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PLATFORM OF
INTEGRATING
CITIES

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CHAPTER 01

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPIC JOURNEY

This document aims to provide a summary of what these three and a half years of work have meant for the EPIC project, its partners and all those organisations and individuals who, in one way or another, have benefited from this initiative. The timeframe and collaborative environment of the project provided the partners with the incredible opportunity to look from different angles at the complexity of local realities within their migratory and administrative contexts, and the opportunity, or the headache, of readjusting plans several times amid a context that posed difficulties never experienced at the global level. The COVID-19 pandemic, which hit migrant communities more harshly than other communities, the fall of the government in Afghanistan, and the war in Ukraine, brought unprecedented

challenges for those working on the frontline, as it is the case for many EPIC partners and the necessity of changing plans rapidly to give priority to most pressing issues. Even so, the project has managed to reinvest and conclude its activities by ensuring that its co-creation and implementation have been carried out through a human-rights approach.

The project kicked off with a baseline analysis (research phase -chapter 2) designed to first, understand how individuals perceive and refer to processes and practices of settlement, belonging and place-making. And secondly, to identify perceived priorities and challenges in terms of accessing and enjoying the 'right to the city' (including access to urban provision systems related to housing, education,



healthcare, and job market, and participation in social and political life). This baseline analysis laid the foundations to identify the main areas of intervention of each EPIC partner city, design a capacity-building process answering to the concrete needs of each territory (chapter 3) and ultimately, to co-produce new practices that reduce urban inequality (the EPIC pilot projects; chapter 4).

EPIC started by launching an online survey collecting information on migration and integration practices in the EU. In the end, nearly 700 residents from 11 European cities shared their reflections. The results of the survey, interviews, focus groups and desk research were published in the **Unsettling integration: EPIC research report** in late 2020. Through this process, we attempted to go back once more to the notion of integration, question its foundations, to rethink hospitality and citizenship. After a first year of fruitful analysis and discussion that allowed the project to have a deeper understanding, and once the best practices and needs of each territory were identified, the project created pairs among partners formed by one Local authority (LA) and one NGO with expertise in a specific sector on migrants' integration and one LAs and NGOs that needs support to acquire skills in that specific area. EPIC's fundamental idea is that cities and regions in the EU have been dealing with migration issues for many years, some longer, some shorter but the nature of challenges are very often similar and therefore, cities could (and should) learn from each other

to manage those challenges in most effective for both migrants and host societies, ideally making them a cohesive whole. Hence, the EPIC cities became their own mentors-mentees, in a process where 'matched cities', taught each other's.

In parallel, EPIC's partners became familiar with communication tools to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices about migration as well as strategies and methodologies to design alternative narrative campaigns. In this framework, the project organised a series of **webinars** and participatory workshops with the partners using a dedicated **toolkit** to design their communication strategy and eventually, delivering 8 local alternative communication campaigns about migration (chapter 6).

The following chapters detail the main elements of this EPIC journey, the main achievements and the lessons learned to continue working towards a society capable of delivering more inclusive services for all.



CHAPTER 02

BASELINE ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

During 2020-21 the EPIC partner University College of London (UCL) led a baseline analysis to explore the diversity of responses to migration and refuge across eleven European urban spaces and the different strategies put in place by migrants to navigate and learn the city. In particular, the analysis was designed to: (1) elicit subjective definitions and experiences of 'integration', to understand how individuals perceive and refer to processes and practices of settlement, belonging and place-making; (2) identify perceived priorities and challenges in terms of accessing and enjoying the 'right to the city' (including access to urban provision systems related to housing, education, healthcare, and job market, and participation into social and political life) in order to co-

produce new practices that reduce urban inequality (pilot projects).

To achieve its objectives and capitalise on the collaborative environment of the EPIC project, the analysis combined literature and policy review (academic papers, research reports and policy documents) with surveys and interviews conducted across a sample of around 700 participants. As part of an effort to move away from quantitative, un-positioned and un-reflexive research, especially during a pandemic, the survey was designed to avoid issues of categorization and stigma in research methods and to separate vulnerability as a concept from a permanent condition. The focus was on parts of the whole population as urban inhabitants, including diverse groups with different backgrounds, needs, ambitions, and trajectories.

