managed on an individual basis, as no state policy was in place to deal with this matter. Until 1991, the care for refugees was delegated to voluntary, and usually religious groups as the state's approach to it was that refugees should not be a burden on the state³. It was also from the mid-1990s that the Irish state created a legal framework for managing the asylum process. The Refugee Act 1996 (implemented in 2000), in some regards, was a progressive piece of legislation that extended the definition of refugee to include prosecution based on gender or sexual identity. However, it did not grant asylum seekers the right to work. This decision had a profound effect not only on the quality of life of people awaiting decision on their asylum application, but also on the future integration prospects and employability of people after they have received their refugee status.

In April 2001⁴, the Irish Government established a new statutory body, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), to provide a single operational structure for coordinating the implementation of reception and integration of asylum seekers. However, the integration mandate was never exercised by the RIA, and in 2007 that function was assigned to the Integration Unit at the newly created office of the Minister for Integration. The office of the Minister for Integration was later abolished, and the functions were assigned to the new unit in the Department of Justice, the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI). However, it was not until March 2017 that the first National Migrant Integration Strategy⁵ was announced. Ireland has always favoured a mainstream approach to integration⁶, therefore integration of refugees has been included in the wider framework of the new migrant integration strategy.

Asylum in Ireland: Practices and challenges

The status of asylum seekers is regarded as peculiar and temporary because of the possibility that they may get a negative decision to their application for asylum, and subsequently depart from the state. For that reason, providing for the integration needs of a group that has only temporary permission to remain in Ireland has not been regarded as 'appropriate'. Temporary permission to remain in the state can be extended by years of waiting for a decision, effectively leaving the group living in a limbo. Currently the average time that a person awaits a decision on their application is 22 months, but the process can take anywhere between 9 months and 10 years. The Irish asylum application process does not offer a single procedure to simultaneously assess the claim for international protection under the Geneva Convention, and the subsidiary protection on humanitarian grounds. Therefore the process is lengthy, creating a backlog of cases.

While the application for asylum is being processed the applicant is accommodated in the so called Direct Provision (DP) system that was established in 2001. The RIA describes it as "a means of meeting the basic needs of food and shelter for asylum seekers directly while their claims for refugee status are being processed"⁷. This system provides bed space in a shared accommodation, and 3 meals per day. Asylum seekers also receive a weekly cash allowance of €21.60 per adult and per child. People seeking asylum in Ireland have access to public education up to the secondary level, and, under very limited condition, they may access scholarship for tertiary education⁸. Vocational training is not available for asylum seekers, limited access to English language and IT training may be possible, but it's not a standard rule. According to the monthly reports at the end of January 2018, there were 34 Direct Provision centres, accommodating 5,182 people.⁹

Since its inception, the Direct Provision system has received significant criticism from civil society¹⁰, academics¹¹, and the

media¹² who have documented the damaging effect of the system on people's well-being, family life, child development, health, and integration prospects of asylum seekers and refugees. "People living in these centres, which were originally set up as short-term solutions, find themselves in these institutional settings for up to several years and face conditions which have been described as dehumanising and sub-standard".¹³

Access to employment

Access to labour market is an issue that has received particular interest, and a few reports¹⁴ were produced to document the lived experience of people transitioning from DP to independent living, and trying to integrate within the labour market. The mainstream approach to refugee integration and the institutionalisation of the reception of asylum seekers have been identified as some of the key barriers to refugees in accessing the labour market. The lengthy time spent in the DP system creates a career gap that very often is detrimental for people who seek to enter the labour market after receiving their status as a refugee. The lack of access to vocational training and inability to gain Irish work experience results in chronic unemployment amongst refugees. It was also documented that the long periods of inactivity in the institution of Direct Provision harms people's mental well-being, making them lose confidence and trust in their own abilities. People also reported that after exiting the institutional living where their daily schedule was decided for them, they find difficulty in organising their lives independently. They lack basic skills in finding accommodation, paying for bills, and applying for jobs.

In addition to the so called soft obstacles, there was also a legal barrier for asylum seekers to enter the labour market. Only in February 2018 the Supreme Court declared the ban on work for asylum seekers unconstitutional. The decision was a result of a legal challenge by an asylum seeker from Burma who spent eight years in the Direct Provision system. He argued that the ban was denying his human dignity and resulted in mental distress and

depression. In February 2018 interim measures were introduced ahead of Ireland's plans to sign the EU Refugee Reception Directive. Despite a campaign led by Irish NGO's for full and instant access to the labour market, the interim measures set many restrictions and subsequently the new legal framework was deemed insufficient and disappointing by the campaigners¹⁵. Currently asylum seekers can enter the labour market through the general work permit scheme. However, the scheme has a list of ineligible types of employment, requires a high level of salary and has high administrative costs. Therefore, in practice, this option is virtually inaccessible for most asylum seekers. The other option to access the labour market is through a self-employment scheme. However this scheme does not offer security of employment and puts people in a precarious position. For these reasons it has been argued that the new scheme has no real improvement on the current situation.

In face of these challenges and the lack of state supported labour integration programmes in Ireland, other actors have emerged as key players in this field. Civil society organisations have been delivering a variety of tailored projects that support labour integration of refugees. *Business in the Community Ireland* has been delivering their EPIC programme since 2014. EPIC is an employment programme for migrants and refugees that builds trainees' skills in CV writing and interviewing, and the trainees also learn about Irish society and political system. New Communities Partnership rolled out a similar project in 2016, and the Migrant Rights Centre started an entrepreneurship course for refugee and migrant women. The funding sector also responded to the issue of refugee integration by introducing new funding streams in this area, for example, by private foundations like the Community Foundation for Ireland, and the St. Stephen's Green Trust, as well as via the use of public funds.

The business sector has also become engaged in the issue of asylum seekers and refugee integration. In 2016 a social enterprise emerged that gave asylum seekers a chance to gain experience in the food service industry¹⁶. A campaigner for rights

of asylum seekers, and a chef, Ellie Kisyombe, opened a pop up café in Dublin. The initiative was financially supported by an Irish celebrity chef and a restaurant owner who met Ellie when she was campaigning for the rights for asylum seekers to cook their own food. Upon hearing Ellie's story who, as a mother living in the Direct Provision, was unable to cook a single meal for her child and herself for eight years, the two entrepreneurs set up the pop up café to test their idea. At that time asylum seekers had no right to work, so all staff worked in the café on a voluntary basis. In exchange they learned about food preparation, health and safety, and customer service. The aim of this social enterprise was to address the issue of employment and training gap for asylum seekers. Despite it being a great success, the café closed down after 3 months due to temporary accommodation arrangements. The café reopened in February for another short period on the grounds of the Dublin's Christ Church Cathedral.

The 'Learning for Life for Refugees' programme: Road to employment

The 'Learning for Life for Refugees' programme is another labour integration initiative not only supported, but initiated by the business sector. A large multinational company, Diageo, which works in the food and hospitality sector, rolled out an internship programme for asylum seekers. The programme offers training and work placement in the food and hospitality sector. This is an offspring of a similar programme that was introduced in Ireland in 2014¹⁷, to support access to employment for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The programme offers an intensive 8 weeks of training in hospitality, food service, health and safety, and other skills essential for this sector. Participants also learn basic information about the Irish tourism sector for example: what are the most popular tourist attractions in Ireland and what are their histories. Trainees also receive training in transferable skills like self-presentation and job searching. After the training, each trainee is placed in a hotel, bar, or a restaurant for a 12 week work placement. The

'Learning for Life' for young people had very good final results. 80% of graduates of the programme secured employment, either at their work placement or at another establishment. The 'Learning for Life' programme is part of Diageo's Corporate Social Responsibility Programme and is designed to transform the lives of people in the different communities in which Diageo conducts business. The 'Learning for Life for Refugees' is just a continuation of the original course but with a different target group. The new scheme has also been enhanced by introducing a mentoring programme for the participants. Each of the participants is paired with a Diageo employee, and the volunteers are drawn from across all levels of the company. The aim of the mentoring initiative is to support the participants in the new environment, and to assist them with advice on issues that may be new to them. Given the high level of social isolation that the asylum seekers experience, they may lack in the social capital that is needed to successfully complete the scheme. The lack of familiarity with the Irish work environment, and the lack of confidence has been repeatedly reported as an issue, and it may be addressed by the mentoring scheme. The mentors received an introductory training in intercultural communication and mentoring skills to help them be successful in their roles.

The 'Learning for Life for Refugees' is a pilot to see if this scheme is suitable for both parties, the business partner and the refugees. If successful, it will be the first large scale labour integration programme for asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland. The importance of this scheme is significant, as it addresses the 'soft' obstacles to labour integration. Tackling the so called 'soft' obstacles in labour integration is as important as introducing an efficient legal framework allowing access to work. This scheme addresses most of the 'soft' obstacles that asylum seekers and refugees experience when trying to enter the labour market, namely: prolonged career break, access to vocational training, Irish work experience, social isolation and lack of social networks. The scheme has a good level of sustainability because there is always a need for food and hospitality staff. Diageo is also well connected within the sector,

and has a well-established and wide network of associated businesses, so there is no issue with finding partners for work placement. Therefore, there was also no need to build a new platform because already existing resources and contacts have been offered to facilitate labour integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland.

This scheme however has certain limitations, too. The particular characteristic of the food and hospitality sector requires participants to work at premises where alcohol is handled, and Irish practices of socialising may differ from standards accepted in other culture circles. Therefore, access to this scheme may be limited for some people for cultural and religious reasons. Additionally, the scheme is mostly available to people living in the Greater Dublin Area, and, given limited financial resources, paying for a public transport is just not an option. This scheme may be expanded to other locations in Ireland later. Nevertheless, this will always be set in bigger urban areas whereas most of the Direct Provision centres are located in small towns or rural areas. Therefore, transport will be always an issue. Lastly, the scheme offers training in manual and the so called low-skill areas of the labour market. This may be an issue for people who will experience a significant deskilling and underemployment, if they were to participate in the scheme. The psychological implications of de-skilling and underemployment have been highlighted in other reports¹⁸, and this is a factor that may play a role for some people for deciding against participation in the scheme. However, social isolation and prolonged gap in employment may be considered as more damaging to peoples' mental wellbeing, so people may be willing to work below their qualification just to escape their situation.

The way forward

Ireland is an interesting case when it comes to diversity, immigration, and integration. This is a state that was elevated from the position of being a sending country to a receiving country within a period of less than 20 years. Irish society holds one

of the most positive attitudes to immigration in Europe¹⁹, and responses in Ireland to the recent refugee emergency were positive and uplifting. In September 2015 hundreds of people went to the streets of Dublin to protest the insufficiency of their reception quota for refugee relocation²⁰. Under that pressure the Government increased their pledge to relocate 4,000 refugees instead of the apportioned 400. The Irish Naval Service saved 8,592²¹ people in the Mediterranean despite the fact that they were never formally part of the EU rescue mission²². At the same time the state is slow in responding to the changing situation with appropriate legislation, policies and practice. Up to now the effort of the state seems to be focused on introducing measures that restrict directly (legal framework) or indirectly (Direct Provision system) integration of asylum seekers and refugees with Irish society. Ireland is a country that favours a mainstream approach to integration, and access to labour market was a contested issue.

In light of this, new actors from the charity sector entered the area to fill in the gaps in the current system, by providing training and funding opportunities. The business sector also reacted by extending existing opportunities to asylum seekers and refugees. The 'Learning for Life for Refugees' has a potential to become a best practice model that could be rolled out to other sectors. Sectors occupying more professional areas of the labour market could build their own schemes to bridge the skills and experience of asylum seekers and the refugees with Irish standards. That would create more diverse opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees to match their skills and qualifications with appropriate level of employment. The 'Learning for Life for Refugees' was developed mostly by Diageo because they had already a template that they could build on. However, the particular target group required them to partner with a civil society organisation that provided insight into the issue of intercultural communication and integration. The Immigrant Council of Ireland, who provided the intercultural training, is also well positioned to document and analyse the scheme, and to build a potential labour integration model for refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland. Thus, the way forward is to empow-

er and engage non-governmental partners to ensure a more comprehensive and effective integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

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SOCIAL ORIENTATION IN BELGIUM AND THE CURANT PROJECT IN THE CITY OF ANTWERP

SANNE VAN DE POL

This contribution starts by giving a concise overview of Belgian integration policy with a focus on social orientation. In this policy, newcomers are invited to follow courses on living in Belgian society. In the different regions in Belgium, these policies were started at different times. It is interesting to learn how these policies developed, but large innovations need to be sought elsewhere. The large influx of refugees of the recent years has forced cities to welcome them in rising numbers and posed challenges for social orientation providers. Antwerp, the city we focus on here, has replied by hiring extra teachers and translators to provide social orientation classes in the native tongue of participants. In 2015, they foresaw a growth in participants in social orientation with a refugee background and 1500 extra places were prepared.¹ The percentage of refugees in social orientation rose from 17% in 2015² to 38,5% in 2016³. Alongside social orientation however, another innovative project has been started for this particular group of newcomers, CURANT. In the CURANT project, young refugees live together with local residents in order to facilitate their integration in Antwerp.

Newcomer inclusion in Belgium through social orientation

Immigration and integration matters in the federal state of Belgium are dealt with on multiple levels, and there are several federal institutions dealing with immigration and asylum.

Reception of claimants for international protection is arranged on the federal level by Fedasil, the Federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers and the Federal Immigration Service administers visa and residence permits. Matters related to integration are regulated on the regional level. Because of this, integration policy in Belgium is, although highly developed, very fragmented. Policies in (Dutch-speaking) Flanders, (French-speaking) Wallonia and (bilingual) Brussels differ from one another. Belgium, in its entirety has more than 11 million inhabitants, of whom 6,5 million live in Flanders. Wallonia has more than 3,6 million inhabitants and Brussels is home to more than 1,1 million people.⁴ Moreover, the German speaking community in the East of Belgium, which has about 77,000 inhabitants also has its own integration policy.⁵ This contribution is dedicated to explaining the highly developed field of newcomer inclusion through social orientation in Belgium. Social orientation encompasses courses, modules and other initiatives in which newcomers are taught basic civic knowledge of the host society. The content of social orientation can differ although most programmes focus on living and working in the host country, peoples' rights and duties, and teaching the norms and values of the host country. Social orientation was first in place in Flanders, but has recently also been installed in Walloon policies and in the German speaking community.

In Flanders, social orientation is a component of a wider civic integration policy (inburgering), which is part of a wider integration policy. Civic integration policy has 5 components: social orientation (MO), Dutch language classes (NT2), counselling towards work, personal general counselling during the process, and the obligation to show personal results.⁶ In Flanders, courses are obligatory for certain newcomers. The list of exceptions is very long and detailed but, put very simply, one can say that third country nationals need to comply with civic integration demands whereas European citizens are exempt.⁷ They can voluntarily participate. Since 29 February 2016, beneficiaries are obliged to obtain certain results whereas, before, participating in the courses was enough to comply. This asks for a stronger commitment from beneficiaries and certificates

are no longer distributed as easily. The current policy is governed by the Decree on Flemish Integration and Civic Integration, adopted in 2013.⁸ This was followed by the Implementing Decision in 2016.⁹ In Flanders, there is no impact on one's residence status and rights in case of non-compliance. However, in the process of acquiring Belgian nationality, Flemish civic integration certificates are taken into account as proof of societal integration. In case of non-compliance, beneficiaries receive an administrative fine.

In Wallonia, a comparable policy was implemented in 2016 and finds its basis in the Decree of 28 April 2016 of the Walloon Social Action and Health Code¹⁰ and the Order of the Walloon Government of 8 December 2016.¹¹ The programme is compulsory and divided into two phases. First, there is a personal welcome module: a free and individual social assessment. The purpose of the welcome module is to determine the individual's personal and professional programme, provision of information on rights and obligations in Belgium, and guidance on social and administrative aspects, depending on the needs identified. Secondly, an agreement is signed between the newcomer and the regional integration centre and assures new migrants of the following free services: minimally 120 hours of language training (*français langue étrangère* or FLE), social and professional guidance (minimally 4 hours), and citizenship training (minimally 20 hours).¹² The programme is tailored to each individual and provides guidance in line with the identified needs (language, work, accommodation, family, health, leisure etc.). Certain newcomers are obliged to participate in the civic integration programme and others can voluntarily choose to do so. Generally speaking, third country nationals are obliged to participate, and European citizens can voluntarily participate. As in Flanders, there are many exceptions to this (general) rule. This agreement lasts at most 18 months and the regional integration centre (CRI) is in charge of monitoring and assessment. When it comes to non-compliance, sanctions can apply, but there is no impact on residence status and rights. When acquiring the Belgian nationality, the value of the Walloon certificates is still rather unclear. In December 2017, the minister

announced that the programme would receive a higher budget in order to increase the number of beneficiaries. Moreover, the courses would intensify by increasing the number of hours of the French and civic orientation courses.¹³

In Brussels, non-nationals are allowed to choose between the Flemish and Walloon integration trajectory although participation is not obligatory. This way, non-nationals choose a focus on either Dutch or French-speaking integration. This can be a very important choice for them, since the language and structure of the integration trajectories are different. Flemish government documents mention the intent to develop obligatory civic integration in Brussels, e.g. in the Flemish Horizontal Integration Policy Plan 2016-2019.¹⁴ The goal is to agree upon this in the years to come.

In the German speaking community, an integration trajectory (*integrationsparcours*) is in place as of January 2018. Its legal basis lies in the *Dekret über Integration und das Zusammenleben in Vielfalt*, which was adopted on the 11th of December 2017. The policy entails a first private conversation in which the needs and the goals of the beneficiary are assessed. Based on this, an agreement is drafted. Through language courses (90-600 hours), beneficiaries are supposed to reach language level A2. The integration course takes 60 hours and informs the beneficiaries about their rights, duties, the educational and tax system, and shares practical advice for daily life in order to fuel the independence of newcomers. In further individual conversations, newcomers are informed on themes like education, work, sports and culture. At the end of the trajectory, a certificate is distributed after attending all individual meetings and at least 80% of the language and social orientation courses.

Innovation in Antwerp: CURANT

Since social orientation policy is already highly developed and well known in the different policy domains in Belgium, the focus now shifts to a new innovative form of integration focusing

on young refugees in particular. This programme takes place in Antwerp, Flanders. Some of the refugees in Antwerp participate in the civic integration programme as provided by the public agency Atlas Antwerpen but in the case of several young refugees, there is more to their integration trajectory. A number of young refugees participate in the recently started CURANT project and are surrounded more intensively by many organisations and coaches. The innovativeness of this project deserves further (academic) attention.

Towards the end of 2016, several stakeholder organisations in Antwerp started an innovative project involving cohousing of young adult refugees. In short, young adult refugees are matched with young locals and they share their housing facilities for 1.5 years and are simultaneously surrounded by several supporting organisations (partnership described below). In total, between 75 and 135 refugees are expected to participate in the project. In what follows, information is provided concerning the innovative aspects, the functioning of the project, and the outcomes.