The analysis underlines the importance of recognising the diversity in migration and 'integration' trajectories, their subjective and emotional dimension beyond overarching, rigid and ultimately racist frameworks. Policy design and support practices should reflect this, by shifting focus from imposing linear 'integration' trajectories to removing obstacles to urban equality. The analysis further evidences the coloniality (the permanence of colonial patterns) of the current policy and discursive notion of integration and proposes alternative frameworks that focus on collective urban life. While migration research has advocated for this for a long time, policy and practice in the EU continue to be framed by an idea of integration that remains problematic. To change this, institutions and organisations can work toward co-creating their own de-colonised lexicon to describe and address migrant 'integration' in terms of urban equality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review analyses the existing literature on migration and integration to deconstruct and transcend the concept of integration. Despite being used as a policy objective by various organizations, there is a lack of clarity about what integration looks like and how it should be evaluated. The literature highlights how integration is often framed as a negative instance, as the inability of an individual to conform to society or place, thus necessitating the development of integration services. Moreover, existing literature further points out how integration is generally considered a one-way process, with little attention paid to how a society can integrate into foreign groups and individuals. The discourse around integration has developed over time in response to inadequacies of the asylum reception and integration processes, particularly since the 2015 migration crisis. This has led to reconceptualization and redefinitions of integration against various backgrounds and frames of analysis. The analysis offers the framework of "inhabitation", a relational feminist practice consisting of multiple formal and informal encounters between people, places, institutions, and services developed to maintain and endure life. This understanding shifts the focus from pre-set categories and needs to the historical and present experiences of those who 'have to integrate', recognizing the centrality of inhabitants, including migrants' and refugees' assessments.



The "Unsettling Integration" Research

Report the findings from those surveys and interviews and reflects on the methodology used.

KEY CONCEPTS USED IN THE RESEARCH

Inhabitation: A proposed framework that emphasizes a relational understanding of integration, focusing on the multiple encounters between people, places, institutions, and services that are useful to support life. In the context of migration and integration, inhabitation recognizes the historical and present experiences of migrants and refugees, valuing and amplifying their perspectives and assessments.

Right to the city: The right to access urban services (housing, jobs, etc.), and to be involved and contribute to social, cultural, and political activities that shape urban life.

Agency: The capacity of individuals to act independently, make choices, and exert control over their lives, playing a key role in shaping urban life.

Migranticised Language: Language that categorizes individuals based on their migration status, perpetuating stereotypes and unequal power dynamics.

Coloniality: The permanence of colonial patterns within current societal order and ways of knowing. It implies forms of discrimination and racism that outlived formal colonialism and are embedded in social relations and knowledge production (including research).

Reflexivity: The ability to reflect on how individual beliefs influence the research or any other setting, and vice versa; and the ability to remain alert to the (re)surfacing of normative (colonial, patriarchal, racist) language and ideologies.

De-coloniality: Decolonising means getting rid of hierarchies and power structures that are embedded in social relations and knowledge production, to embrace many perspectives, especially of those who are excluded.

Urban equality: A concept of social justice applied to cities and urban dwellers that includes participation in urban life, recognition and equal distribution of resources and access (Levy et al).

METHODOLOGY

The project employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including desk research, online surveys, and oral narratives. The latter was a mixture of in-person and online due to travel and other restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The desk research involved a literature review, consultation of policy, mapping of local good practices, and analysis of data on migration and integration. The online survey was grounded in the findings of the desk review and aimed to deconstruct people's ideas of integration, provide feedback on certain services, and learn about less-known strategies and practices of integration, including how migrants have been impacted by COVID-19. The survey was designed to challenge the host/migrants' dichotomy and move away from pre-set categories to let participants define themselves without bias and construct their own truth. For instance, the first question of the survey was articulated around the notion of 'heritage' to avoid asking "what country are you from" and implying an 'othering' intention.

During interviews, photo-elicitation was used to explore the meaning of place in the context of migration and integration. Thirteen interview participants were asked to share images that represented a space which brought them comfort or belonging, either within or close to their home. While some participants shared photographs of local areas, others interpreted the question of "home" differently, incorporating feeling and memory within their interpretation.