The central question in the CURANT project is: 'How can we stimulate the inclusion of unaccompanied young adult refugees in society?' It is a social policy intervention that combines individualised guidance, cohabitation with a local flatmate, training, and therapy with the aim of supporting social integration. The reason for the project is as follows: "When these minors become adults, they are no longer able to benefit from subsidised shelter, enrolment in reception classes, customised trainings, and support from a legal guardian. By definition, this vulnerable group of young adults is unqualified, is not engaged in education, employment or training, and this situation can develop into protracted dependence on social welfare."¹⁵

The project started in November 2016 and is expected to run for two years. It is mainly financed (80% or €4,894,303.32) by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) of the European Commission. The remaining budget (20%) was covered by the consortium partners, listed below.¹⁶

Innovation

This project is innovative in multiple ways. Firstly, it involves close cooperation between stakeholder organisations that normally do not cooperate this extensively. The leading organisation of this project is OCMW Antwerp (a public centre of social welfare). They are joined by the NGO *Jes VZW* (a youth-oriented outreach and urban lab), Atlas Inburgering en Integratie (a public institution training and counselling newcomers), Vormingplus Antwerpen (NGO, adult education and volunteer support), Solentra (NGO diagnostic and therapeutic support for migrant and refugee children and families) and the Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies (CeMIS) at the University of Antwerp. This combination of public organisations, NGOs and an academic institution, combining their extensive expertise and jointly committing to the integration of young adult refugees is unique. They aim at providing a holistic intervention. Secondly, the project is innovative because it goes further than current policies in Belgium. Importantly however, it did not start from scratch nor operate in a vacuum. It is embedded in existing policies, expertise and networks on the federal (Belgian), regional (Flemish) and local (Antwerp) level with regard to newcomers and refugees.¹⁷ All stakeholders use their knowledge and experience to provide an integrated approach, whereas normally this approach is more fragmented. Working on different life domains simultaneously (social networks, education, wellbeing etc.) is considered to be a requirement to solve the existing problems that are caused by fragmentation of support.¹⁸ Thirdly, the focus on young adults shows the preventive nature of CURANT. Its goal is to protect participants from the social problems that might otherwise come their way. There is a strong belief that young adults will benefit the most from such intervention.¹⁹ Fourthly, another innovative characteristic is the deliberate inclusion of local flatmates who live with the young adult refugees. Both of them receive support during the project and they are closely followed. All too often, the receiving society is left aside in integration policy and CURANT has clearly demonstrated the ambition to overcome this common bias by matching locals and refugees in their housing units.

The functioning of the project

The target group of this project consists of unaccompanied minors with a refugee status or subsidiary protection status who are about to become adults, or who have done so recently. They are aged between 18 (or turning 18 within 3 months) and 21.²⁰ They are also referred to as young adult refugees. Their position in Belgian society is vulnerable in three ways. Their status as a refugee, their young age, and the fact that they lose the special care and support they were entitled to as a minor makes their situation very precarious.²¹ They often face problems in finding adequate housing. Substandard housing for very high monthly rent prices is no exception. Especially (young) refugees are particularly vulnerable to discrimination on the private housing market due to having a foreign name and appearance, and a low proficiency in Dutch. Moreover, these young adults have very limited opportunities to meet Dutch-speaking locals.²² Their social networks are mainly made up of intra-ethnic or inter-ethnic contacts they meet through living in a local reception centre, education for newcomers or language classes.²³ CURANT wishes to overcome these obstacles to their integration in the host country.

There are no exact numbers on young adult refugees but in 2015, Belgium experienced a peak with a total of 3,099 unaccompanied minors, in 2016 there were 1,076. Most of them come from Afghanistan. Logically, a number of these minors reach adulthood in Belgium.

These young adult refugees are carefully selected for the CURANT project²⁴ and paired with local residents between 20 and 30 years old²⁵. They can either live in 2-bedroom apartments where refugee and local share a kitchen, living room and bathroom or in a house or apartment where more than one couple will cohabitate and share common areas or in a site with 25 modular units built from scratch.²⁶ OCMW Antwerpen has purchased, constructed, rented and renovated these locations. In total, there are 75 housing units where refugees and locals can live at a reduced rate of 335 euros

per month, per person. The cohabitation does not affect the refugee's or flatmate's welfare benefits and taxes. Normally, this would not be the case.²⁷

The programme foresees different interventions, focusing on the young adult refugees, the local flatmates and the stakeholder organisations. Here the interventions regarding the refugees and the locals are discussed. Most interventions target the young adult refugees. They meet with a social worker on a weekly basis in their own home to follow up on administrative and practical matters and to coordinate their individualised learning and training trajectory.²⁸ They follow various forms of training and learning: a 10-day training trajectory in group sessions and thematic training sessions. Furthermore, they are guided towards regular services such as further education and work services. A continuum of care is ensured such that even after CURANT, the refugee is taken care of. Also, psychological care is provided to help the clients cope with the psychological strains they might have. The last two interventions are shelter, having decent affordable housing for 12 to 18 months and cohabitation, living together with others.²⁹ Interventions focusing on the flatmates entail cohabitation with a young refugee. The shared living space would offer a durable setting for regular, informal and meaningful social interaction. They also receive training before they actually move in. Lastly, there is a structure for peer support, though feedback activities and guided peer learning among the flat mates.³⁰

Possible outcomes

The first pairs started their cohabitation in May 2017. Today, about 40 duos participate. The numbers are slightly lower than expected because the influx of refugees has diminished.³¹ The first official intermediary evaluation is to be published in the first half of 2018.

However, the expected results have been reported in the evaluation and literature study. For the refugees, short-term outcomes to be expected are, firstly, individual empowerment on

multiple levels. Empowerment can take many forms: forming a clearer picture of their life in Belgium (mainly work and study), feeling more welcome, improving their Dutch skills, preparation for independent living and knowing where to turn to for assistance. Secondly, the social network of the refugee is supposed to grow both in numbers and diversity (especially locals). Lastly, participation in society through volunteer work, leisure activities work and study should grow. Flatmates are expected to develop their social skills, especially their intercultural competences and are expected to connect more easily with other newcomers in the future.³² For the stakeholder organisations, other outcomes have been predicted such as more suitable organizational policies for young unaccompanied refugees and durable cooperation across institutions.³³ Other effects are changing perceptions regarding refugees among the family and social network of local flatmates and increased integration of refugee family members in the receiving society. If family members are reunited, family members might benefit from the networks of the young adult refugee. Long-term outcomes are increased structural integration of refugees, more social cohesion and the development and implementation of more appropriate public policies for young adult refugees.³⁴

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²⁴ Participating in CURANT <https://www.antwerpen.be/nl/overzicht/cohousing-curant-1/jonge-nieuwkomers-aanmelden> 6 March 2018

²⁵ Becoming a buddy <https://www.antwerpen.be/nl/overzicht/cohousing-curant-1/word-buddy> 6 March 2018

²⁶ Mahieu and Ravn. 2017. Cohousing and case management for unaccompanied young adult refugees in Antwerp (CURANT), p. 50.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 6.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 14.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 16.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 16.

³¹ De Standaard, 'Zitten er plots tien Afrikanen in de keuken' 20 February, 2018.

³² Mahieu and Ravn. 2017. Cohousing and case management for unaccompanied young adult refugees in Antwerp (CURANT), p. 29.

³³ Ibid, p. 30.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 31.

ACCOMMODATION AND INCLUSION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS: AN EXAMPLE FROM BERLIN

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Looking back to summer 2015, images of crowds standing in train stations welcoming newly arriving refugees and the immense commitment of (voluntary) supporters in emergency shelters all over Germany come to one's mind. Not least because of Chancellor Merkel's sentence "Wir schaffen das"² – which quickly was spread all over the world as a synonym for the, at that point, great helpfulness in Germany.³ In only two years, this image had shifted. Germany's political openness towards refugees had changed, initiatives noticed a decrease in volunteers and the right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)⁴ increased in popularity.

When discussing the current dynamics of immigration, it is important to look at developments after World War II to understand that Germany's recent history of immigration. Immigration attributable to the labor agreement from 1955-1975 and the corresponding family reunions mostly until 1985. Later many people sought asylum in the late 80s and early 90s. There were also emigrants from 1987-1999 and EU citizens moving to Germany because of freedom of movement. Recently, the number of asylum seekers has again increased due to war, political tensions and persecution in the Middle East and countries of the global south.⁵ As of today, 17.1 million people in Germany have a migration background, 16.7% of this group come from Turkey, making it the largest group of immigrants in the country.⁶

Article 16a of the German Constitution give people who are politically persecuted in their home countries an individual and fundamental right to asylum in Germany. The asylum procedure is carried out by the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Federal Agency of Migration and Refugees, BAMF). According to the *Königsteiner Schlüssel*, the *Länder* are responsible for providing accommodation and social support for asylum seekers. Official numbers show that in 2015 441,899 asylum applications were submitted, in 2016 722,370, and between January and October 2017 167,573 asylum applications were submitted in Germany.⁸

This article focuses on unaccompanied minors living in a temporary reception shelter run by the Malteser Werke gGmbH in Berlin and describes the dynamics, integration developments, and lessons learnt in Berlin during the so-called refugee crisis in 2015/2016. It is based on personal experiences. It should be noted that Berlin faced specific procedural difficulties, which are not representative of the entire country. Especially the Regional Office for Health and Social Affairs Berlin (LAGE-So) gained a bad reputation and became an example of how refugee administration should not be performed. Obsolete management structures, unfilled positions and overstrained authorities, poor crisis management in the beginning, and long-term stays in emergency shelters are just a few examples of challenges of that time.

Unaccompanied minors in Germany

In 2015, there were 42,309 unaccompanied minors in Germany. In 2016, especially in the first quarter of the year, there were slightly more and a total of 44,935 unaccompanied minors was counted.⁹ Since 2015, unaccompanied minors are distributed according to *Königsteiner Schlüssel*. Prior to 2015, they had to be accommodated at the place of arrival. Since Berlin is a city-state, the quota of asylum seekers seems relatively small. However, Berlin has a small territory and a rather stressed (social) housing market. The numbers of registered

unaccompanied minors in Berlin were as follows: 4,252 (2015), 1,381 (2016), 481 (until August 2017).¹⁰

Due to numerous changes in the Asylum Law, in Nov. of 2015, the legal age to ask for asylum was raised from 16 to 18 years.¹¹ Thus, having an official guardian was needed in order to move on with the asylum process. However, there was only a limited number of official guardians in Berlin, and they could not sufficiently cover the high numbers of unaccompanied minors. As a result, the number of organizations that educated and qualified voluntary legal guardians increased. Interested people could apply; they were then interviewed and trained before the family court officially assigned him or her as a voluntary legal guardian for an unaccompanied minor. This was a great chance for the unaccompanied minors to move on in their processes, but also partly included challenges as the voluntary legal guardians were mostly not experts. Many unaccompanied minors arriving in 2015/2016 could not be assigned to a legal guardian for a long period and thus valuable time regarding the asylum- and integration process was lost.

According to the §42 *Sozialgesetzbuch VIII* (Code of Social Law) a foreign minor in Germany needs to be taken into custody by the youth welfare office when no legal guardian lives within the national territory¹². Normally, there are special reception facilities for such cases. However, because there were so many unaccompanied minors arriving daily in summer/fall 2015, the *Land* had to act in order to prevent this vulnerable group from becoming homeless in Berlin. Welfare organizations and youth welfare institutions were approached and asked whether they have the capacity to develop and extend their concepts for accommodating unaccompanied minors on short notice. Former Youth Hostels, public properties and conference facilities were rented and, quickly, the Malteser, like many other organizations, offered immediate help for numerous needy people in this emergency situation on behalf of the *Land*.¹³ The Malteser opened a temporary reception shelter in Berlin in October 2015, providing room for 34 unaccompanied male minors aged 14-18. Within two years, more than

150 unaccompanied minors from over 30 countries lived in the reception shelter. The duration of stay varied from one day to 13 months. Most came, according to own statements, from Syria, Afghanistan and Lebanon but also from Eritrea or Somalia, Gambia, Mali or Guinea¹⁴. In 2015/2016 up to 50 temporary reception shelters of different sizes were established for unaccompanied minors all over Berlin, and they were key to handling the influx of minors.¹⁵

A glimpse from the shelter

After arrival and completion of a short admission procedure, the main focus in the shelter was set on the child's welfare and the need of the young refugees to come to rest, and to slowly build new confidence and strength in their unknown surroundings. Pedagogical concepts that focused on the specific needs of the target group were designed. Most of the unaccompanied minors had fled from civil war, terror or the lack of opportunity in their home country. The long duration of flight, paired with possibly having lost family members, and losing their childhood too early leads to the fact that unaccompanied minors are heavily burdened. They often need to process and handle multiple traumatic experiences. The socio-pedagogical experts provided support with 'life organization' upon arrival, and help in a variety of topics such as access to health care, accompaniment to appointments with authorities or counselling centres, and, if needed, a shoulder to cry on.

The duration of stay in temporary shelters should have been no longer than three months and within this time, the appointment for age-assessment¹⁶ should have taken place. A *positive* age-assessment (being under 18 years) meant to move on to youth welfare homes and to undergo the so-called *clearing process*. Because there wasn't sufficient housing in youth welfare institutions for unaccompanied minors and because of the extreme overload for the political- and administrative authorities in Berlin, some minors stayed in temporary shelters for more than a year. Because of these slow processes, the state

responded, and pedagogical concepts of several temporary reception shelters were reviewed and extended in order to offer the highly demanded *clearing process* for unaccompanied minors. The clearing process was performed by socio-pedagogical experts (a special ambulatory clearing team) and included e.g. a short recording of the child's story, medical check-ups, clarification of educational needs, clarification of adequate housing possibilities, police registration and registration at the foreigner's registration office.¹⁷

The pedagogical and interdisciplinary team in the shelter worked day and night, 365 days of the year. Connections to caregivers were developed over time, and especially caregivers with a migration background (e.g. Arabic-, Farsi- or French speaking) were highly valuable for the minors because of their expert knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and language skills.

Cooperation and linkages to social space as a stimulus for inclusion

As the name *temporary shelter* indicates, it was not intended that the young refugees stay for a long time. The financial support by the *Land* for organizations running temporary shelters, therefore, was small. Staff quickly realized that the most important time for young refugees to maintain their, often, high motivation for achieving goals in the new environment and integrating into society are the first few months after arrival. Those are the months where young people are least frustrated about the slow administrative progress.

Large financial (and material) donations were needed in order to afford activities and goods that were not paid for by the *Land*. Donations were used for recruiting a German teacher, as finding a place in school was highly difficult in 2015/2016. With the private teacher, the long wait for the placement could be used in a meaningful way: German courses were offered according to different levels. Some even had the chance to learn to read and write, and, so, gained the necessary self-esteem

before eventually entering a school. Language can be considered as a major catalyst for integration. The teacher in the shelter not only focused on language skills but also provided information on culture, politics and society. Thus, it can be best understood as a well-adjusted integration course that considered the requirements at stake and the situation at hand.

For Malteser institutions, integrating young people into local projects and activities as quickly and smoothly as possible is highly relevant. Hence, the network of cooperation partners expands constantly. During the so-called refugee crisis, numerous welcome initiatives were established all over Germany. Also, the different districts in Berlin established a variety of support networks. Local networks and the Integration Office from the District Authority were a great help in accessing local initiatives. An educational centre was close to the shelter and it offered comic workshops, art projects, political education and information about state and society for youth. Cooperation with the *Gemüse Ackerdemie* (vegetable academy) was also established. It was possible to grow vegetables at the shelter and the skills of personal responsibility were taught. Cooperation with soccer- and swim clubs was established, partly funded by the *Land*, and partly by donations. Additionally, regular city excursions were offered. Another promising strategy to motivate kids who preferred to stay at home to engage in activities was for the socio-pedagogical experts to incorporate them into hobbies. Weekly hip-hop classes and boulder climbing were offered by team-members and open for participation for friends or young people from the neighbourhood.

Another cooperation was with the charitable limited company *PluralArts International*. It is an organization that encourages mutual understanding between people of different origins and social classes. The director and his team visited numerous shelters and schools to promote the development of a musical-project with both refugee and local kids participating. The main idea was to integrate young people through effective participation. Participation is considered to be the best when concepts and solutions are developed *together*, with input from

all parties involved. Over the time period of only 7 months, the *Welcome Voices: hoch hinaus* (flying high) musical was developed with 150 participants from a variety of backgrounds. Because of the regular rehearsals, friendships throughout different age groups and nationalities were established and eventually the musical was performed in Berlin, Hamburg and Leipzig in front of excited audiences.

Challenges

The biggest challenges the pedagogues faced were related to false expectations by the unaccompanied minors about the life in Germany, and the political and cultural/situational challenges. The housing situation in Berlin was an omnipresent challenge, being a catalyst for frustration on all levels. The constant bureaucratic and administrative barriers and lacking a self-determined life might seem inconceivable for people not involved in refugee aid at that time.

Political level

The lengthy political decision-making process created many challenges. Most of the unaccompanied minors hoped to reunify with their families as soon as possible. However, the family reunification process is on hold and closed for asylum seekers with subsidiary protection since early 2016. Moreover, a limit for family reunifications in the future currently is being discussed.¹⁸ The lack of standardized procedures and a high mistake ratio by authorities regarding documents and registration for asylum seekers made certain situations for the young refugees unbearable. The authorities constantly passed responsibility from one institution to another and many administrative procedures were not consistent nationwide and therefore caused lots of confusion. The above-described increased engagement of *voluntary* official guardians was needed and meaningful. However, to immediately create sufficient job openings for *official* legal guardians by the *Land* in a short process would have been a solution. Consequently, a larger number of official legal guardians could have supported more unaccompanied minors.

The transition time from temporary shelters to adequate youth welfare homes has eased but was difficult in 2015/2016. Increasing the capacity of social housing is not a quick process but needs to be approached as efficiently as possible now. The access to school was an immense challenge in 2015/2016. Schools and teachers were not prepared which often led to excessive demands and contact persons for the shelter often changed. The support and the possibility for the authority to make quick decisions was missing. The country is in need of more projects that motivate refugees to be part of society and encourage them to take part in language courses, education, vocational trainings, and work.

Nevertheless, as a result of the challenging times in 2015, work groups were established in the city. The aim was to regularly exchange experiences with other youth welfare institutions working in the same field and to give feedback to representatives of the Land in order to improve processes and situations.

Cultural - Situational

Cultural differences and clashes within the group are natural when living together in a small place in adverse conditions for an uncertain time period. Different characters, different backgrounds, different experiences, the lack of perspectives as well as being sad, homesick or simply unhappy about the food in the shelter are just a few examples that triggered heated situations. Drug or alcohol abuse, self-harming behaviours, aggression or other behaviours occasionally were the result of desperate situations and hopelessness. The team had to be prepared for a variety of situations and to be aware of mechanisms that had to be followed. Mediation, direct connections to specialized doctors and the local police as well as a working complaint management system were crucial to finding quick solutions.

Regular group meetings and the possibility for the young refugees to submit wishes or complaints anonymously were tools to develop and stabilize a good atmosphere within the group.

For the Malteser it was important to train all team members according to the needs at stake and, therefore, compulsory trainings regarding cultural sensitivity, closeness and distance, de-escalation, sexual prevention, and handling traumatized minors were offered. Regular team-supervision is another key-factor for a good atmosphere within the group in a sensitive working environment.

The young refugees were often in a generally weak psychological state. This was normally observed after the first months in the shelter. They feared turning 18, as this might entail deportation or being sent to emergency shelters for adults, with far worse conditions and even less comfort. Provision of psychological support is an immense problem as in big German cities there is a significant shortage of medical specialists, psychologists and therapists.

General

A general problem is the shortage of specialists in this field. Social workers and educators are rare but highly needed and required for working in youth welfare services, due to their specific education. A high level of stress, shift work and relatively low wages make these jobs rather unattractive. Because of the low ratio of staff in temporary reception shelters, employees work under difficult conditions. More appreciation from the society for the important job of social workers is generally desired.

Lessons learnt

During the two years of operating the temporary shelter, the Malteser were able to gain a valuable overview of the precise needs of this vulnerable group. It was a unique and meaningful time: solutions and progress constantly had to be reviewed and reflected on to optimize processes and follow the needs of the young refugees. It is difficult to compare the experience of this policy crisis with developments in immigration to Germany prior to 2015. It is important for youth welfare institutions

to think outside the box. It is important to network with other institutions and to constantly know about the landscape of opportunities in the shelter's surroundings.

It pays off to constantly ask the authorities for progress regarding individual cases and to fight for schooling and vocational training, even if legal barriers might make it appear less promising. It is important to advocate for what is in the child's best interest and well-being. There are personal defeats, emotional situations, lack of patience, and feelings of doubt about the system but every caregiver needs to be aware of the big impact they have on each child's life.

It is furthermore important to include the neighbourhood into activities/festivities from the shelter. Being transparent is a decisive factor for support by the neighbourhood. Young refugees from the shelter need to feel welcome in their temporary home. Possible prejudices need to be clarified from the beginning; being in active dialogue with society is essential.

A balanced composition of the pedagogical team is key to successful supervision of unaccompanied minors. Experience shows that a heterogeneous and culturally diverse team best meets the needs of the target group. The team members should complement each other. Ideally there are experienced colleagues as father/mother figures but also younger colleagues full of energy and drive. Colleagues with migration backgrounds are highly valuable assets.

Good experiences were also made with intentionally challenging traditional norms and behaviours. Stereotypical gender roles need to be broken down and gender equality has to be promoted from the beginning. The introductory phase for the unaccompanied minors is important and sets the base for their future. The investment of the government for access to education, housing, health care, family reunification etc. is crucial for successful integration. It needs to be understood as an investment into the future of Germany. Germany faces an immense lack of skilled workers, especially in craft trade.

These young refugees could be educated according to these precise needs – a win-win situation as the result. Migration and a diverse society have to be seen and treated as a chance and investing into the young generation is crucial for this process. Active participation, integration and tolerance need to be the goal and hate-speech and exclusion has to be banished.

Challenges in the integration of newcomers shall by no means be trivialized; it is a long way and needs to be worked on with all efforts. However, increasing populist propaganda, not only within the German society but also in the German *Bundestag* by the right-wing party AfD, cannot be tolerated and accepted. The intentional distribution of incorrect facts about migration and agitation is dangerous and needs to be strictly confronted by politicians and civil society.

Integration will remain a prominent topic as we have to engage in dialogue and develop a common future: (young) refugees as an equal part of society.

Brief outlook

A new German government recently was formed after months of coalition negotiations and the grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD continues to rule the country. The coalition agreement does not present a pleasant first-taste regarding the handling of unaccompanied minors in the future. The press release from the B-umF wraps it up nicely: unaccompanied minors are the “target group of intensifications”.¹⁹ The legal right of family reunification for people with a subsidiary protection status remains suspended and is currently only possible for families of recognized refugees. It is furthermore planned to no longer treat young refugees according to the primacy of the national youth welfare system. They shall be treated as adults and only after age-assessment those younger than 18 will be taken into custody by the local youth welfare authorities. According to the coalition agreement, *all* newly arriving asylum seekers shall be accommodated in so called AnKEr facilities²⁰. All nationa

authorities involved in the asylum process are to work hand-in-hand in those facilities. As a result, integration in society appears almost impossible. All this currently is part of intense public and political debates. The age-assessment for unaccompanied minors will also be performed in the AnKEr facility by the youth welfare office in cooperation with the BAMF. The formulation in the coalition agreement leaves room for interpretation but it can be concluded that access to the German youth welfare system and the connected individual support for integration will be made even more difficult.

References

- ¹ About the organization: Since 1989, people in need are in the focus of action for the Malteser Werke gGmbH, a charitable limited company with its German Head Quarters based in Cologne. The organization has operations sites all over Germany. The core services offered by the Malteser Werke gGmbH include refugee aid, integration services, youth welfare services, Schulträgerschaft, as well as social support and advice for drug-addicted people. Innovative solutions for emerging challenges are developed where no other measures seem to be progressive. As a catholic organization all humans, regardless their belief and ethnicity, are supported and considered equally. The work of the Malteser can be best understood as an investment for the future of individual humans, being part of society.
- ² Translation from German to English: ‚We will make it happen‘
- ³ Merkel, A. 2015. Sommerpressekonferenz von Merkel im Wortlaut. Bundesregierung.
- ⁴ Translation from German to English: ‚Alternative for Germany‘
- ⁵ Malteser Migrationsbericht. 2017. Fakten statt Stimmungslage. *Malteser Stiftung*: 10-18.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ The *Königsteiner Schlüssel* determines how many asylum seekers each *Land* has to accommodate. The number is specified according to tax revenues (2/3) and the total population (1/3) of each federal state. Each year, the precise number is newly defined (BAMF, 2018).
- ⁸ BAMF. 2017. Unbegleitete Minderjährige. Entwicklung des Zugangs.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Scheeres, S. 2017. Letzte temporäre Unterkunft für unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge leergezogen. Senat für Bildung, Jugend und Familie.
- ¹¹ B-umF. 2018. Bundesfachverband für unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge. Inobhutnahme.

¹² With the law for the improvement of accommodation, care and support of foreign children and youths, which came into force 01.11.2015, the regular custody process (§42 SGB VIII) was extended by a so called temporary custody process and the possibility of distribution according to a quota (§42 a-f SGB VIII) (B-umF. 2018. Bundesfachverband für unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge. Inobhutnahme).

¹³ Scheeres, S. 2017. Letzte temporäre Unterkunft für unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge leergezogen. Senat für Bildung, Jugend und Familie.

¹⁴ It was beyond the scope of the shelters mandate to check and verify documents and IDs (if existed). The data provided by the young asylum seekers at the initial shelter (Erstaufnahme) was adopted at the temporary shelter. The relevant immigration authority then verified the data at a later obligatory appointment.

¹⁵ Scheeres, S. 2017. Letzte temporäre Unterkunft für unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge leergezogen. Senat für Bildung, Jugend und Familie.

¹⁶ Age-assessment processes are controversial. If there is a dispute about the stated age of a minor, the youth welfare office undertakes a *qualifizierte Inaugenscheinnahme* in order to assess the age. The young refugee is questioned about family, previous school attendance, the escape route. An interpreter and employees of the youth welfare office participate in this conversation. At the end of the conversation it is decided if the previously stated age is correct. If in doubt, a medical assessment can be requested (e.g. x-ray of carpal bone). Numerous physicians state that from a medical point of view no clear age-assessment is possible, only an estimation of age. Furthermore, an x-ray without a medical indication is an intervention in the physical integrity.

¹⁷ Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft LJA (2014). Handlungsempfehlungen zum Umgang mit unbegleiteten minderjährigen Flüchtlingen.

¹⁸ Pro Asyl (2018). Familiennachzug. Retrieved 2 March 2018 from <https://www.proasyl.de/thema/familiennachzug/>.

¹⁹ B-umF. 2018b. Bundesfachverband für unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge. Koalitionsvertrag: unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge sind Zielgruppe von Verschärfungen (09.02.2018).

²⁰ Translation from German to English: Center for arrival, decision and return

REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN BULGARIA: THE HOT POTATO WHICH ONLY NGOS DARE TO TOUCH

IVA LAZAROVA

Integration is not simply a fundamental element of the refugee protection system. It is the asylum process endgame. It is the decisive moment when national authorities need to step up the efforts invested in the initial reception of refugees, and create conditions for them to become self-reliant and eventually able to contribute to the host society. Properly resourced and wisely-designed integration policies which favour social cohesion and economical productivity are thus a strategic tool to guarantee the interests of both displaced communities and their receiving country. The absence of a viable option for establishment of sustainable refugee livelihoods to a great extent renders all previous steps in the asylum process futile, creates danger of permanent dependence and marginalization, and in many cases encourages onward irregular movement.

European countries with developed refugee protection systems have placed integration high on their policy agendas and made significant investments in identifying and applying good practices which facilitate faster adjustment to the new environment. States with long history of inward migration have built upon what they have learned over decades and adapted it to the special needs of the forcibly displaced communities that arrived on the continent after 2013. The European Union itself has recognized integration of refugees as a priority area – an understanding manifested in the adoption in June 2016 of a comprehensive EU Action Plan on Integration, as well as in the allocation of additional funds for strengthening integra-

tion policies of Member States and numerous initiatives and partnerships to support this process.¹ All these measures have aimed to refocus the heated debate, sparked by the arrival of a record numbers of refugees, from a solely short-term costs and concerns approach, to a vision for a worthwhile investment in human capital with vast economic potential.

Bulgaria, the easternmost EU country with a record of massive emigration and little experience in reception of foreigners, including refugees, was not in position to join these progressive approaches. On the contrary, as soon as more asylum seekers started crossing the border with Turkey at the end of 2013, the modest refugee integration programme in place in the country was abruptly terminated. This cemented the transitional position of Bulgaria along the refugee routes towards Western Europe and condemned those remaining to risks of homelessness, unemployment, social isolation, and extreme poverty.

No state integration mechanism in place

Between 1 January 2013 and 31 March 2018, a total of 62 044 individuals have sought asylum in Bulgaria, with record years being 2015 (20 391) and 2016 (19 418). 2017 marked a dramatic decrease in those numbers, with 3700 applications. In the same 4-year period, 11 690 individuals were granted refugee status, and 6619 - subsidiary protection, which according to the Law on Asylum and Refugees is defined as a humanitarian status. The vast majority of beneficiaries left the country once they were issued ID documents. It is impossible to verify how many have decided to stay and integrate in Bulgaria. Data from municipalities, NGOs working in the field, and national schools put their numbers between 500 and 1000, with the overwhelming majority living in Sofia.

Bulgaria, which ratified the Geneva Convention and the New York Protocol in 1992, was one of the first countries in the region to introduce a state-led integration programme (in 2005) for beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs). Until 2013,

this mechanism was implemented by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) - the core institution responsible for reception and RSD procedure - and provided 1-year support for housing, healthcare, employment, and Bulgarian language courses. It facilitated refugees in addressing their administrative, financial and social challenges. The programme - with an annual budget of 300 000 leva (150 000 euros), was designed to benefit 100 individuals.² This good practice was suspended at the end of 2013, following that year's mass influx of asylum seekers.

Since its termination, the country in practice lacks a state-run integration programme and provides no targeted integration measures to refugees.

The impasse stems from a tangible lack of political will for the creation of a working integration mechanism, which results in a strategic vacuum, legal contradictions, and procedural nonsense. Refugees in the country fall victim to an understanding on the part of the government that no integration programme is needed, as none of the status holders wish to remain in Bulgaria. While this might be true in many cases, testimonies suggest that a decision for an onward movement is often driven by the lack of opportunities for basic survival in the country.³ It is a vicious circle that the authorities show no willingness to break. The reasons behind such policies (or absence thereof) are similar to those around Europe, but also have local dimensions. Bulgaria is projected to have the fastest-shrinking population in the world and has lost a fifth of it since 1990s - from almost 9 million to a little over 7 million now, and a projected 5,5 million by 2050. According to data from the last census, 8,8% of the population is ethnic Turks and another 4,9% (but probably more) Roma. These figures create a feeling of vulnerability for national politicians and many citizens, who fear Bulgarians will eventually disappear and that this will benefit other ethnicities. The government, now formed by central-right party GERB and the ultra-nationalist coalition United Patriots, introduced a number of measures to tackle low birth-rates, and encourage Bulgarians who live abroad to return, but does not regard immigration to be a solution to the dwindling population.

Furthermore, as with many other nations in the Balkans, centuries of Ottoman rule and the romanticized liberation struggles against it resulted in strong anti-Muslim feelings.

Among other important factors hampering integration ambitions are social issues, with locals often referring to the modest salaries and pensions, by far the lowest in the EU, and the vast spending on refugees. A crucial role, further, is played by the general distrust within society (and the political elite) that the authorities have the capacity to tackle the issue, with the term integration often referring to failed attempts to integrate Roma. Thus, according to recent survey, 84% of Bulgarians dislike refugees and believe they should not be allowed in the country.⁴

In these conditions, and upon the abrupt end of the existing Integration Programme in 2013, the creation of a new system became a reason for fierce political confrontation. The Council of Ministers was in practice forced to adopt an integration mechanism in light of the obligations of the country under the relocation scheme of the EU. After a three and half year legal vacuum, in August 2016, an Ordinance on the Terms and Conditions for Concluding, Implementing, and Terminating an Integration Agreement for Foreigners Granted Asylum or International Protection to regulate the process of integration was adopted, but was soon abolished, to be replaced with a new – much more restrictive version in July 2017.

The key obstacle to integration is the lack of a long-term vision on the part of the government regarding a strategy, goals, and means to achieve them. Bulgaria has a National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration 2015-2020, which is outdated and refers to the pre-2013 Programme. As of April 2018, the government is in the process of finalizing an Action Plan on Integration for implementation of the outdated Strategy, which – in its draft version, does not reflect the priorities outlined in the Strategy, and does not refer to the Ordinance on Integration. These three documents – The Strategy, Action Plan and Ordinance, have major discrepancies and differ significantly in content.⁵

The revised Ordinance – in force today, but never implemented – maintains the principle that integration and release of supporting funds is conditional on the conclusion of a contract between a refugee and a municipality. The participation of both parties is voluntary. The Ordinance does not provide for any targeted integration measures, but rather confirms the availability of mainstream support at par with Bulgarian citizens to which BIPs are formally entitled once granted protection.⁶ As a result, areas where targeted assistance for Bulgarian citizens is not obligatory – such as housing and Bulgarian language classes – remain unaddressed.⁷ Moreover, the Ordinance does not remove some of the legal and structural barriers BIPs face in accessing mainstream social support mechanisms, and as a result, refugees remain ineligible for family benefits⁸ and social housing.⁹

The effective implementation of the Ordinance still had not commenced 10 months after its adoption. This is mainly hindered by the unwillingness of municipalities to implement its stipulations for a combination of financial, practical, and political considerations.¹⁰ The implementation of the Ordinance is further hampered by the lack of a coordinating body in a position to address problematic issues and to facilitate the activities stipulated in the document. Although the new Ordinance assigns this role to a deputy prime minister with the support of the Council of Ministers' administration, a particular designated official has yet to be named.

In the absence of a defined policy approach on integration, implementation of integration activities within the National Programme of Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund remains ineffective, with the managing Ministry of Interior employs a piecemeal approach. The Calls for Proposals under the Integration Priority are issued without the context of a comprehensive strategic framework and, therefore, lack a clear sustainable outcome.

The result of all these factors is that, once they are granted protection, refugees face immense challenges after their removal from SAR reception centres.

According to the Law on Asylum and Refugees, they have 14 days to leave and identify their own housing. Finding appropriate private accommodation within this timeframe has proven to be impossible for most for a variety of reasons, most notably due to lack of finances and reluctance on the part of landlords to rent to refugees.¹¹ The difficulties in finding a permanent address prevents refugees from receiving ID documents, which hinders access to all other services and rights. No state institution has been awarded the responsibility for providing accredited Bulgarian language classes to refugees. Bulgarian language classes are provided only by NGOs and only in Sofia, with demand much larger than the available schedules. Access to the Bulgarian labour market has a multitude of obstacles such knowledge of the language, lack of skills or a mechanism to prove them, and a lack of information on available vacancies. Since 2015, the National Employment Agency has operated an annual Programme for Employment and Training of Refugees, which provides for subsidized employment and vocational training of refugees, but it has very slow implementation rates. Vocational training is provided only in Bulgarian, and upon proof of a certain educational level. There is no effective system for the official recognition of skills and qualifications of refugees. Refugees can apply for monthly social assistance with the Agency for Social Assistance. The amount varies depending on type and the vulnerability of the applicant and is determined on the basis of the guaranteed minimal income in the country, which from 1 January 2018 is 75 leva (38 euros) per month per adult. As mentioned, the applications for family benefits are routinely rejected, as the Directorate of Social Assistance interprets the Family Allowances Act restrictively. Refugees have access to health insurance, but, for many, the monthly fee (9.20 EUR per person/month) is prohibitively high. In the absence of these payments, many refugees end up uninsured and consequently deprived of affordable health care. The only area where significant progress was achieved is education, as simplified access to school for all asylum seeking and refugee children was guaranteed upon adoption of improved legislation in April 2017. The percentage of asylum-seeking and refugee children enrolled in schools had increased more than fivefold by the end of 2017.¹² Refugee

children have the right to additional Bulgarian language classes in school.

NGOs play a crucial role

Despite these obstacles, refugees repeatedly demonstrate the ability to be far more innovative than government policies, and many people have reached a point of economic and social integration despite the national and international policy climate. In a reality without state-led integration system, many of them found the necessary support in the non-governmental sector. The role of the latter proved crucial in fostering an environment conducive to local integration.

Caritas Sofia, funded mainly by the Catholic Relief Services, and Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC), funded by UNHCR, run integration centres where basic assistance is provided to refugees. Those two organizations have developed significant capacity over the years and their comprehensive approach in tackling refugee problems could be considered by far the best integration practice in Bulgaria. They provide a partial replacement for the missing state support. While Caritas Sofia and BRC are providers of a set of services, a recently founded innovative start-up enterprise 'Human in the Loop' tackles exclusively, but very successfully, the issue of employment, by providing jobs to refugees.

Caritas Sofia's integration centre for refugees and migrants 'St. Anna' represents the most extensive and elaborate service in support to status holders. A team of about 20 coordinators and social workers, including representatives of the refugee community who speak Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish and English, create, plan and implement a rich set of activities. The centre provides support in several important areas: housing, Bulgarian language courses, job matching, facilitation in access to healthcare and education; art classes for women; cash grants for the most vulnerable; aid for social and cultural adaptation through thematic events, concerts, excursions, festivals.

'St. Anna' opened in January 2017 in a strategic location, in the centre of Sofia, close to the only mosque in the city and close to a neighbourhood preferred for living and business by the Arab community.

Upon arrival in the centre, each person meets with a team of social workers, who conduct a detailed interview to learn his/her personal story and specific needs. A personal file with all relevant information is created, where all follow-up steps have to be registered.

Caritas Sofia is the only organization in Bulgaria which provides housing support, although on a small-scale. In 2017, the organization arranged accommodation for 20 families, while in 2018 - it is projected to support 17. A coordinator seeks out and vets potential landlords and brokers willing to rent to refugees, and the organization then covers costs for a period of six months. The data at the end of 2017 showed that upon completion of the programme about 60% of the beneficiaries managed to remain in the arranged housing units, by covering rent and bills on their own.

Caritas shared that they faced a dilemma in dividing resources between participants in the programme who are extremely vulnerable individuals in dire need of help, or individuals who have a greater chance for integration and building a sustainable livelihood. While in 2017, the programme prioritized the first group, in 2018 Caritas preferred to focus its activities on refugees 'willing to put efforts into their own welfare'.