The research faced several ethical issues, including the digital divide among participants, and biases in sampling and recruitment, among others. The process involved long discussions with partners on whether the research was still needed – given the pandemic outbreak - and its impact. An attempt was made to make the research activities less time-consuming for participants, more meaningful, and as empowering as possible, following instances of research justice.



FINDINGS

This section is divided into two segments; the first segment presents the results of surveys and interviews conducted in nine cities with around 700 participants on subjective definitions and individual experiences of 'integration'. The second segment investigates the city-specific findings in terms of the needs, strengths and thoughts on the existing urban provision systems and practices.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Out of 685 survey respondents, 52% identified as having moved to the city they were in, and 45% as having been born there. An analysis of the differences between these two groups found marginal differences in responses, supporting the hypothesis that integration is a more general phenomenon of human experience. In terms of identity, the survey asked participants about their heritage, allowing for a range of diverse responses such as parental background, historical and cultural attachments, memory, and humanistic values and principles. The survey also included standard demographic questions such as age and gender, with a balance slightly tipped towards female respondents. 25% of respondents reported having worked for a migrant integration-related practice. The survey was divided into three parts to understand people's relation to place, the meaning, and attributes of integration, and institutional versus people-led practices and spaces of inhabitation.

The meaning of integration. The survey asked respondents whether they understood and think of the term integration. As illustrated in Figure 1, of the 469 respondents who defined integration, 10 themes emerged, including belonging, adaptation, difference, two-way, welcome, equality, participation, respect, agency, and process. The responses used diverse language, with inclusion and assimilation being the most used terms. Responses also revealed a pattern of integration is viewed as a process of unity or becoming one, but with some perceiving it as a smaller part joining a larger one, while others viewed it as two equal parts joining.

“Integration is real only when the majority as well adapts and broadens its cultural and experiential horizon by including characteristics of the minority, albeit to a lesser extent than the other direction. Otherwise, when it is only the minority that makes the habits and customs of the majority their own, without an exchange, I would speak only of assimilation.”

“[Integration is] incorporating new elements into a whole”

“Merging something new with something old.”

“To conform someone or insert something from the outside into the bigger picture.”

“For me, integration is about having the same opportunities and rights as local people.”

“Integration is, or should be, a process in which, through getting to know each other and exchanging knowledge, customs, traditions, a new society is created together.”

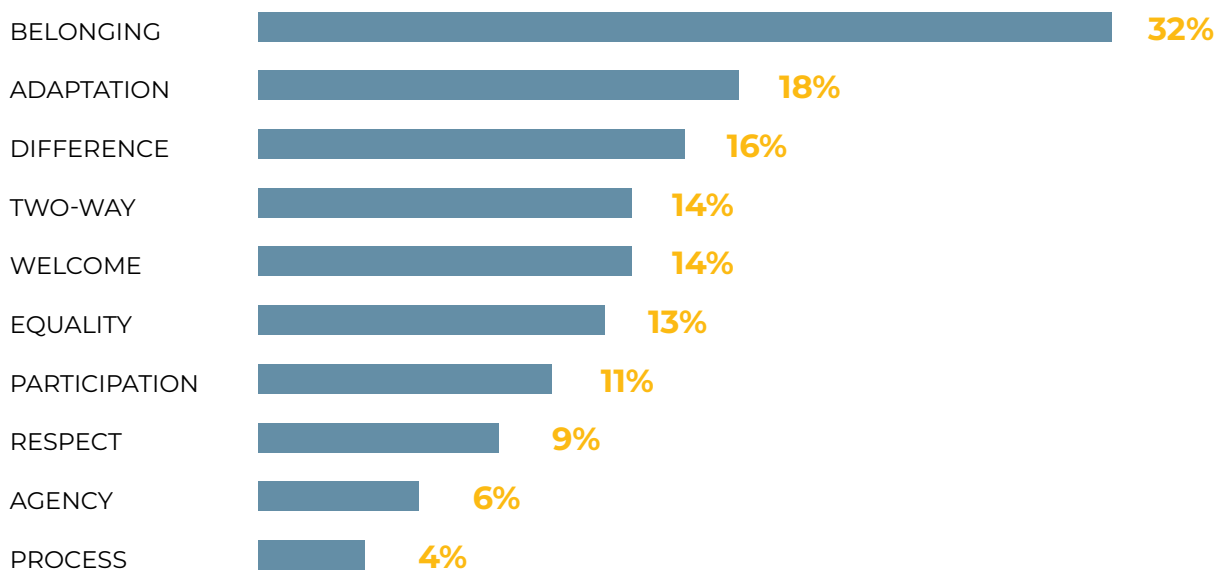


Figure 1. How do you define integration? (N=468, open-ended question. Multiple responses possible)

Difference and integration as a process.