Nevertheless, the organization provides emergency housing support for up to a week for homeless individuals (especially Dublin returnees).

Bulgarian language courses are organized in 5 groups, either A1 or A2 level, for children and adults, with flexible schedules, including evenings and weekends for employed students. In 2013, Caritas developed a textbook in Bulgarian for refugees, which was printed with UNHCR's support and is widely used. Its

content was used for the newly adopted National Programmes for Teaching Bulgarian as a Foreign Language, adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science in the end of 2017.

Employment is facilitated through professional support in developing CVs and liaising with a network of companies interested in hiring refugees. According to Caritas' statistics, 248 individuals were assisted in their search for jobs in 2017, with 100 eventually hired. The employment coordinators organise job fairs on a regular basis - for facilitation of direct contact between refugees and employers. CVs and profiles of interested individuals are usually shared in advance with participating companies, who might choose whom of the candidates to interview.

Furthermore, Caritas provides cash grants for a period of 1 to 3 months to individuals in transitional phase from SAR centers to private accommodation. Very limited emergency funding is available for covering specific needs (operations, medications, etc).

A unique service provided by the organisation is support to disabled refugees through cooperation with specialized centres, run by Caritas under unrelated projects for Bulgarian beneficiaries. In these services refugees could receive kinesiotherapy, psychological support, training, etc.

A very important part of Caritas' work organising social events, including thematic evenings, festivals, excursions and exhibitions. Each last Thursday of the month, Caritas invites all its 'friends', meaning staff, beneficiaries, partners from state institutions and NGOs for drinks. This welcoming environment has turned 'St. Anna' into a social centre, where refugees enjoy staying even without visiting a course or benefiting from specific support.

The Information-Integration centre (IIC) of the Bulgarian Red Cross provides some of the same services to 40 refugees per year. No available housing support means beneficiaries need to have own resources to cover rental costs in order to take part in the BRC integration programme support.

The IIC has a team of two social workers (a coordinator and an Arabic speaker). As of 2018, BRC organizes Bulgarian language courses (5 groups, including the only free B1-level course in the country), vocational training, facilitates and covers costs for legalization and translation of documents (education and qualification diplomas, certificates for marriage, etc.), pays health insurance for one year, provides transportation cards to those attending courses in the centre, arranges for tutoring of children enrolled in Bulgarian schools, and, in extreme cases, delivers direct emergency financial or in-kind support to vulnerable BIPs.

What is unique for the BRC project is its outreach to the receiving community: the integration social worker organizes 20 peer-to-peer meetings with students from universities or schools, including outside Sofia. The aim is to raise awareness among young people about the life and struggles of refugees, fight myths and prejudice, and foster a welcoming environment.

Considering the limited resources of the IIC, and its inability to cover rents, UNHCR and BRC are considering its further development into a training hub, which provides quality and high-standard courses in Bulgarian language (including for citizenship exams and driving license), vocational training based on expert research of local market needs and cultural orientation. BRC hopes to be able to mobilize a network of volunteers and mentors, who could turn the centre in a space for cultural exchange.

Digital social enterprise

Employment is a shortcut to a sustainable livelihood for refugees, as it provides social security, but also often leads to improved language skills, regular communication with the receiving community, and self-confidence. In countries like Bulgaria, where there is no integration system and mainstream social assistance is inaccessible or for rates far below the poverty line, the labour market gives an alternative.

It is this understanding that motivated the founding in October 2017 of 'Human in the Loop' (HITL), an innovative start-up company which dedicated its efforts to creating inspiring jobs for refugees. The aim of the young team is to provide a long-term and sustainable employment opportunities through engaging employees in the most promising and innovative industries. Unlike NGOs, HITL does not rely on funding, but sees itself as a hybrid which combines profit and social purpose so as to achieve financial independence.

The social enterprise employs and trains refugees to provide services to companies that work with big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. The founder of HITL, 24-year-old Iva Gumnishka, explains that the company has based its activities on a model called 'impact sourcing', or socially responsible outsourcing. This means big companies outsource digital remote work to vulnerable individuals and, thus, helps them move out of poverty. In contrast to traditional outsourcing such as call centres, which may require higher levels of education, impact sourcing focuses on tasks with lower and moderate skill requirements. This means employees perform easier tasks that usually computers are not able to perform.¹³ Examples of such services, which are provided by HITL, are annotating images (the employee tags an object at the image and draws a box around it); outlining keywords about the images, thus helping companies create algorithms which recognize what the image is about; collecting photos on a certain topic (for example, photos of birds); and verifying the relevance of results from search engines. All these tasks are visual, thus easier to complete without the necessity for language skills, but at the same time - in great demand in the computer vision and self-driving cars industry. HITL also is capable of providing transcription and translation, with the possibility of providing those in Arabic and Dari.

The enterprise aims at 'upskilling' its employees: every working day consists of 6 hours engagement with simple digital tasks and 2 hours dedicated to English and computer learning. Free access to online courses in digital skills such as programming and graphic design is facilitated.

Mrs. Gumnishka, a human rights graduate of Columbia University in the City of New York, was inspired while doing her thesis research in the USA. She closely studied the work of digital companies with similar goals and scope of work, such as Sama-source, Cloudfactory and iMent.

Upon her return to Bulgaria she reached out to the IIC of BRC, and managed to receive funding for a three-months training in IT skills for 10 people (enrolled in the Bulgarian language classes). The participants varied: from a 19-year-old Syrian youngster to 45-year-old female with no work experience whatsoever, and 56-year-old bee-keeper. The training started from the very basics of computer literacy: elements of a computer, how to switch it on and off, etc., to reach more advanced skills, such as work with Microsoft Office. The training also included an English language course.

5 of the 10 refugees who graduated from the training ended up being hired by the company. Some of the rest would have the possibility to join the enterprise once it is in position to provide a more stable income. The mission of the HITL is to employ those refugees who might be most vulnerable to marginalization because of education or language skills, although the selection of the five people was a result of administrative restrictions and not to other criteria (to be further discussed).

HITL has its office in the building of an IT Academy which provides a room and computers free of charge. UNHCR donated four more computers to be used for employees working from home. Having such an option allows for the hiring of refugees who are unable to leave their house every day: single mothers, disabled individuals, people who have a second job, etc. Currently, HITL employs eight refugees, of whom one is working from home (a Pakistani female with a small baby). It has managed to receive outsourced tasks from two American companies and a Bulgarian one. Mrs. Gumnishka actively applies for funding under various programmes in support of starting businesses.

HITL managed to register with the Labour Bureau and hire its staff under the Programme for Employment and Training of Refugees. The latter allows each employee to receive a minimum salary (510 leva, 255 euros) from the state budget. HITL adds to this amount, depending on the number of tasks it has managed to attract and finalize during the month (currently, the employees receive about 750 leva, or 375 euros, which is still below the average 1123 leva, 561 euros, for the country¹⁴). HITL is the first employer since 2016 that has managed to use the Programme to hire refugees. Usually, the only beneficiary is the SAR that hires staff for the reception centres, as such an option is outlined in the Programme. Mrs. Gumnishka shared that the state funding played a crucial role for the successful launch of the company. Unfortunately, only refugees who have received protection in the last two years have the right to benefit from the subsidized employment.

Although still small-scale, HITL is unique in the landscape of refugee support in Bulgaria. It has not only managed to provide jobs to individuals in dire need of employment (some of the staff members were jobless for more than 5-6 years). It created an uplifting environment, where the individual's talents are cherished and developed, while specific needs are addressed. 'We try to inspire refugees and make them regain their self-confidence. In the end, they manage to perform tasks which keep the enterprise alive and profitable. And they do so, although only a couple of months ago some had never touched a computer', says Mrs. Gumnishka. She insists that technology has a potential to transform lives and should be more widely used.

In the wake of the founding of the company, the young entrepreneur organized a Hackathon, where four teams of IT experts, together with asylum seekers and BIPs created digital products in support of refugees. As part of the competition, a web developer from Ghana, and refugee status holder in Bulgaria, created a website for job matching, house search and exchange of donations which currently gains track among the community.

In conclusion, the absence of state mechanism for integration has left a vacuum, filled with the creative energy of the civil society. In the last five years, thanks to the increased funding and beneficiaries, NGOs have managed to develop capacity in all integration areas, tailored good programmes and improved co-ordination between themselves. This support, though, should not be over-romanticized, as it remains limited in scale and project-based, thus, dependant on availability of funding (with the exception of HITL). Until a state-led mechanism is in place, the asylum process in Bulgaria will continue missing a substantive element.

The author currently works as an Integration Associate in UNHCR. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in the article are personal view of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of UNHCR.

References

¹ One of the latest being the European Partnership for Integration, which was signed in December 2017 between the European Commission and social and economic partners who committed to foster integration of refugees in the labor market.

² Or more than half of the recognized refugees and humanitarian status holders in the pre-crisis years (177 in 2012, 192 in 2011, 138 in 2010)

³ See: UNHCR Bulgaria, AGD PA Report 2017, p.10

⁴ Trend Survey from October 2017. Available here: <http://glasove.com/categories/na-fokus/news/trend-bylgariynt-iska-poveche-dyrzhava-i-ne-obi-cha-bogatite>

⁵ For example, the Strategy allows for 600 school hours of Bulgarian language within a six months period, while the Ordinance does not envisage any language support for adults. In another example, the Strategy mentions the right to health insurance, while no such support is provided for under the Ordinance. The Plan doesn't address either of those contentious issues.

⁶ According to the Law on Asylum and Refugees, refugee status holders are accorded the same rights as those of Bulgarian citizens, while humanitarian status holders have rights equal to those of permanently residing foreigners.

⁷ The lack of targeted integration support in the Ordinance means that Bulgaria fails to transpose in full Art. 34 of Directive 2011/95/EU, pursuant to which 'member states shall ensure access to integration programmes which they consider to be appropriate so as to take into account the specific needs of beneficiaries of refugee status or of subsidiary status, or create

pre-conditions which guarantee access to such programmes'. See: *Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast)*, 20 December 2011, OJ L 337/9-337/26; 20.12.2011, 2011/95/EU, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f197df02.html>

⁸ Due to a restrictive interpretation of Art. 3 of the Family Allowances Act

⁹ Municipal ordinances introduce admission criteria which cannot be met by refugees and humanitarian status holders, such as requirement to have had an address registered in the municipality for a period of 5 to 10 years, or that one of the applicants should hold Bulgarian citizenship.

¹⁰ *First*, the government has not set up a clear mechanism for the disbursement of funds for integration activities under the Ordinance. Although funds under AMIF are available for such activities, no direct allocation of resources to municipalities has been planned or taken place. No funds from the national budget have been used or are budgeted to be used in 2018. *Second*, local authorities in Bulgaria are often highly understaffed and lack critical knowledge, capacity and experience of and in the integration process. *Third*, municipal leadership is wary of negative public response following multiple protests in municipalities where refugees have previously settled, as well as general negative attitudes towards the community on the part of the local population.

¹¹ In exceptional cases, and at the discretion of the directors of the reception centres, the SAR may tolerate the prolonged stay of vulnerable refugees for a period of up to 6 months. Article 32, Para. 3 of LAR allows for the possibility to SAR to offer housing assistance, but this provision has so far not been used.

¹² As of February 2018, 208 asylum seeking and refugee children study in Bulgarian schools (out of 280 in school age accommodated in SAR centres).

¹³ These tasks are usually referred to as 'microwork' or 'human intelligence tasks'.

¹⁴ As of February 2018

RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION OF NEWCOMERS IN LATVIA: THE ROLE OF NGOS AND THE ISSUE OF CONTINUITY

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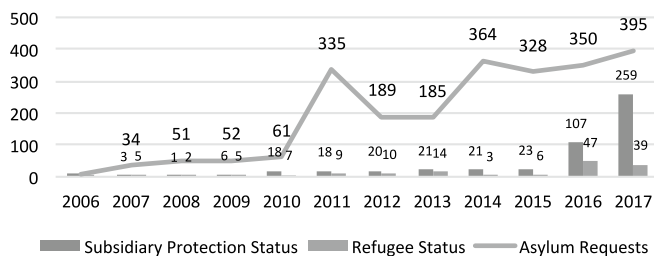
Latvia, a country of emigration: Who are we integrating?

Latvia can be categorized as a country of emigration. Ever since the restoration of its independence in 1990, Latvia's migration balance has been negative. Indeed, emigration has been one of the main reasons for the steady decline of Latvia's population – the total population of the country has decreased from nearly 2.6 million in 1990 to 1.95 million in 2017.² The peak of emigration was reached right after the 2009 financial crisis, when in 2009 and 2010 the number of emigrants amounted to 35 thousand per year³, a significant decrease in population for a small country like Latvia. As a result of both recent emigration and refugee flows during and after the Second World War, the size of Latvian diaspora is estimated to be around 250 to 370 thousand, amounting to nearly 15% of Latvians overall.⁴ As most people leaving are aged between 15-34, are qualified and tend to leave together with their family members, emigration creates an additional pressure – first, on the labour market where a significant deficit of labour is predicted for the coming decades,⁵ and, second, on the demographic outlook of the country that is already characterized by a low natural population replacement rate.⁶ Given the size of Latvia's diaspora, several policy initiatives have followed to promote links with the diaspora and support return

migration, the highlight being the development of the Diaspora Law, due to be passed in Latvia's Parliament in autumn 2018.

At the same time, there is a comparatively small population of foreign nationals in Latvia, that is slowly, but steadily increasing. About 92 thousand foreign nationals resided in Latvia in the beginning of 2018, compared to about 80 thousand in 2014. That means that both EU and third country nationals compose around 4.2% of the total population of Latvia. The main countries of origin are Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania and Germany, and the main reasons for immigration are employment, studies, family reunification, and investment.⁷ In contrast with diaspora and return migration policies, no targeted immigration policy measures have been in place. The Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy was finally passed in early 2018,⁸ following a back-and-forth discussion over eight years, leading to some amendments in Immigration Law regarding the immigration of highly-skilled professionals and the easing of administrative regulations during the immigration process.⁹ Despite these changes, Latvia's immigration policy can still be characterized as restrictive.

Asylum Dynamics



Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, Latvia.

Asylum seekers make up a small share of the total immigration volume. The number of asylum requests significantly in-

creased starting in 2011, and reached 395 asylum requests in 2017, the highest number in Latvia's history. Undoubtedly, this is a comparatively small number in the context of the European Union. In the early 2010s, the main countries of origin for asylum seekers were Georgia, Ukraine and Syria. However, the number of statuses of international protection (refugee or subsidiary protection) actually granted remained low – between 20 and 30 each year – until Latvia joined the EU relocation programme in late 2015. Latvia's asylum policy will be the focus of this chapter, first, by analysing general policy developments in response to the so-called refugee crisis in Europe, and, second, by highlighting support programmes developed in the recent years as examples of best practice.

Solidarity refugees

The year 2015 was marked by intensive political discussions on how to best react to the influx of asylum seekers across the Southern border of the EU. In Latvia, these discussions were mainly kick-started as a response to the call from the EU to the member states to share the burden with Italy and Greece. There were severe divisions in the coalition government, at that moment composed by the Unity (*Vienotība*), National Alliance (*Nacionālā Apvienība*) and Green and Farmers Union (*Zaļo un zemnieku savienība*) parties, where the National Alliance was categorically against any quotas being defined at the EU level, while Unity saw this as a solidarity measure. In June 2015, an inter-institutional working group involving representatives of state institutions, and, if deemed necessary, social partners, municipalities, and NGOs, was created with the task to “create a system, suitable for the Latvian context, for the reception and integration of beneficiaries of international protection.”¹⁰ This working group also advised the Prime Minister at the time Laimdota Straujuma on Latvia's reception and integration capacity. Eventually, in September 2015 the government of Latvia committed to take in 531 asylum seekers in the framework of the EU Relocation Programme, despite the lack of consensus among the coalition parties.

What followed was the development of several amendments to the Asylum Law, as well as the design of an “Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection.”¹¹ The most significant amendments to the Asylum Law dealt with the amount of monthly financial benefits, decreasing it from 256 EUR to 139 EUR per month for one member of the family and 97 EUR to all other family members or unaccompanied minors. Despite the objections of NGOs and some politicians to this decrease, as it would create obstacles for decent conditions of living in Latvia, this decision was taken as a political trade-off in response to the agreement of taking in relocated asylum seekers at all. Drawing on the existing scattered practices of reception and integration of beneficiaries of international protection, the Action Plan was targeted especially towards those relocated in the framework of the EU programme, even though several activities concerned all beneficiaries of international protection, and were to be in force only until the relocation process was completed. The Action Plan was first and foremost intended to ensure a clear division of tasks and responsibilities between various state institutions and included three large blocks: (a) the selection and movement of persons; (b) the reception of asylum seekers and the asylum procedure, both under the coordination of Ministry of Interior, and (c) the socioeconomic inclusion of beneficiaries of international protection, coordinated by Ministry of Welfare. In what follows, the second block – socioeconomic inclusion – will be addressed in detail, as that included innovations that went beyond the minimum standards set forward in EU integration policy principles.

Action Plan and other integration measures

Latvia’s integration policy principles are defined in two policy planning strategies – The Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030¹² and The National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014-2020,¹³ highlighting such strategic objectives as belonging to Latvia and social integration. Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy 2012-2018¹⁴ aim at

promoting societal cohesion; however, support for third country nationals was scarce and not targeted, and beneficiaries of international protection were not defined as a specific target group for activities of the Guidelines before the development and implementation of the Action Plan.¹⁵ Indeed, UNHCR characterized the available support for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection as fragmented, non-systematic, and as lacking understanding of their specific reception needs.¹⁶ Most of the integration support activities for foreign nationals have been financed from the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals, Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, or European Social Fund, providing the requested state co-financing, thus matching the priorities of the respective fund with the activities that are implemented in the framework of national programmes.

It was with the readily available funding, programmes and activities in mind that the Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection was designed. The process of elaborating this Action Plan has been recognized as a good practice internationally as it was a clear effort to systematize the existing services and to identify gaps in ensuring a comprehensive reception and integration process. The most significant improvements introduced with the Action Plan are as follows. First, it sets a clear division of responsibilities between state institutions. The Ministry of Interior and its subordinate Office for Citizenship and Migration Affairs are responsible for the reception and asylum procedure, including service provision at the temporary reception centre ‘Mucenieki’, as well as access to preschool education, psychologist and a physician. The Ministry of Welfare is responsible for coordinating the socioeconomic inclusion strategy and for ensuring support for inclusion in the labour market with support of its subordinate State Employment Agency. The Ministry of Culture – in cooperation with other state institutions and NGOs is responsible for providing language and integration training, both before and after the awarding of international protection status. Secondly, the Action Plan was to source existing projects to find opportunities for providing innovative services.

For example, the need for individually targeted support was recognized and therefore the use of social workers and social mentors was developed in the framework of a larger European Social Fund financed project 'Diversity Promotion'. Similarly, a targeted project aimed at labour market integration of the beneficiaries of international protection was designed and kick-started at the State Employment Agency in addition to existing services that are provided in this institution. These two projects will be elaborated in detail later on. Finally, the tasks envisioned in the Action Plan have been transposed in policy planning documents that followed, indicating the prospective longevity of these support activities. Namely, the implementation plan of the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy for 2017-2018¹⁷ included beneficiaries of international protection as a distinct target group and several activities were aimed at their integration, such as the provision of integration courses at the temporary reception centre 'Mucenieki', as well as the use of interpreters, social workers and social mentors.

However, despite the commendable initiative to introduce a comprehensive policy for reception and socioeconomic inclusion of the beneficiaries of international protection, when evaluating the implementation of the Action Plan, several challenges have been identified.¹⁸ Due to the decrease of monthly financial benefits, many beneficiaries of international protection do not have access to *housing* after being awarded their status. Even though amendments in Asylum Law introduced a new pay-out scheme which allowed beneficiaries of international protection to request a one-off allowance to be able to cover a security deposit for renting an apartment, it also decreased the total length of financial support to 10 or 7 months for refugees and persons with subsidiary protection status respectively. That creates an additional strain for finding a job sooner. Finding *employment* is challenging as many positions require knowledge of Latvian at A2 level, which is difficult to achieve in the time period given. Housing is also linked with access to *municipality assistance*, directly dependent on official place of residence. Due to these and other challenges,

many beneficiaries of international protection chose to engage in secondary movement upon receiving their status, with an estimate of 85% of relocated persons leaving Latvia. By the time they choose or are forced to return to Latvia, they are not entitled to any support - financial or otherwise. Thus, a precarious starting environment is created for beneficiaries of international protection in Latvia, only to force them into a more difficult situation in other EU member states or upon their eventual return to Latvia. Currently, the Ministry of Welfare is tasked with the identification of possible solutions to this conundrum. However, this dynamic is especially challenging, as it will require financial commitment from the state beyond the existing earmarked funding from mainly EU sources.

Moreover, there are crucial differences between recognized refugees and the beneficiaries of subsidiary protection regarding the support available from the state and municipalities. This is due to the fact that recognized refugees receive a permanent residence permit, while subsidiary protection status only leads to a temporary residence permit. Around 80% of recent statuses awarded were those of subsidiary protection, including all Syrians. That means that, for example, a Syrian family is not eligible for state family allowance or additional support in case there is a person with a disability in the family that requires assistance.

Finally, all parties involved in the implementation of the Action Plan, as well as the State Audit Office identified shortcomings in the coordination, despite the initial ambition of the Action Plan to introduce a comprehensive intra-institutional coordination and cooperation system. While specific responsibilities for activities are earmarked, there is a lack of leadership in addressing challenges, both practical and political, that has emerged during the implementation process. This can be explained by a lack of political will, which stems from the fact that the Latvian population is predominantly negatively biased towards the reception and integration of beneficiaries of international protection. It can also be linked to the lack of a clear feedback mechanism and the minimal involvement of the target group in designing and evaluating activities.

Two of the services introduced with the Action Plan deserve further attention, both for a better understanding of the challenges identified, but also for highlighting the need for improving a newly created service during its implementation in order to achieve the intended results.

Social workers and social mentors: Providing continuous assistance despite scarcity

The services of social workers and social mentors for asylum seekers, recognized refugees and persons with subsidiary protection status are provided in the framework of an ESF project “Diversity Promotion,” administered by the Society Integration Foundation - a public foundation under institutional supervision of the Prime Minister. The overall aim of the project is “to promote the employment and socioeconomic inclusion of persons subject to risks of social exclusion and discrimination, while at the same time fostering the increase of the level of information and understanding in the society as a whole on the issues of prevention of discrimination and of inclusive society.”¹⁹ In the context of this broader aim, individual assistance is provided to beneficiaries of international protection through procuring services of social workers and social mentors. Since April 2016, two NGOs – Latvian Red Cross and Society “Shelter ‘Safe House’” – have provided these services for different time periods.

What does the service entail? First, a social worker meets with and develops a socioeconomic inclusion plan for an individual or a family right after their arrival at the temporary reception centre. This plan depends on the age, education, skills and wishes, as well as the immediate needs (i.e. physical and mental health care, clothing, communication) of the asylum seeker. These first meetings also provide an opportunity for a tailored explanation of what to expect during the asylum process, as well as after having received or having been declined the status of international protection. Second, social mentors provide

support in daily situations, for example, in finding housing, understanding the public transportation system, using banking services, communicating with state and municipality institutions, finding a family doctor or a GP, establishing contact with State Employment Agency (described in detail below), and so forth. Social workers and social mentors accompany beneficiaries of international protection to meetings, ensure that children attend school, and help to build a social support network in their new country of residence. Indeed, the Society Integration Foundation describes social workers and social mentors as “advisers and consultants, encouragers, supporters and defenders”.²⁰

This service is available during the asylum procedure, which usually does not take longer than 3 months in Latvia, and for twelve months following the reception of the status of international protection. Between April 2016 and December 2017, 658 persons received this service, including 367 relocated beneficiaries of international protection and 291 person who arrived in Latvia on their own. The average age of persons receiving assistance was 32, and around 42% were children. Even though the number of social workers and social mentors is adjusted to the number of people needing assistance and the complexity of their needs, most of the time there are two social workers and ten social mentors employed by the respective NGO. There is no data about the average length of assistance, but if beneficiaries of international protection leave Latvia, it usually happens in the first two months after receiving their status. These factors, as well as the gradual arrival of asylum seekers, explain why such a small number of personnel were needed.

While this service has been recognized as very valuable and helpful by the beneficiaries of international protection, state and municipality institutions, employers and other involved parties, there have been a few stumbling blocks in its implementation. First, it is typical for integration support activities to be outsourced or contracted through project calls to NGOs. While this may be seen as an opportunity to strengthen civil society, it has also posed challenges. These challenges have

been showcased during the implementation of this activity as well, namely, during the interruption (even if short-term in nature) in service provision due to technicalities of handing over cases or in cases of a contract termination.²¹ Furthermore, it creates a loss of trust already established between the service provider and beneficiaries of international protection, creating a delay in fulfilling individual socioeconomic inclusion plans. Finally, it results in a loss of accumulated expertise and experience. Moreover, there is only one service of this type and organisations compete among themselves, and, unfortunately, there is no comprehensive exchange of experience and practice.

Second, while social workers and social mentors try to assist in ensuring housing, education, employment and so on, they must operate in the context of scarce resources. For example, they have limited or no financial resources to pay for transportation, help with security deposits for new lodgings, or help with utility bills. These factors significantly limit the effectiveness of their services. Finally, these service providers often deal with negative attitudes prevalent in Latvian society towards newcomers. They are often mediators between locals and newcomers, and, as such, must endure continuous backlash. Despite these challenges, it is certain that this service will be provided at least until the end of 2021, and the implementing NGOs are developing partnerships with other private and non-governmental entities to foster more comprehensive assistance.

Refugee project: First steps to employment

The State Employment Agency developed a targeted programme²² in response to a consensus among policy makers that beneficiaries of international protection should be involved in the labour market as soon as possible to decrease their dependency on social assistance. They have developed a special skills assessment process, informational materials in several languages (including Arabic and Tigrinya), and quite a successful dialogue with prospective employers.

It is through the social mentor that an asylum seeker meets a State Employment Agency consultant for the first time, while still waiting for the decision on the asylum request. This is done in order to set ground for all steps to be taken as soon as the status is granted, because, as already mentioned, the timeframes wherein beneficiaries of international protection receive financial benefits from the state is quite short – from 7 to 10 months. After assessing the existing education and work experience, an individual career and Latvian language learning plan is developed. As soon as a person is registered as a job seeker or unemployed, they have access to 720h of Latvian language training from A1 to C2 levels. Language learning is crucial in the plan, as many professions are not accessible without language knowledge, especially those involving any communication with clients. Furthermore, vocational education classes, which are also provided by the Agency, are only taught in Latvian. Moreover, while learning Latvian, beneficiaries of international protection can receive 5EUR per day in addition to their monthly allowance.

In addition to individual work with the job seeker, the Agency also offers programmes for employers, for example, setting up a subsidized work place, where part of the salary is covered by the state, or providing practical and language training at the work place. This should incentivize the employer to hire beneficiaries of international protection. The Agency continues to provide support to both the employee and the employer at least 6 months after the start of the employment. Unfortunately, as many beneficiaries of international protection have left Latvia, the number of people actually becoming involved in the labour force is small, but the experience of employers has mostly been positive. In a recently started campaign, “Openness is Valuable,” several employers discuss the added value of employing refugees.²³

Involving locals: NGO activities beyond the Action Plan

While the Action Plan highlighted the need to inform the society about non-discrimination, tolerance and the value of diversity, the activities intended were large-scale campaigns or trainings of civil servants and service providers. Unfortunately, none of the activities sought to encourage integration as a two-way process, and foster an immediate interaction between the host society and the newcomers. An NGO was formed directly as a response to the news that asylum seekers will be arriving to Latvia, called quite descriptively 'I Want to Help Refugees'. It started as a group on the large social media site, *Facebook*, and grew into a wider movement, eventually becoming an officially registered association. The *Facebook* group is still the first and foremost resource for scouting necessary items – furniture, clothing, books – for the newcomers, used also by service providers as social mentors and employment consultants themselves. It is also a convenient place to exchange information, ask for advice, coordinate volunteers, and so on.

In addition, 'I Want to Help Refugees' has also implemented a few small-scale projects aimed at socialization and the promotion of empathy. 'Living Libraries' took place every month for almost a year, and served as a platform for peoples' stories, experiences and emotions. They aimed to use conversation to erase the artificially constructed boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Most of the storytellers were beneficiaries of international protection, but volunteers, service providers or return migrants were also encouraged to share their experiences of adaptation as well. The other project is called 'In the Shoes of Refugees,' and it entails designing a simulation game and introducing high school students to it as means of teaching empathy and understanding. Such socialization activities are extremely important, but are not prioritized by the state, and the NGOs implementing these activities are dependent volunteer enthusiasm with project funding barely covering the technical expenses.

Project-Based Integration Support Activities: Good Ideas, but Will They Last?

When, after intense political debates, the government of Latvia decided to take part in the EU Relocation Programme, and, as a result, designed the Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection, integration and human rights experts and practitioners saw this as an important turning point for establishing a truly comprehensive integration policy for beneficiaries of international protection. Indeed, the Action Plan set into motion several crucial elements of such a policy, namely, a division of responsibilities, a need for individual support, and a clear focus on socioeconomic inclusion, with an emphasis on employment.

As of summer 2018 363 persons have been relocated in accordance with the EU programme, 168 are yet to arrive. Of those relocated, only a few remain in Latvia. The explanations of this dynamic vary, but it is undeniable that the existing support is insufficient – low monthly benefits, difficulty accessing housing and employment, experiences of discrimination, and virtually non-existent inclusion into the local community. In addition, the differential treatment of recognized refugees and persons with subsidiary protection status regarding their available support puts most of beneficiaries of international protection in a very precarious situation. Moreover, those returning – or being returned – to Latvia, after engaging in secondary movement will receive limited support or none at all, as many services are available only during the first year or so.

On this background of a target group in quite a precarious situation, Latvia still implements several well-designed, targeted services to facilitate their socioeconomic inclusion, inter alia, social worker and social mentor services and projects at the State Employment Agency. However, what unites these services and other integration support programmes is that they are project-based or procured, leading to interruptions in service provision, and limited experience accumulation. These are significant hurdles to a streamlined, systematic approach

to the integration of beneficiaries of international protection. Moreover, as several of the services that were developed were linked with the Action Plan and thus with the EU Relocation Programme, it is unclear if they will be able to continue after the relocation ends. Some activities are to be included in the new integration policy plan under the agency of the Ministry of Culture. However, this may prove to be to the detriment of a comprehensive and well-coordinated approach to socioeconomic inclusion of beneficiaries of international protection. It is now high time for Latvia to choose between a mainstreamed integration policy for beneficiaries of international protection or a targeted one. Latvia's recent experience indicates that it would be wise to keep in mind the lessons learned from the implementation of the Action Plan, while continuing to assess the sustainability of a project-based integration support service provision. In so doing, Latvia could continue to advance and increase the success of not only the integration of newcomers to Latvian society, but also to strengthen the engagement of NGOs in integration policy development and implementation.

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REFUGEE INTEGRATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES: LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS AND NGO INITIATIVES AS THE RESPONSE TO RELOCATION AND RESETTLEMENT IN LITHUANIA

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Introduction

In the context of international migration processes, Lithuania has played and is still playing an important role as a 'sending' country. After restoration of independence in 1991, Lithuania experienced significant political and socioeconomic changes which led to specific patterns of international migration. After 1991, large-scale emigration of Lithuanian residents to the Western and Nordic regions of the EU brought demographic challenges and led to structural changes in the Lithuanian labour market. After Lithuania joined the EU in 2004, economic emigration became more visible. Together with a growing trend of economic emigration, new migration patterns have been identified, as the demographic shortfall combined with labour force shortages triggered immigration from third countries (see graphs 1 and 5). At the same time, membership in

the EU and the development of Schengen area has increased migrant transit through the territory of Lithuania. In parallel to that, Lithuania has become an attractive target country for economic immigrants.

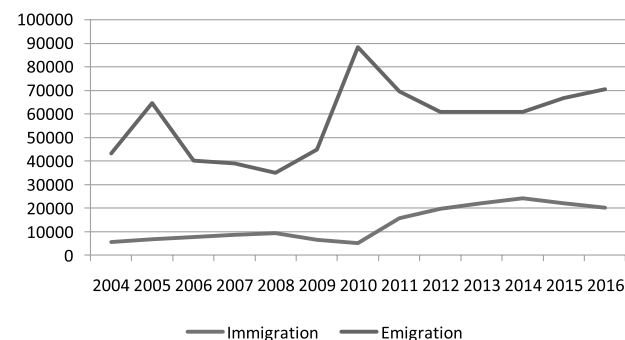
In general, immigration flows to Lithuania started to increase even before EU enlargement in 2004. Particularly, it was noted from 2001 with a peak before the 2008 global economic crisis. After the outbreak of the crisis, immigration started to increase again. Particularly, labour immigration went far beyond pre-crisis level (see graphs 1-6 and table 1 below). Regardless of the increase of labour immigration to Lithuania, the total number of foreigners living in Lithuania remains small. However, absolute numbers as well as the share of the total population is gradually increasing (see table 1). However, while labour immigration became very visible, flows of asylum seekers remained insignificant (see graphs 5 and 6). Nevertheless, in recent years several legislative and practical changes have taken place regarding refugee reception and integration. This article elaborates further on these policies and practices.

General immigration trends

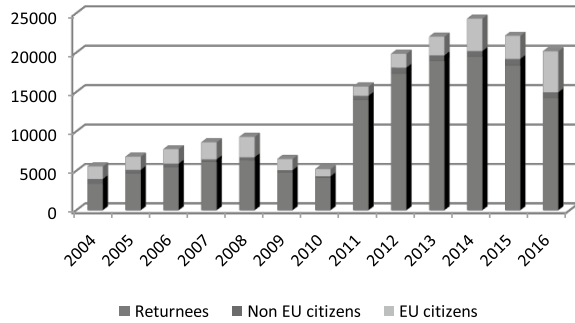
In summing up immigration flows to Lithuania, several trends can be identified. First, the vast majority of immigrants living in Lithuania and arriving annually to the country for various purposes are citizens of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (see graph 4). In addition, in the light of the conflict in Ukraine, quite a significant immigration flow of Ukrainians has been identified recently. Second, the distribution of immigrants by age groups allows arguing that Lithuania is an attractive country mostly for people of working age and from outside of the EU. Third, the distribution of immigrants by gender shows that family reunification is more related to female immigration, and economic (labour) circumstances – more with male immigration. Fourth, immigration flows of foreign citizens either from EU or non-EU countries are small. In the general context of immigration (including return migration of Lithuanian residents), non-EU citizens are 25% of the total immigration flow. In the context

of foreign immigration (excluding return migration of Lithuanian residents) the percentage increases to 80 % and more (see graphs 2 and 3). Fifth, the local (or municipal) aspect of immigration structure reveal that foreigners (non-EU citizens) are concentrated in the largest Lithuanian cities. More than two thirds of all foreigners live in 6 municipalities. The majority of foreigners reside in Vilnius (more than one third of all foreigners residing in Lithuania), followed by the city of Klaipeda (13.3 %), Visaginas (8.6 %), Kaunas (7.4 %), Vilnius District (5.4 %) and Šiauliai (4.3 %). This means that the major Lithuanian cities attract immigrants, as highlighted by the fact that foreigners living in these municipalities make up the majority (73.8 %) of non-EU nationals in Lithuania.¹

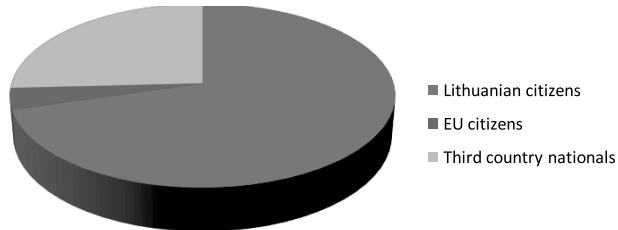
Graph 1. Annual migration flows in Lithuania 2004–2016: the difference between immigration and emigration



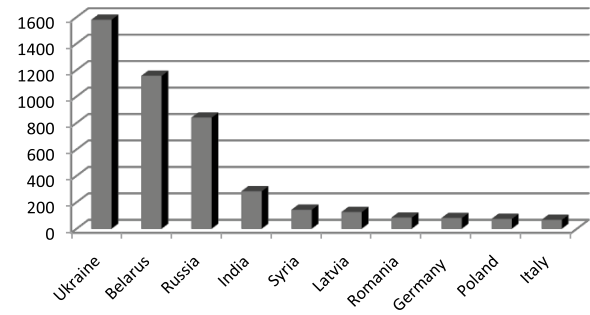
Graph 2. Immigration to Lithuania: return migration, third country nationals and EU citizens 2004-2016



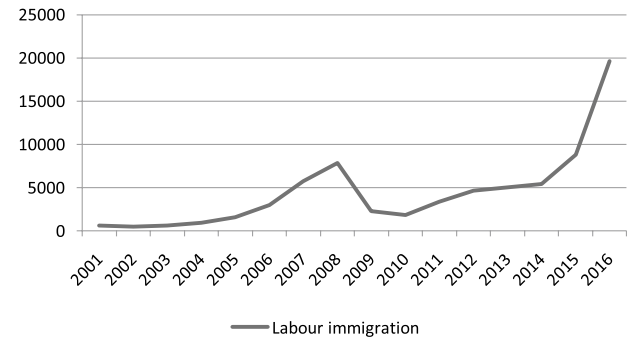
Graph 3. Immigration structure by citizenship / legal status 2016



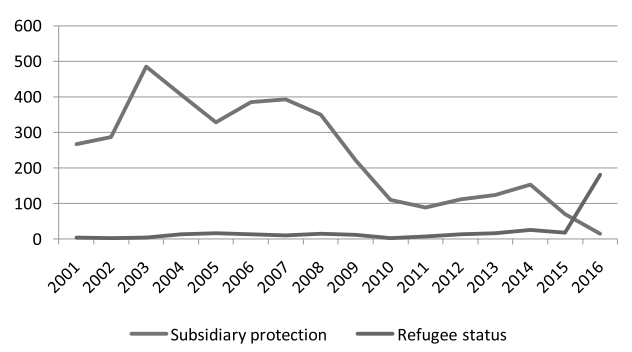
Graph 4. Immigration structure 2016: EU and non EU citizens



Graph 5. Labour immigration to Lithuania 2001-2016



Graph 6. Asylum in Lithuania 2001–2016



Source: European Migration Network 2018

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Population in Lithuania (thousands)	3 137,0	3 052,6	3 007,8	2 979,3	2 944,5	2 921,9	2 888,6	2 849,3	2 810, 1
Number of foreigners	32,500	29,600	31,300	32,300	35,500	40,000	40,300	43,600	49, 400
Share of foreigners (%)	1,04	0,97	1,04	1,08	1,20	1,37	1,40	1,53	1,76

Source: Migration Department²

Asylum in Lithuania: relocation, resettlement and integration challenges

According to unofficial estimates, approximately 300–350 foreigners with refugee status or subsidiary protection reside in Lithuania. In 2015, 291 asylum applications were submitted in Lithuania; 17 asylum seekers were granted refugee status and

69 – subsidiary protection. In 2016, because of a more intense relocation/resettlement processes, the number of asylum seekers increased to 425. In 2016, 181 asylum seekers received refugee status and 14 – subsidiary protection. In 2017, 599 asylum applications were submitted; 280 foreigners received refugee status and 13 received subsidiary protection.³

When it comes to relocation/resettlement, Lithuania is still in the phase of implementation of commitments toward EU level solidarity. According to the data from NGOs, until now, out of 1,077 asylum seekers to be relocated from Greece, Italy and resettled from Turkey, Lithuania has already received 468. However, it has to be emphasised that a quite significant proportion (349) of those relocated to Lithuania have already left the country.