The theme of difference emerged in 16% of survey responses and was often associated with diversity, identity, heritage, experience, and origins. Respondents emphasized that integration did not require one group to dominate or lose their identity. Instead, integration could be mutual and retain both former identities while creating a new shared identity. This theme is often connected with the idea of a gradual process of integration rather than a fixed or completed phenomenon. The process theme was mentioned in 4% of responses and emphasized that integration was a continuous, lifelong task for all people who want to live in a community. Some respondents also viewed integration as the gradual dissolution of one's past identity to make way for the new, which was in opposition to the affirmation of difference.

“The concept of ‘integration’ is not totally positive, because it is based on the existence of two cultures: a dominant one, and a subordinate one which needs to be ‘integrated,’ namely assimilated. Sometimes, this process does not take into account the characteristics of different cultures.”

Integration as belonging. The theme of belonging was the most referenced in the survey with 149 responses (32%). Respondents primarily referred to integration as the creation of a shared community and society, where individuals are recognized as part of a collective with positive culture, traditions, and values. This theme also included other themes such as difference, equality, participation, and a two-way process. Belonging is also related to the theme of agency and equality, where integration means that every human being can integrate well into the community without any kind of discrimination or violence. Additionally, belonging also incorporated a critique of migration as being the antithesis of a shared community, where integration is becoming a part of the wider community and not isolating oneself or staying within a bubble of fellow migrants.

“[Integration is] being an active part of a community that recognizes me as an individual bearer of positive culture, traditions and values”

“...the process through which a person has the opportunity to feel part of a collective in its various aspects.”

Integration as inhabitation. The concept of integration as a lifelong task that requires patience, willingness, time, and open-mindedness emerged in the interviews, highlighting the temporal and continuous nature of integration. The ability to adapt and navigate changing circumstances was also emphasized, regardless of one's categorisation as a migrant, refugee, asylum seeker, citizen, or local. In this sense, it is crucial to avoid using migrantised language and instead, view integration as a spatial practice that can be either hindered or enhanced by policy.

“[Integration is] integrating yourself and your culture with them, but not forgetting your culture”;

“Integration means acceptance of the fact that you are just the way you want to be. It should be far from assimilating the ‘Other’”;

“I believe we should instead favour a new meaning in which it is understood as a dynamic and reciprocal process”;

“Constantly trying to get the people you come to, to accept you”

“Adjustment is everything, and if the immigrant wants to belong to the community, the obstacles are overpowered.”

The multiple dimensions of inhabitation. The participants were asked to rate the importance of various dimensions of integration in supporting inhabitation, including Participation, Plans, Knowledge, Networks, Belonging, and Security. These dimensions were further divided into sub-dimensions to provide a more nuanced analysis. The Security dimension was ranked

highest in terms of importance in supporting inhabitation, with 78% of respondents strongly agreeing. Within this dimension, secure accommodation was ranked the highest, followed by health and wellbeing, and financial security and work.

“I wanted to buy a house. That’s why I have earned and bought it. If I plan to buy a car, I earn and buy. But in Moldavia, there is no possibility to do so [...] The money left is enough to buy food only. There is no possibility of making plans and solving problems. There is no opportunity [...] I have to take what’s new and integrate it better. If I want to change my life, it’s because I don’t feel well. I must stop suffering.”

For some, work was also a way to create a positive perception from locals and to build an image of belonging in the host society. The idea that migrants have to prove themselves worthy of the host society by achieving security status and abiding by the host’s rules and expectations was also revealed.

“The work of the local community, but then also for them to see my work. Because then it helps to get to know us more”

“[...] that’s why integration is important to me because I will get to know them and they will get to know me and then when I would work and have a job they would create some image of me”.

Additionally, belonging was seen as a process that required active participation and engagement in the local community. This participation was viewed as a way to both contribute to the community and create a sense of belonging for oneself. The importance of Language was also emphasised by respondents in the interviews, particularly regarding networking and finding employment opportunities.