Studies⁴ focusing on refugee integration in Lithuanian society have revealed broad fields of challenges. For example, it showed that the social context (unemployment, underdeveloped social resources and skills, housing and language obstacles, lack of social contacts with receiving society, etc.) in which refugees find themselves while solving their everyday challenges, creates a significant impact on the integration process. Language obstacles and opportunities of employment allow refugees to choose only unskilled and poorly paid jobs. Moreover, successful integration is related to the city where refugees live as the course of integration often depends on the assistance of NGOs.⁵ Moreover, because of a lack of political and public debate, the notion of ‘refugees’ is becoming political and, eventually, creates prejudices and stereotypes.⁶

All these challenges and, at the same time, commitments to relocate / resettle 1077 asylum seekers to Lithuania from refugee camps and reception centres in Greece, Italy and Turkey, encouraged Lithuanian NGOs, governmental institutions and grassroots societies to come up with new initiatives aiming for better and more effective refugee integration (see section on good practices and innovations).

Refugee integration infrastructure

There are two stages of reception and integration in Lithuania: 1) before refugee status or subsidiary protection is granted (reception procedure) and 2) after particular status is granted (integration). As the article focuses on refugee integration, the second stage – integration – is briefly explained below.

After refugee status or subsidiary protection is granted, refugees are moving to the Refugee Reception Centre (PPC) in Rukla – a government institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Here, the emphasis should be given to the fact that relocated / resettled asylum seekers are also moved straight from the airport to the PPC. In PPC, the first integration stage is organised and support is provided up to 3 months.⁷ Support continues later on the municipal level, where the second integration stage is organised by NGOs with the support of EU funding. After the period of integration at PPC is completed, support for integration continues in the municipal territory for a period of up to 12 months counting from the day of departure from PPC. Integration in municipalities continues mainly through NGOs. The current total period for support for integration is 15 months (3 months at PPC + 12 months in the municipality) with the possibility to prolong the integration programme for reasons such as vulnerabilities. NGOs are running so called “one stop shops”, where all necessary integration services, including social orientation courses are provided for both beneficiaries of international protection and other immigrants. It means that in Lithuania, the implementation of refugee integration policy is project-based, and related to EU funding. In contrast to many EU member states, where integration is organised by municipal institutions, NGOs are key stakeholders providing integration measures for refugees in Lithuania.⁸ Therefore, all innovative solutions in the area of integration usually are developed by NGOs; while, at the same time, governmental institutions are reconsidering integration policy by creating a friendlier integration environment.

Good practices and innovations

New approach towards migrant integration policies

Even before the so-called refugee crisis (particularly – during 2014), a new trend emerged as the Government of the Republic of Lithuania adopted “Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines” (22.01.2014 No. 79)⁹. In these guidelines, migrant integration issues have been emphasised and, for the first time since restoration of independence of Lithuania, received special status as a prioritised policy area. At the same time, the “Action Plan for the Enforcement of the Foreigner Integration Policy for 2015-2017” (31.12.2014 No. A1-683)¹⁰ and the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania “On the composition of coordinating working group for integration of foreigners” (22.01.2014 No. 54)¹¹ have been adopted. In addition, a new area of policy emerged in the Ministry of Social Security of Labour – integration of foreigners. Moreover, migration experts and practitioners started to develop strategic documents for integration of refugees and immigrants.¹² Currently, the Commission under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour is working on the new action plan on migrant integration for 2018-2020. Such legislative developments show that integration of foreigners has become a prioritised policy area, and the focus is shifting from *ad hoc* approach to a more strategic approach.

2.2 State-Level Practices for Refugee Integration

One of the greatest recent developments regarding integration of beneficiaries of international protection is related to the amendments of the following legal acts - Order on Approval of the Terms and Conditions for the Implementation of Employment Support Measures (30.06.2017 No. A1-348)¹³; the Law on the Declaration of the Place of Residence (30.06.2015 No. XII-1919)¹⁴; the Law on Cash Social Assistance for Poor Residents (01.07.2003 No. IX-1675)¹⁵; the Law on Benefits for Children (03.11.1994 No. I-621)¹⁶; the Law on Assistance in the Case of

Death (23.12.1993 No. I-348)¹⁷; the Law on Social Integration of the Disabled (28.11.1991 No. I-2044)¹⁸; and the Law on State Social Insurance Pensions (29.11.1994 No. I-675)¹⁹. The aim of the amendment of these legal acts was to equalize the status and rights of recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. The latter ones were in a more vulnerable position as they are granted only temporary residence permits in the country.

Furthermore, during the last couple of years, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania approved two resolutions that are directly related to the facilitation of integration of beneficiaries of international protection. The Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on Providing State Support for Integration for Asylum Beneficiaries (05.10.2016. No. 998)²⁰ regulates the organisation, implementation, and state support for integration in refugee reception centres and municipalities. It covers issues related to allowances, integration in the education system and employment, as well as public awareness and support for the integration of asylum beneficiaries. Special attention is paid to ensuring intensive Lithuanian language training and an early entry into the labour market. Meanwhile, the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the Approval of the Description of the Procedure of Asylum Seekers' Accommodation (08.03.2017 No. 171)²¹ regulates the accommodation of asylum seekers in the municipality's territory. This document legally covers national level, but has the opportunity for the integration of the local level approach for the issues of beneficiaries of international protection as it officially establishes the procedures of asylums seekers' integration on the municipal level.

Finally, it is important to mention the document prepared by the Ministry of Social Security of Labour and which is in the draft phase at the moment. The project for creation of the action plan for foreigner integration 2018-2020 is the first document for which the target group is 'foreigners' not excluding migrants nor refugees.

Main amendments within the legal acts mentioned below:

Decree on Approval of the Terms and Conditions for the Implementation of Employment Support Measures: In addition to changes for Lithuanian citizens, new measures to facilitate refugee integration were also put into effect. Refugees and persons with subsidiary protection are entitled to additional support for employment:

- Support for professional training. During the period of professional training, individuals with refugee or protection status now receive a grant equivalent to 0.6 of minimum wage or the full social benefits that unemployed individuals are eligible for;
- Support for mobility. In order to enable foreigners granted asylum to be more flexible in terms of job location, they now receive compensation for certain travel expenses;
- Subsidised employment. In order to facilitate refugee integration in the labour market, subsidies as an incentive are now being offered for employers who hire foreigners granted asylum. The government has committed to granting 75% of the income earned by individuals with refugee or protection status. The period of subsidised employment is limited to 24 months and the subsidies provided cannot exceed two minimum wages (€760);
- Support for gaining skills. Support through a job placement in order to help foreigners with asylum status has been granted to gain necessary professional skills. The government provides the employer with a grant to fund placement expenses as a part of professional training or as an opportunity to get the first hands-on experience;
- Support for job creation. In addition to employment support mechanisms that became accessible for individuals granted asylum, competitions for social business initiatives now are also available to these persons.

Law on the Declaration of the Place of Residence: Since the 1st of July 2017 persons who are granted asylum in the Republic of Lithuania during the period of integration can be involved in the list of persons who do not have place of residence. In

accordance with the law, all residents of the country must declare their place of residence or must be in the list of people who do not have a place to live. The recent amendments in the Law are important for receiving some social services and social benefits as the law says that a person acquires some rights only after (s)he has proved that (s)he resides in a certain location (e.g., voting in the local self-government, in certain cases – going to school, kindergarten). However, such an opportunity is available for persons who have been granted asylum only during the stage of integration (15 months), and when it is over they do not have such right and have to deal with the declaration of the place of residence on their own. Consequently, the issue of housing – one of the greatest problems that both migrants and beneficiaries of international protection face in the country – remains unresolved.

Law on Cash Social Assistance for Poor Residents: Since 1st of October 2017 persons under temporary protection and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are able to receive financial social assistance (social benefit; compensations for the costs of house heating, hot and drinking water) not only after the period of integration (as it was before the amendment of the law), but also during the period of integration.

Law on Benefits for Children: Since 1st October to 2017 the law also applies to people who have refugee status in the Republic of Lithuania.

Law on Assistance in the Case of Death: Since 1st October to 2017 the law also applies to people who have refugee status in the Republic of Lithuania.

Law on Social Integration of the Disabled: Since 1st October to 2017 the law also applies to people who hold a permanent EU residence permit and those who have refugee status in the Republic of Lithuania. The law covers both social integration of the disabled and assessment of the level of capacity for work, and disability level.

Law on State Social Insurance Pensions: Since 1st October to 2017 the law applies to people who have refugee status in the Republic of Lithuania. This means that they will be entitled to state social insurance pensions (old-age pension; work incapacity pension; survivor's and orphan's pension).

Municipality-Level Practices

As a follow-up of institutional and legislative developments in the area of immigration and migrant integration policies as well as relocation and resettlement processes (where Lithuania signed an agreement to relocate / resettle 1 077 asylum seekers), since 2017, almost every municipality has appointed a person responsible for coordination of refugee integration policies and processes at the city level. However, because many lack knowledge, low immigration rates and, eventually, a lack of direct experiences providing integration measures, resources at the local level are being used only partly. This means that municipalities are failing in their direct duty; especially, taking into consideration the second phase of integration, which has to start and be organised at the local level.²² However, some municipalities are developing municipal level initiatives to solve relocation and resettlement challenges. For example, Akmenė District Municipality has started to invite refugees from Ukraine and, with some other municipalities, has already signed an agreement to relocate refugees from Rukla's PPC. Eventually, refugee integration (policy and processes) are slowly moving toward local level, where some municipalities are showing commitments and solidarity. Other municipalities are dealing with everyday integration challenges by coming up with promising initiatives. For example, Jonava district municipality is planning to buy 5 flats to deal with housing challenges for refugees. In Lithuania, housing is one of the biggest challenges for refugee integration as owners of real estate are not willing to rent out flats to refugees due to prejudices and stereotypes towards refugees. Such an initiative will help dealing with this challenge at least in one municipality. In addition, it is expected that other municipalities will follow this example and implement as good practice.

NGOs, Grassroots Society's Initiatives and Social Entrepreneurship

One-stop-shops for refugees

As refugee integration policy at the municipal level is implemented by the NGOs (particularly, Lithuanian Red Cross and Vilnius archdiocese Caritas), so called “one stop shops” for immigrants and refugees have been established in three biggest Lithuanian cities: Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda, where different innovative methodologies and approaches are applied. Along with traditional integration measures that are provided free of charge (language, legal counselling, social consultations, individual and group level psychological consultations, vocational training, labour market integration, cultural events, etc.), different specialists are also employed to provide specific integration measures. For example, cultural mediators are used to foster integration and intercultural coexistence, labour market specialists to foster labour market integration, coordinators of voluntarily activities to mobilise local communities' resources, and others (for more, see Zibas K. “Mapping of social orientation: the case of Lithuania”. Available at: <http://raccombat-project.eu/mapping-lithuania/>).

Grassroots societies' initiatives

In the light of so-called refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016, as well as following good examples of grassroots societies' initiatives to help refugees settle in the EU, Lithuanians have created several volunteer initiatives to increase local community engagement for more effective refugee integration process. For example, initiatives such as “Rukla Support”, “I Welcome Refugee” and “Assistance for Refugees in Lithuania” are coordinated via social media channels (usually – Facebook) and involve students, teachers, journalists and a wide cross-section of ordinary citizens. These groups have started to organise events to bring refugees from PPC to major Lithuanian cities, helping to build understanding, enthusiasm, and respect for life in Lithuania

among their new neighbours. Such groups have also started bringing Lithuanians to PPC along with cultural programme, second hand clothing and donations such as toys, books, and other educational material to demonstrate a sincere interest in learning more about refugees, their experiences, and what they need to successfully integrate. As new grassroots initiatives usually are hampered by a lack of resources and organizational expertise, NGOs' in Lithuania initiated HUMANAID project (funded by the US Embassy in Vilnius), which addresses the short-term resource gaps of Lithuanian grassroots organisations by providing micro-grants to cover costs such as fuel and transportation, supplies for events, educational supplies for school-aged children, etc. At the same time, HUMANAID aims at building organisational capacities of these grassroots organisations by hosting workshops to share international best practices. Eventually, the goal is not to create professional organisations, but rather to improve volunteers' ability to sustain community events / initiatives independently and increase their success in creating connections between refugees and grass roots societies.

Platform for Migration Information and Cooperation – MIPAS

A new national project, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, “The Platform for Migration Information and Cooperation” (MIPAS) has been initiated in Lithuania. The objective is to improve the availability of information to various stakeholders and the target group and cooperation between them by ensuring operation of the platform for migration information (website). Information on the website is available in three languages: Lithuanian, English, and Russian. A separate section of the website is dedicated to foreigners, where practical information regarding arrival and life in Lithuania, employment, accommodation, education, social guarantees, health care, etc. is available. The website provides an opportunity for stakeholders and individuals to monitor TCN migration and integration processes as it provides access to recent statistical data on migratory flows, studies and other data, the activities

of the participating actors, results and other useful information. It also allows stakeholders to respond to the latest news related to the migration and integration of the target group in Lithuania and all over the world. This allows finding common points and principles that bring together the priorities of the TCN immigration and integration policy, projects and research activities, and thus creates the basis for the involvement of all social and political actors participating in TCN immigration and integration processes, the target group, and the general public (see more in details at www.mipas.lt).

Social innovation through social entrepreneurship for refugees

At the same time, while the so-called traditional integration measures are provided by NGOs, some innovative integration methods have been identified. For example, “Social business accelerator Socifaction”, considers social entrepreneurship as a powerful instrument in building bridges among different actors and consolidating a society for common good and better migrant integration. The initiative “Socifaction”, designed for new social enterprises, started in 2014. Since 2017 “Socifaction” has set its focus to rural areas and engages 15 different Lithuanian regions where the local communities developed 60 social business initiatives. The program also influenced significant changes in the field of education starting with 10 secondary and vocational schools that started teaching social entrepreneurship during economics and business classes. In 2018, 50 more schools joined the movement. Since 2018, the organisers are giving significant focus to the issues of ethnic minorities and migrants in Lithuania by promoting social entrepreneurship as an instrument to tackle these issues. During the last cycle of Socifaction, 7 initiatives are being developed that mainly focus on building a better ecosystem for people from different countries or with different cultural backgrounds. Most of the ideas focus on social cohesion via experiencing the culture and national cuisines, as an instrument to help build bridges between people and increase awareness of other cultures. No less important, the goal here is to build business cases that help to ensure sustainability of the solutions.²³

Lessons learned

In some of the EU member states the so called refugee crisis (in countries such as Lithuania and Latvia – even without refugees) could be considered not only as a challenge for integration policies and capacities to relocate and resettle refugees, but also as an opportunity to finally strengthen their integration infrastructure and, at the same time, create a more welcoming environment for asylum seekers and refugees; and not only for those relocated / resettled, but also for spontaneous arrivals. The Lithuanian case has shown that, despite many challenges that Lithuania is facing in the area of refugee reception and integration, some pressing issues have been solved by creating a more welcoming integration environment, and resettlement / relocation could be considered as a background for these changes.

When governmental institutions initiate good practices, NGOs and local communities keep up by mobilising volunteers and local community resources. In addition, after taking a decision to relocate / resettle refugees from Greece, Turkey and Italy, Lithuanian society has shown interest to understand the asylum and refugee integration processes from a broader perspective. This interest has fostered debates on one hand, and increased the number of volunteers on the other.

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INTEGRATION POLICIES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN ITALY: THE CASE OF LUCCA AND CATANIA

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Integration of migrants in Italy has been discussed by many scholars¹. However, the local governance of integration and immigration still seems to be a mystery and a still under-examined topic. In 1995, Freeman² categorized countries as 'settlement' (e.g. Canada and USA), 'post-colonial' (e.g. UK, Belgium and France), 'guest-worker' (e.g. Germany) and 'new immigration countries' (e.g. Italy and Spain). Italy was included in the last group as a country transitioning from traditionally a place of emigration to a migrant-receiving state. Twenty-three years after Freeman's writing, Italy is more than ever a country of immigration, experiencing remarkable migration pressures from documented, undocumented migrants, and asylum-seekers. Increased diversity can be observed within Italian society. This is because of the growth of a second generation of migrants, the high numbers of foreign nationals residing in the national territory (see Table 1), and how the recent migration crisis in the Mediterranean has made Italy one of the first European Union (EU) countries in terms of incoming migration (see Table 2).

Table 1. Number of foreign nationals residing in Italy in 2017, by geographical area of origin.

European Countries (non-EU 28)	1 070 445
Northern Africa	652 497
Western Africa	331 935
Eastern Africa	39 419
Central/Southern Africa	23 403
Western Asia	44 365
Eastern Asia	471 326
Southern Asia	504 023
Northern America	16 731
Central-Southern America	352 824
Oceania	2 122
TOTAL	3 509 090

Source: Authors' elaboration from ISTAT

Table 2. Migrant arrivals to Italy and the EU from the Mediterranean (2014-2017)

	EU	Italy (% on the EU total)
2017	172 301	119 369 (69%)
2016	362 753	181 436 (50%)
2015	1,015 078	153 842 (16%)
2014	216 054	170 100 (79%)

Source: Authors' elaboration from UNHCR.

In such a complex context, Italy seems now to be characterized by a 'super-diversity'¹ with recent massive arrivals of migrants of diverse nationalities² adding a new layer of confusion to Italian immigration trends of the past 20 years. These new

patterns of super-diversity raise significant challenges for migrant reception and integration, making the latter a 'hot' – and often-contested³ – issue that Italy needs to manage.

In this brief article, we aim to look at the implementation of integration policies at the local level, by drawing attention to two different municipalities in Italy. Whereas the bulk of scholars about the migration crisis in terms of management and implications at both the EU⁴ and Italian level⁵ less attention was devoted to a key phase of the migration trail, namely migrants' integration. This is an exploration of recent integration policies in Italy to analyze how integration is being implemented on the ground. The analysis of local case studies enables disentangling the main gaps and obstacles in implementation, as well as latest best practices potentially laying the ground for specific policy recommendations.

After having looked at the overall understanding of integration at the national level, we examine in comparative terms the two cases of Lucca and Catania in the regions of Tuscany and Sicily. The two regions are located in the Central-Northern and Southern part of the country, respectively. As such, the two selected municipalities stand as interesting cases to depict potential divergences or convergences and to explore whether the implementation of integration policies can be varied at the local level and between different parts of Italy. More specifically, our research questions are: how are integration policies implemented at the local level in Italy? What are the main difficulties and implementation gaps? What are the best practices or innovative methods to improve the lives of the immigrants? Who are the main actors (state, municipality, civil society associations, migrants' advocacy groups, etc.)?

In terms of methodology, secondary literature review and desk-based research were complemented by semi-structured interviews with experts responsible for implementing and promoting integration policies at the local level in Lucca and Catania. Associations, social workers and the municipal social support units were among the main stakeholders interviewed.

More specifically, questions were aimed at disentangling key actions for the social, economic and cultural integration of migrants and their main difficulties, as well as the complementarity and working links among different 'integration actors'.

The article is organized as follows: the first part provides an overview of integration policies in Italy at the national level, whereas the second examines the two local cases of Lucca and Catania. Finally, the last section of the article discusses comparative findings and explores possible policy recommendations on what can be improved at the local level and whether there are best practices that can be potentially replicated elsewhere to promote a better -as well as a two-way⁶- integration.

Opening the black box of integration policies: Background for the case of Italy

'Integration' is just one of the many buzzwords that -together with 'assimilation', 'inclusion', or 'absorption'⁷- have cluttered studies on how immigrants interact with the citizens, culture and institutions of the receiving country. It concerns the cultural, social, economic and political processes that happen when newcomers integrate into the existing systems of the host society, i.e. its labour market; its language, education and culture; its health, welfare and housing systems⁸. Experts suggest that the immigrants are not the only ones who are supposed to adapt. Rather, integration happens on a reciprocal basis, with the immigrants and the host community adapting to each other and striving to accommodate differences. In the several documents⁹ that make up the European framework for integration policies, the EU conceives of integration as a 'dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States'¹⁰, 'based on reciprocity of rights and obligations of third-countries nationals and host societies'¹¹. Integration policies, therefore, should achieve this purpose and devise concrete measures to address all the different economic, political, social, religious and cultural dimensions of integration.

Against this backdrop, what is Italy's political and policy approach to integration? In 2015, the country obtained a high score in the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), ranking above the European average¹².

Yet, Italian discussion and policymaking on integration have long developed in a slow and fragmented way, with no clear vision or policy design. While migration policies started to be organized in a more comprehensive way at the end of the 1980s, none of the laws adopted at that time¹³ sufficiently addressed the dimension of integration. There was still no proper budget and no fully-fledged policy framework, which left the burden to act on regional entities and local civil society associations¹⁴. It was only in the late 1990s that the issue of integration made its way to the national agenda, with the so-called 'Turco-Napolitano' Law (n.40/1998). Approved under a centre-left wing government, the law introduced for the first time the concept of 'reasonable integration', by emphasizing immigrants' social rights and well-being, as well as their access to the welfare state and the respect of religious and cultural diversity¹⁵. For this purpose, the law provided measures in the domain of health, intercultural education (including Italian language courses), and housing. While strengthening migration controls and restrictions, the following Bossi-Fini Law (n.189/2002) provided similar measures (language courses, cultural mediation, psychological support) to promote the integration of migrants and asylum-seekers¹⁶. Yet, neither law offered a clear definition of what integration is and resulted in an uneven implementation, which was mainly left as the responsibility of local actors and their resources.

A few years later, the attention on security during the 2008 national elections and the following approval of the so-called "Security Package", which established a linkage between migration and security, inevitably forced the issue of integration out of policy discourses¹⁷. In 2010, the debate on integration was again revamped with the adoption of the 'Pact for Integration'¹⁸, which entered into force in 2012, and provided for a 'compulsory integration path' for all third country national

(non-EU) residents in the Italian territory (with the exclusion of refugees). The integration path consists of different activities for learning the Italian language and the country's civic culture. As such, it seems to provide for a conceptualization of 'integration' that is far away from the 'two-way process' promoted by the EU. In those years the position of Minister of Integration was created for the first time, and integration soon returned to no longer being a matter of debate. In the 2013 elections, it was not a relevant topic in the campaign and Matteo Renzi's government definitively abolished the post of Integration Minister in 2014. Overall, integration policies in Italy have always been the result of a 'stop and go' process¹⁹, stemming from the twists and turns of uncertain political and policy decisions.

This fragmented approach generated mixed results. The MIPEX Index 2015 identified health as one of the integration dimensions in which Italy fared best, by granting immigrants health rights and access to sanitary structures. Yet, according to other studies, foreigners in Italy still seem to experience inequalities in accessing healthcare²⁰. In the domain of economic integration, initiatives such as the Program INSIDE, for the inclusion of vulnerable immigrants in the Italian job market, or the Program to promote migrants entrepreneurship, were allocated over € 4 million from the National Migration Policies Fund. However, managing economic integration remains a difficult task, especially in the context of the current migration crisis that has placed a considerable strain on Italian reception facilities and structures. As shown by Campomori²¹, the migrants temporarily welcomed in the so-called SPRARs²² are supposed to undergo a path of economic integration. Yet, in 2015, only 31.9% of the people leaving the SPRAR actually achieved true economic independence. Both the short-lived permanence and the fact that SPRARs are located mainly in Southern Italian regions, where job opportunities are limited, and the welfare system is less efficient, are among the factors hindering effective patterns of economic integration. Moreover, even when immigrants become economically integrated, this is not a guarantee for also being socially and culturally accepted by the host society²³. In this sense, Italy does not seem to have adopted

a holistic approach to integration, but the latter is rather addressed as a set of parallel dimensions.

The launch of the 'Migrant Integration Portal: Live and Work in Italy'²⁴, as a dedicated website to inform both migrants and national operators at all levels on the wide set of services available for integration (not only education but also the job market, housing, healthcare and social care for unaccompanied minors), is an attempt to adopt a more comprehensive approach. The Interior Minister, Marco Minniti, announced in September 2017 the launch of a new National Integration Plan. However, as we write, no new government has been formed after the March 2018 elections, it is difficult to foresee what the approach to integration of the next government will be. In the meantime, actors at the local level stand as the main service-deliverers to support and implement integration policies on the ground.

As suggested by Caneva²⁵, non-state actors and local governance carry great importance in terms of integration at the local level. In this sense, 'collateralismo', i.e. associations and parties being closely connected, reveals itself in the domain of integration policies²⁶. State and voluntary organizations in Italy are aware of the power of certain associative bodies -such as Caritas- and their capacity for managing irregular migration and helping immigrants²⁷. Yet, associations do not always have uniform practice across Italy, and monitoring them is often difficult.

The case of Lucca: What is being done at the local level for the integration of immigrants?

In recent years, Lucca has attracted an increasing number of foreign residents²⁸. Associations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), cooperatives etc. have a key role in promoting immigrants' integration and stand as key partners for both the prefecture²⁹ as well as the municipal administration. It is thanks to the cooperation with different associations that the local administration could inaugurate a 'Desk for Immigration' in 2012, with the purpose of facilitating immigrants' access to

local services and increasing awareness on every aspect related to permanence in Italy. The collaboration with local associations became even more important in recent years, when, following the migration crisis, the so-called ANCI Plan³⁰ called for an equal redistribution of migrants and asylum-seekers among Italian municipalities and across the national territory, according to the model of widespread reception³¹. Therefore, first reception in Lucca is today managed through a first-host hub run by the Red Cross that hosts around 100 people on average. Migrants are then accommodated in the so-called 'Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria' (CAS), i.e. reception centers that are variously located in the territory and that welcome up to 10 migrants. The CAS are managed by various cooperatives coordinated at the inter-municipal level³² and are where most integration activities are decided. In this variegated panorama of foreign residents, economic migrants and asylum-seekers, mixed - and often not uniform - integration practices emerge.

Several associations promote projects tailored to mutual integration by helping local people and immigrants learn about each other. This is, for instance, the case of the cooperative Odyssey and its initiative 'Add an extra place at the table', which allows for local integration initiatives such as families opening their homes for dinner with migrants, or for immigrants joining local football teams. The underlying logic is that 'mixing is the best way' to prompt two-way integration³³. This is also the reason why some other associations foster the host society's involvement by buying food supplies for migrants in small local shops rather than in large international chains, in order to promote the acceptance of migrants in economic terms as well³⁴. The 'mix' logic has also recently been applied to asylum-seekers who are now allowed to access the Provincial Centers for Adult Learning, where they can learn the Italian language and socialize with Italian people.

However, actions at the local level are not always coordinated, with activities scattered unevenly. As an interviewee put it: 'my impression is that no one really knows clearly what has to be done'³⁵. The lack of proper coordination at the local and

national levels inevitably hinders a comprehensive approach to integration in all its different dimensions. For example, whereas migrants might receive hospitality in terms of food, lodging, participation in events across the territory or help in requesting documents, they are often left alone in finding jobs and in overcoming language gaps³⁶. Moreover, there are still problems regarding two-way integration. Several projects, launched in partnership with the municipality, enable migrants to work voluntarily in support of urban decorum and public green spaces. The rationale is that by creating a positive image in the eyes of local population, the locals would then increase familiarity with foreigners and recognize their value³⁷. Yet, such a unilateral approach happens at the expense of integration as a two-way process. On the contrary, 'if you decide to clean a park, it is useless to form a team of cleaners who are all migrants, you need to form a mixed team'³⁸.

This remark reflects a more general attitude towards migrants: '[Italian] people often have prejudices and sometimes it is difficult for them to see the potential that migrants can bring'³⁹. These difficulties are further widened by the fact that the Italian State is often unaware of the situation on the ground. 'The inability to cope with this phenomenon and to encourage the local community to welcome and integrate are two aspects on which the Italian state should work harder'⁴⁰.

Integration of immigrants in the South of Italy: the case of Catania

Due to its geographical position in the core of the Mediterranean, Catania has always been a main immigration hub, with both associations and local institutional actors at the forefront of fully-fledged policies addressing integration and all its dimensions. Yet, as the city was considerably exposed to the migration crisis and hit by massive arrivals every day, the traditional holistic approach to integration was significantly challenged⁴¹.

In the late 1990s, local institutional actors implemented a comprehensive approach to integration through the launch of an

intercultural centre called 'Casa dei Popoli' (House of People). While prompted by the administration, the centre was built using a bottom-up approach and came as the result of multiple consultations with immigrants about needed services⁴². From the outset, the Casa dei Popoli stood out as a very effective 'integration' actor for two main reasons. First, it promoted integration tout court by using a single centre to provide different services: from language courses to cultural mediation on demand, and from healthcare assistance to legal and administrative support. In this sense, the centre developed as a main reference point for both immigrants and citizens, as well as for all other local 'integration' actors, such as schools, hospitals or tribunals. Its premises were also used for the so-called 'mobile Consulates', i.e. migrants had the chance to access the services of their Consulates directly on the territory, bypassing the burden of going to Rome or other bigger cities. Second, the centre stood as a virtuous example of two-way integration. Several activities (including events with local schools) were launched to let the citizenry get acquainted with immigrants as well as to understand migratory phenomena. Therefore, the *raison d'être* of the centre was to go beyond mere assistance and to build a system of mutual exchange between immigrants and the host society.

However, as the migration crisis turned immigration into a mixed flux of economic migrants and asylum-seekers, the municipal administration decided to change its approach by separating intercultural activities from those related to first reception and assistance. In this sense, whereas the previous Casa dei Popoli was a real multi-tasking unit 'integrating integration policies'⁴³, now many of the former activities fell apart. This had several consequences for effectiveness, since first reception came to be intended just in terms of pure care, with few -if any- actions in terms of integration⁴⁴. Therefore, if the former intercultural centre was once a real observatory for the territory, bridging institutional and non-state actors on the ground, after the dispersion of activities, associations re-emerged as key players to keep the multidimensional and joint character of integration.

Several non-governmental organizations, such as the Centro Astalli, strive to promote a holistic integration toolbox by providing in one single premise access to language classes, lawyers specialized in international law, support in job-finding and free healthcare. The latter remains a convoluted matter, as not all the hospitals in Catania have translators and cultural mediators. Overall, two main problems affect the effectiveness of integration policies on the ground. The first is the lack of coordination, not only among associations but also between associations and institutions. The second is that many of the activities carried out on the ground are not able to make the migrant independent. 'You know that integration worked when you, the migrant, become autonomous economically and socially'.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Across the years, Italy has become a land of diverse migrations and is already a multicultural society in many ways. Yet, Italian integration policies are not uniform either at the national or the local level. Whereas the chosen case studies represent two specific local realities, they still provide a snapshot of general problems affecting migrants' integration and reveal to what extent implementation varies across Italy. Overall, we can identify two main best practices for effective integration policies to be developed. The first is the need to adopt a 'migrant-host society mixed approach' able to promote a full-fledged two-way integration. The latter always involves fighting prejudices and bringing local people and hosted people together as a team. Creating common ground, common interests and an intercultural understanding works better than just 'assisting' people. Promoting immigrant autonomy and independence is fundamental for two-way integration to work. In this sense, access to the labour market remains one of the main starting points for integration.

The second best practice is that integration activities should be 'consolidated'. Working in a joint manner across all the dimensions that make up the integration policy toolbox helps develop a more effective approach. Migrants' reception and

intercultural activities should not be separated. For these practices to develop, the State should be 'brought back in' to make sure that the receptivity of the society is not limited only to volunteering organizations. The lack of national coordination gives rise to uneven implementation, with associations' capacities varying greatly. Moreover, the State should take measures to avoid economic vulnerability and any kind of exploitation, which could emanate from deregulated and unmonitored practices in the labour market.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge Georgiana Turculet on her useful comments on the Lucca case and we would like to acknowledge Lucia Del Chiaro for her contributions from the Municipality of Lucca, for their acceptance to interview with us in this occasion of conducting field-work.

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³² Agreement between the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) and the Ministry of Interior

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³⁵ Interview with Lucia Del Chiaro, Municipality of Lucca, 25 February 2018.

³⁶ Interview with an association working in Lucca, 8 March 2018.

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WHEN REGIONAL INCLUSION OUTPERFORMS THE STATE: THE CASE OF THE SPANISH BASQUE COUNTRY

TINA MAGAZZINI

The present chapter aims at describing the case of the Spanish Basque Country, one of Spain's seventeen regions, and how it has coped with its changing population over the past decades. The reason for scrutinizing this particular region is that it has introduced some policies and practices aimed at social inclusion that could—as will be argued—be usefully employed elsewhere to strengthen the social integration of European societies. In keeping with this volume's focus on practices of solidarity and migrant integration, the wider argument of this chapter is that such practices need not necessarily be aimed at the migrant population, in order to benefit migrants. The Basque case shows how, since migrants and refugees tend to be overrepresented in the most vulnerable sectors of society, inclusive welfare policies can function as useful temporary safety nets, when such policies do not exclude potential beneficiaries based on their nationality.

Introduction

The Spanish Basque Country¹, or Basque Autonomous Community (Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco, CAPV), is comprised of three historical provinces—Alava, Biscay and Gipuzcoa—which, population-wise, are inhabited by slightly over two million people. While in demographic terms it amounts to hardly 5% of the Spanish population and hosts a relatively small number of refugees and migrants, it is the Spanish region that invests the most in inclusion policies by a large margin².

Taking its welfare services as a departing point, I believe the Basque case is salient to the European integration debate for both practical and conceptual reasons. On the practical side, it offers a 'pilot case' of how high expenditures in social services can be a sensible economic investment in the medium and long term for social integration, even though the inclusion measures themselves might not be explicitly targeted at migrants. In conceptual terms, the CAPV provides a good lens through which to observe how ethno-national identities situated 'at the periphery of the State' can redraw their solidarity boundaries to negotiate the inclusion of immigrants. The Basque Country is an autonomous region where identification with the Spanish State remains a controversial topic, thus the origin of widening access to services to migrants might be ideological. Be it as it may, the result has been to normalize the idea that integration rests on ensuring that no resident is denied basic services nor lives in poverty, irrespective of country of origin. This, in turn, might in the long run contribute to construct an idea of 'nation' and/ or 'who the locals are'³ that is not narrowly limited to those born in a specific city, region or country.

As argued by Andrea Ruiz Balzola "[...] integration policies are policies of nation-building. This assertion is relevant for nation-states, as well as for national minorities who specifically aspire to have a separate state. It is precisely because integration policies are nation-building policies that minority nations attempt to link their nationalist politics to immigration policy"⁴. In order to illustrate how and why the CAPV can serve as a positive example of integration practices, the chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, I will outline how immigrant integration policies emerged and developed in the Basque Country; how integration can be operationalized by the welfare services offered by a polity, and by the requirements it places to access such services. Finally, I will draw some brief conclusions from the policies described.

In terms of methodology, this analysis of the Basque case with regard to integration policies and practices is based mainly on official documentation regarding the integration strategies in

the region. It however also draws on the participation in a local network aimed at debunking stereotypes on migrants and refugees (Antirumores) and semi-structured interviews with street-level bureaucrats, as well as on field observations and on the participation in the drafting of a green paper on social cohesion in the Basque Country for context and detail.

Immigrant integration policies in the CAPV

In answering the question "what type of policies do minority nations develop to accommodate immigrants and are they more or less liberal than state policies?" it has been convincingly argued that generalizations are unhelpful, and that any analysis must take into account the specific context. Ruiz Vieytez has put forward the case that the Basque sovereignty movements have not yet incorporated the new social realities of migration into their imagination of nationhood or of Basque national ideal⁵. The same author, amongst others, has however also made the point that the Basque Country as a regional autonomy has, over the past two decades, developed integration policies to accommodate immigrants that are more inclusive than those of the Spanish state, particularly with respect to welfare benefits⁶.

Such considerations raise a compelling question: how can a population that is not (at least not yet) perceived as part of the local imagined community be included in welfare policies without it leading to strong anti-migrant sentiments?

The first of four Basque immigration plans dates back to 2003, when it was pushed for by two small nationalist left-wing parties, the United Left (Ezker Batua, EB) and Basque Solidarity (Eusko Alkartasua, EA), which were in coalition with the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and successfully lobbied for an Immigration Plan to be included in the Basque government's programme. This followed a more general trend, which saw most of Spain's seventeen Autonomous Communities adopt similar plans in the late 1990s or beginning of 2000s⁷. Against this backdrop, the Basque Country created in 2001 its first

Immigration Directorate, headed by Omer Oke, a Benin national (who at the time did not hold Spanish citizenship). The Immigration Directorate helped create a number of agencies, such as the Legal Services and Social Care for Immigrants which provided free legal support to migrants (Heldu), the Basque Service of Integration and Intercultural Coexistence (Biltzen), the Forum for the Participation of Immigrant Citizens, and the Basque Observatory for Immigration (Ikuspegi), which has been collecting data on perceptions towards immigration in the Basque Country since 2004.