“I have learnt that communication has a primary function. If you know how to communicate, you can go on, you can go anywhere.”

“That is not a problem for me to say it. The fact that they speak their language in communities, and too often only their dialect, has created enormous problems.”

“Think that a considerable difficulty people experience, at this moment, is at a mental level. It is the language because it is the way we think. So, my main obstacle is language.”

The dimension of planning was seen as more important in the interviews. For many interviewees, their ability to plan in the sense of the possibility of planning their future and plan for their lives and their children and to choose their destination was important for their sense of agency and certainty towards the future. Those who had to settle in a different destination than planned found it more difficult to integrate at first and had to adjust their expectations. Participation was the least important dimension in supporting inhabitation, with only 44% of participants considering it as ‘very important’.





Figure 2. Which factors are most important for supporting integration? (N=570)

What is most important. As a sub-dimension of security financial autonomy was ranked as the most important. This is followed by being socially well-connected and being able to choose what is better for oneself (Figure 2). These results make sense, as financial autonomy often equates to security in terms of shelter, food, and livelihood. However, the interviews reveal that each of these dimensions is intrinsically intertwined. Employment and security lead to identity, facilitate social connections and contribute to a sense of belonging. Security is not just about having property but also creating a home and a sense of place and ownership within a territory. Employment is not only about income but also visibility within a community, pride, purpose, and the agency to approach integration from a position of equality. The knowledge and networks that form the links between these dimensions ultimately facilitate the process of belonging within a larger community and the process of inhabitation, which involves adapting, navigating, and learning the city.

Crucial acquaintances. The actors that support inhabitation. The survey asked participants to rank the importance of different actors in their inhabitation experience. As illustrated in Figure 3, the results showed that educational institutions, host and migrant communities, and authorities at the local level were viewed as the most important actors, with the national government, authorities at a regional level, media, and the EU being viewed as less important. When asked to select a single response, the local community was viewed as the most important actor, with NGOs, family, and the migrant community being viewed as less important. However, when comparing responses from those who migrated to the city to those who were born there, a significant difference emerged, with those born in the city being more likely to turn to the local community for integration support. This may represent a disjuncture in perspective on integration between these two groups or a difference in personal perspective.

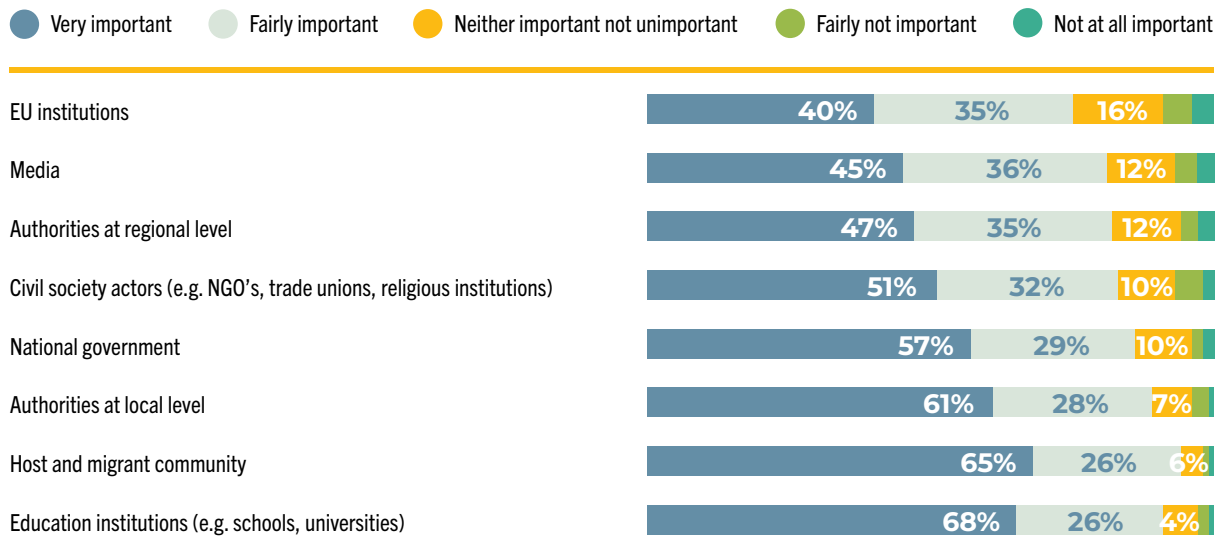


Figure 3. In your opinion, how important or unimportant is the role of each of the following actors according to your experience?