Following the first Immigration plan for the Basque Country in 2003, updated plans were approved in 2007, 2011 and 2017⁸. The ways in which the Basque Government chose to define ‘integration’ in its Plans can be subsumed into two main components. On the one hand the vocabulary employed is one of inclusion and rights. Mindful of being a minority nation that opposes assimilationist policies, the Basque Immigration Plans⁹ consistently refer to bi-directionality in integration, to inter-culturalism, to integration as social responsibility, and to ‘full political inclusion and rights’¹⁰. It is noteworthy that the first Basque Immigration Plan states: “Full integration requires the possibility of the foreign person to incorporate herself or himself into the political community, which in turn requires the recognition of a new citizenship status, not tied to the nationalist component”¹¹. While such claim remains within the realm of declaration of intentions, since being able to vote in regional and local elections requires Spanish citizenship, this position is in line with the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country of 1979, which states in its article 7: “For the purposes of this Statute, the political status of Basque shall be accorded to all who are officially resident, according to the General Laws of the State, in any of the municipalities belonging to the territory of the Autonomous Community”. In short, Basque nationalism has tended, at least from the late 1970s, to utilize a residential criteria rather than an ethnic or linguistic one. On the other hand the inclusion narrative is underpinned by an economic view according to which immigrants are seen as workforce, as an economic ‘buffer’ that contributes to the society and that as such should be granted equal opportunities.

In the second Basque Immigration Plan of 2007 there was a re-affirmation of socio-economic solidarity as one of the basis for an intercultural society. As a result of the institutions created, particularly the Observatory on the attitudes towards immigration, some first estimates were by 2007 available regarding people’s perception of immigration, which saw an 85% of the Basque population in favour of extending voting rights to (regular) migrants, largely seen as a needed workforce. These attitudes worsened in 2009 and 2010 as a result of the economic crisis, but have returned to similar percentages in the last few years. The third Immigration Plan of 2011 acknowledged that an ‘ethnification’ of poverty and social exclusion was taking place¹². Taking stock of these developments, the latest Immigration Plan of 2017 has placed the attention squarely on reducing poverty in the Basque Country by 20% by 2021, “in line with our commitment toward labour inclusion and towards supporting those sectors of the population who have been the hardest hit by the crisis”¹³.

The basic income policy and housing services

The Renta de Garantía de Ingreso (RGI), the basic income policy, was introduced in the Basque Country in 1989 under the name of ‘minimum family income’ (Ingreso Mínimo Familiar) by a Basque Parliament led by a PNV in which much of the social stances were embedded with a Catholic culture with social leanings.

The RGI is the most well-known welfare support available to those who are have no other source of income in the Basque Country, or whose income falls below the amount considered to be the minimum needed for a dignified life, which is set to approximately 700 euro per month for a single individual¹⁴. Even though the measure has been politicized on occasion, the RGI is widely regarded as a fundamental pillar of integration for all. According to a former civil servant,

‘in 1988 we faced an integration challenge: many of our co-citizens at that time found themselves in a situation of

marginalization due to post-industrial changes in the Basque society, coupled with a profound economic and identitarian crisis. You now see a Bilbao which is clean, organized and attractive to tourists, but in the eighties we lost an entire generation to the [ETA] conflict and the drug epidemic. The law that created the RGI was part of a strategy to invest in society; it got to be known as the ‘inclusion minimum’ but was really just one of the tools to promote solidarity and reduce poverty, not a stand-alone measure. Anyways, it was approved by unanimity in the Basque Parliament. And, against all odds, it worked.’ (author’s translation, interview with public official, Bilbao, 5 April 2017).

While measuring the ‘success’ of inclusion policies is always difficult and uncertain, indeed the percentage of people who are at-risk-of-poverty in the CAPV is the lowest in the country. This does not however mean that migrants enjoy the same opportunities as the majority population, since they are overrepresented in temporary, low-paying jobs. It is precisely the most vulnerable sectors of the population that were the most affected by the economic crisis that hit the Basque Country in 2009-2010¹⁵. This resulted in a number of unemployed or underemployed immigrants residing in the Basque Country making use of the RGI. It is important to note that the RGI is a right based on the need of each individual, which cannot be denied based on lack of funds, therefore the regional budget’s expenditure in the years of economic crisis raised¹⁶. Even though a change in the Basque government made, in 2009¹⁷, the requirements to access the RGI stricter¹⁸, the percentages reported by the Ikuspegi between 2010 and 2017 show that non-Spanish nationals in the Basque Country, which constitute around 9% of the population, accounted over the past decade for an average of approximately 30-35% of RGI beneficiaries. In other words, migrants residing in the CAPV find themselves disproportionately occupying the most vulnerable employment sectors, as is the case in most of Europe. Precisely for this reason, the basic income policy scheme is so relevant for this part of the population, which generally lack other safety nets (such as family) in times of economic hardship. Additionally, local officers work-

ing social benefits claim that it is rare for migrants to remain for long periods of time in the RGI scheme. Most of the recurrent receptors of the RGI are rather pensioners (approximately 25% of total beneficiaries), particularly widows, whose pension is so low that it needs to be complemented in order to reach the basic income.

While the RGI was not envisioned as specifically aimed at the CAPV’s migrant population, one practice that has been emerging at the municipal level in a number of Basque cities and which works directly and exclusively to help refugees and asylum seekers find housing. Such services stemmed from the fact that it is close to impossible for refugees and asylum seekers to secure affordable and proper housing in cities such as Bilbao, where the real estate market has been rising for decades (despite a brief halt during the economic crisis). This is far from being a problem unique to the Basque Country: studies across Europe show that on average, home-owners prefer to rent their properties to nationals, and that Third Country Nationals tend to be particularly discriminated against, have a harder time finding an apartment to rent and/ or pay comparatively more than a national for the same housing¹⁹. Given these factors, Basque municipalities have taken it upon themselves, or delegated to pro-migrant NGOs while serving as a financial guarantor, to secure housing for asylum seekers and refugees. While there is yet no comprehensive study to show how this initiative is performing in terms of absolute numbers, the local policy makers interviewed stated that house-owners have been significantly more receptive to being approached and engaged by a public-affiliated body or organization than by the refugees themselves. Given that refugees in Spain are entitled to some form of support for the first 18 months²⁰, this is a practice that, apart from improving the housing conditions of refugees (and the stress related to being rejected multiple times in search for an apartment), can also optimize the resources invested by the State in housing integration.

Conclusion

While migrant integration is always context-specific, and depends on a myriad of factors—from a country's colonial history, institutions, previous migration experiences, the demographics of both the receiving and incoming populations, and so on—some conclusions can be drawn from the Basque case and its integration policies.

Firstly, the choice of a 'residential' approach over a national, linguistic or ethnic one as a baseline for access to social services provides a distinctive advantage to fostering migrants' integration, since those who need the assistance of public institutions the most are precisely those who lack other support channels. Ensuring that migrants fall within the scope of inclusive policies without singling them out can also prove less controversial in mainstream society than specific aid that is aimed at migrants, and which might be perceived as 'reverse discrimination' by part of the majority. Such an approach, however, can only be successfully implemented and replicated with a disclaimer, which is: inclusive policies require a welfare state that is concerned with ensuring some degree of equality in the first place. In the absence of a functioning welfare state that caters to its citizens, and of budget commitments that can meaningfully operationalize it, inclusive policies risk becoming hollow promises.

Secondly, since residents' integration hinges both on the inclusiveness of institutions and on the support they receive from other members of society²¹ (Schweitzer 2017), the intersections between racial discrimination and socio-economic standing must be taken into account when shaping (regional, local or national) integration policies. Systems of inequality are produced and reproduced through the overlap of multiple disadvantages; thus specific needs (such as housing for refugees, or language courses for migrants, for instance) need to be addressed.

While there is certainly room for improvement in the CAPV's management of diversity, what this case shows is that the role that socio-economic integration policies can (and should) play is one that caters to residents based on their needs rather than on citizenship requirements.

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- ² The population of non-Spanish citizens residing in the CAPV is of approximately 9% (196.589 in 2017, according to the Basque Immigration Observatory) of the total population of residents in the region (2.168.254 according to the census in 2017). In terms of resources dedicated to social services, the CAPV invested an average of 611,8 euro per inhabitant in 2016, almost as twice as the national average. See García, G., et al., Índice DEC. Índice de desarrollo de los servicios sociales 2017 / Índice DEC. Valoración del desarrollo de los servicios sociales por comunidades autónomas 2017. Madrid, Asociación Estatal de Directores y Gerentes en Servicios Sociales.
- ³ Buhr, F. (2018). Using the City: Migrant Spatial Integration as Urban Practice. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44 (2): 307-20.
- ⁴ Ruiz Balzola, Andrea. 2016. Migration and Diversity in the Discourse on Basque Sovereignty, p.119. In *Pro-Independence Movements and Immigration: Discourse, Policy and Practice*, edited by Roberta Medda-Windischer, Johanna Mitterhofer, and Patricia Popelier. Brill.
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- ⁷ Blázquez Rodríguez, Irene. 2009. Comunidades Autónomas E Integración de Los Extranjeros, p. 77. In *La Integración de Los Extranjeros. Un Análisis Transversal Desde Andalucía*, edited by Sixto Sánchez Lorenzo, 65-84. Atelier.

⁸ Alongside the regional dimension, local initiatives were also established and funded, and the Basque Parliament appealed several laws promoted by the central Spanish government aimed at restricting the rights of immigrants, particularly with reference to welfare benefits.

⁹ See Plan Vasco de Inmigración: 2003-2005; II Plan Vasco de Inmigración: 2007-2009; III Plan Vasco de Inmigración, Ciudadanía y Convivencia Intercultural: 2011-2013; IV Plan Vasco de Inmigración: 2017-2021. All are available (in Spanish and Basque) at <http://www.euskadi.eus/planes-estrategicos-inmigrantes/web01-a2famil/es/>

¹⁰ See the 2003 Basque Government Plan, p. 63-64.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

¹² The Plan put forward the idea of a Social Pact for Immigrant Integration, which was drafted the year later by Basque academics. The Social Pact constitutes an inclusive and progressive roadmap, which however lacks concrete actions and resources to have tangible effects.

¹³ Statement by the Councillor for Employment and Social Policies of the Basque Country, September 2017. Available at <http://www.europapress.es/euskadi/noticia-iv-plan-vasco-inclusion-2017-2021-buscara-reducir-20-tasa-pobreza-euskadi-20170925170601.html>

¹⁴ For details regarding conditions and eligibility of the RGI see (in Spanish) <http://www.lanbide.euskadi.eus/rgi/>

¹⁵ See the statistics provided by Ikuspegi, the Basque Observatory on Immigration, available at <http://www.ikuspegi.eus/es/>

¹⁶ While the rise in the number of residents entitled to the RGI did affect the regional budget, it is not—nor has ever been—the most significant expenditure in social services, which remain the health sector followed by the education sector.

¹⁷ Between 2009-2012 the Basque government saw its first (and so far only) non-Basque nationalist leadership, in which the People's Party (PP) and the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) joined forces to defeat the PNV, which resulted in a Lehendakari (Basque Prime Minister) from the PSOE.

¹⁸ The main change was that until 2009 it was enough to have resided one year in the Basque Country to be eligible for the RGI. This residency requirement was changed to three years under Patxi Lopez (the head of the Basque government, member of the Socialist party, who was in office from 2009 to 2012). When the PNV regained power in 2012, it left the set requirement to three years.

¹⁹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2016. Monthly Data Collection on the Current Migration Situation in the EU - July 2016 Monthly Report.

²⁰ Typically, during the first 6 months refugees are hosted in reception facilities, while the following year includes economic support, which varies depending on the specific situation.

²¹ Schweitzer, Reinhard. 2017. Integration against the State: Irregular Migrants' Agency between Deportation and Regularisation in the United Kingdom. *Politics*, Vol. 37(3): 317-331.

CONCLUSION

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Since 2015 the – somehow improperly called – “refugee crisis” forced all EU Member States, also those that had been so far only marginally touched by the phenomenon of migration, to introduce new measures to cope with a larger influx of immigrants. In spite of the steps forward in certain areas (such as border control, security, fight against smuggling networks, and partnerships with countries of origin and transit), the European response to the growing inflows has been inadequate. This has made the question into a political and solidarity crisis within the EU and among EU Member States. Areas, such as reform of the common asylum system and, above all, the reform of the Dublin regulation – that determines what Member State is responsible for examining an application for asylum – remain unsolved, blocked by the lack of political willingness and by the strong reluctance by some countries, in particular the so-called Visegrad countries (that is, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic – but unfortunately the front has since enlarged), to accept any form of solidarity-sharing.

At European level, much less attention has been devoted to the question of integration, as this is still a field largely in the hands of the Member States. Most European countries have tried to adjust their integration capabilities to meet the increasing number of migrants, with different degrees of efforts and outcomes. Yet, an effective integration policy is essential to ensure the inclusion of the migrants in the social fabric of the hosting countries, to avert and ease tensions between newcomers and citizens, and to prevent the consequences that social marginalisation, alienation and inactivity can induce in

the refugees and migrants. These are consequences that have an impact not only on the migrant on a personal level and on his/her capability to contribute in economic, social and economic terms to the hosting country, but on the receiving society at large.

It is to be said that it is not possible to offer a single “recipe” for a successful integration policy. Every country has its own cultural, social, economic, administrative and political peculiarities that make extremely difficult to devise measures that can be applied and would work in any possible case. However, some guiding principles can be deduced by the many best practices that indeed exist in the European Union Member States, sometime at national level, more often at the regional and local ones. It is indeed above all at local level that interactions between migrants and receiving societies occur, and it is at local level that integration measures are inescapably applied.

This book necessarily only offered snapshots of very diverse situations, as the analysis of best practices cannot be comprehensive. However, through the observation of some experiences in ten EU Member States – that differ from each other in terms of cultural background, number of migrants received, and political and administrative organisation – it was possible to extrapolate some elements that could be useful also elsewhere. Inevitably the analysis of best practices puts also the fingers on the many gaps, shortcomings, inadequacies, and fragmentations that characterise integration policies in numerous Member States.

The lack of a general vision on the kind of (inclusive) society national governments want to build is, for example, an obvious deficiency that can invalidate any effort to ease newcomer inclusion into society. Often this flawed approach is accompanied by the tendency to formulate policies that result in a fragmented scenario. They either deal separately with the different areas of integration (education, housing, employment, healthcare, training, language and cultural courses, recreational activities, etc.), establishing a set of “parallel dimensions”, or

are characterised by discrepancies between administrative levels (particularly in highly decentralised countries). A sort of “patchwork” that can be confusing and misleading for migrants, practitioners and citizens themselves.

A first lesson learned from the analysis of best practices therefore concerns the fundamental prerequisites of formulating and presenting a clear vision of society. And, then, of promoting a holistic approach and policies that aims at creating synergies and cross fertilisation among different fields and different actors.

Overcoming and fighting prejudices and concerns towards the newcomers is, of course, essential, even if – against the current European political background and the rising scepticism of European public opinions – extremely difficult. It is necessary to normalise the idea of migration – which in Europe is currently blamed for countless faults – presenting migrants as the contributors to society and economy they actually are. The very process of integration is also to be normalised by promoting policies that aim at general objectives of reduction of poverty and inequalities, at ensuring services irrespective of the countries of origin, and at investing in the future of the hosting countries at large.

It is recognised that integration is a two-way process that involves the newcomers on the one hand and the hosting society on the other. As such it requires adjustments on both sides. To facilitate this process, mixing is a fundamental factor. Measures that favour contacts, interactions, and exchanges, that facilitates acceptances (for example, in the circle of peers, as the case of Belgium suggests) are useful instruments and can have a spill-over effect, on the other social circles and on the families and friends of the newcomers.

Moreover, a transparent approach, the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process concerning the inclusion of migrants in the communities are important tools to overcome prejudices and suspects towards the foreigners.

Most chapters in the book tackled the essential role played by civil society organisations (CSOs) that deal with migrants in many EU Member States, from Sweden to Greece or Italy. In some cases, CSOs have even made up for the many shortcomings of the public authorities. There is no doubt that their role is essential in providing first support and services, and in promoting integration. However, while their invaluable work and of their function of bridge between newcomers and native population is to be recognised, they cannot and must not replace public authorities, particularly in the provision of basic services that imply fundamental rights.

The kind of funding civil society organisations receive and the resulting agreement between CSOs and public authorities is also very important for effective involvement of civil society in the process of integration. Experience would suggest that agreements that reduce relations between the public sector and CSOs to a client-supplier one should be avoided. It is above all the quality of the activities carried out and not the economic advantage that must drive the decision to entrust an organisation with the duty to provide a service.

As mentioned earlier and as it has clearly emerged in the individual chapters, the European dimension is largely lacking. However, even if, as it has been underlined above, the process of integration mostly occurs at the local level, the fragmentation of the relevant legislations and policies and the different application and outcome would suggest the need for the European Union to be more present in the definition of precise standards of reception and integration. The EU should also be involved in the role of monitoring, in order to prevent the huge differences that exist between the outcomes of the Member States' integration policies.

Migration is constantly increasing, as statistics remind us. It is therefore crucial to devise effective integration policies that promote the inclusion of newcomers in our societies. We cannot leave the future of the European social fabric to the chance. But in order to do that, we should have a clear idea of what

kind of society we want to build. An inclusive society cannot be built on ethnicity or religion, even if extreme right and populist parties all over Europe strongly suggest that this is what defines our national identities. An inclusive society can indeed be built on those fundamental values of freedom, respect for human rights and dignity, and solidarity on which the EU was founded. Fundamental values that we should constantly underpin and promote.

BIOGRAPHIES



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Giedrė Blažytė is researcher at the Institute for Ethnic Studies of Lithuanian Social Research Centre and NGO “Diversity Development Group”. Research interests in areas of contemporary migration issues, migration and gender, family migration, fundamental rights and equal opportunities. Giedrė Blažytė holds PhD degree in Social Sciences (Sociology).



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FEPS is the only progressive think tank at European level. FEPS establishes an intellectual crossroad between social democracy and the European project, putting fresh thinking at the core of its action. As a platform for ideas and dialogue, FEPS works in close collaboration with social democratic organisations, and in particular national foundations and think tanks across Europe, to tackle the challenges that Europe faces today. Our main purpose is to nourish a fresh progressive dialogue through its research, which includes Next Left and Millennial Dialogue programmes. Activities are in person or online and available in different formats, notably FEPS Progressive Post magazine as well as further publications and events where you can find our material.



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Freedom and Solidarity Foundation (BSF – Brīvības un solidaritātes fonds) has been established in 2007. BSF is primarily focused on organization of various educational events about important up-to-date issues. To achieve its goals, BSF holds discussions, conferences, seminars, lectures and other informative events, as well as publishes related articles on its website and elsewhere. BSF sees academic environment as the main and most fruitful contributor of serious proposals for public governance organizations in order to develop effective and better solutions to improve welfare of the state, to encourage social justice, as well as to form successful and modern society in Latvia.



This collection of articles illustrates diverse approaches used in some EU member states which have led to successful integration of newcomers. The aim of this book is to enable a better exchange of experiences between experts in migrant and refugee integration in the member states and to raise awareness in the broader public of the importance of effective and comprehensive integration programmes, in order to advocate a genuine European solidarity towards newcomers while fostering the social cohesion of the receiving societies.

- This book is edited by FEPS with the financial support of the European Parliament
- **ISBN number** 978-2-930769-08-0