Multiple lives. In conclusion, the exploration of the different dimensions of integration from the survey and interview responses revealed that priorities can differ depending on individual circumstances and trajectories. Despite this diversity, there are commonalities in experiences where needs, spaces, and relations overlap and converge.



CITIES FINDINGS: NEEDS, STRENGTHS AND FEEDBACK ON PRACTICES

Brescia, Italy.

The findings from the need assessment focus group and survey revealed several challenges related to supporting the integration of migrants in Brescia. These include the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants, the need for e-learning, affordable housing, the excess of bureaucracy during COVID-19, and increased racism and discrimination. Additionally, some respondents highlighted the need to sustain intercultural events, promote integration activities in territories that are not welcoming to migrants, and consider the educational background and skills of migrants when providing training to help upscale their career options.

Brescia has several strengths that can be leveraged to support the integration of migrants. The fast response of the authorities to the needs of migrants during the pandemic, forms of mutual solidarity, refugees' humanitarian work during COVID-19, cultural mediators, and territorial tutors were identified as key strengths. The city's multiculturalism, engagement of migrants as active subjects, and provision of additional educational support for children through CAG (Youth Reception Centres) and GREST (Gruppo ESTivo) Summer camps were also highlighted as strengths.

The survey respondents identified several effective practices and services that support the integration of migrants in Brescia. These include "In Rete" desks, Integration territorial tutors, the House of the Neighbourhood, the Festival of arts and religious cultures DòSTI, the People's Festival, the Association Diritti per Tutti and CSA Magazzino 47, the Municipal Observatory on Migrations and Social Inclusion, and Social housing. The majority of the respondents (91%) believed that the practices they were most familiar with were effective in supporting integration, with successful facilitation of relationships between local communities and new arrivals being the most common reason for this positive response. However, some respondents (36%) wanted to change something about the practices they were most familiar with. They suggested the inclusion of migrants in formal employment rather than volunteering/informal jobs and more focus on learning and language.



Brescia

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Gdansk, Poland¹

Several challenges were identified, including the need to create a public discourse and national policy framework on migration and integration. There is also a need to promote openness to "others" and cultural mixed activities to break down barriers between different groups. Other challenges include addressing power relations and stigma toward Russian and non-European migrants, addressing legal procedures for stay and work permits, resolving long-term conflict between Ukraine-Polish groups, and settling children integrating programmes in school.

The analysis also revealed several strengths of existing practices and services, including creativeness in terms of analysing trends in the job market and proposing projects. The practice with the highest familiarity among respondents was access to general information on living in Pomerania, followed by direct access to job offers/local employers. The CZESC! Welcome programme provided by the Migrant Support Centre and European Solidarity Centre and access to affordable Polish language courses were also identified as strengths. The Migrant Support Centre and Gdansk Contact Centre and access to volunteering programmes also encountered positive feedback.

¹ Note the analysis was conducted before the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and henceforth does not reflect its impact on individuals, organisations and cities

Ioannina, Greece.

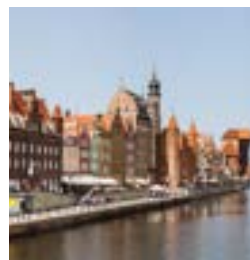
The analysis identified several challenges related to refugee integration in Ioannina. These include the need to draft a plan to support housing for refugees after exiting from state-led/humanitarian accommodation, provide language learning centres for adults and children, provide housing accommodations outside the camps, provide transportation means that connect the city to the camps in the fringe areas, ensure better coordination and communication with stakeholders, and close monitoring of NGOs financial performance. Ioannina's ability to coordinate across municipalities is one of its strengths. In addition, the state programme "HELIOS" was identified as a strength.

The survey revealed that most respondents were familiar with NGO services, and the majority believed the practice they were most familiar with was effective in supporting integration. However, some respondents suggested changes, including reducing bureaucracy, increasing staff, improving organisation, and expanding connections to the wider employment market and society. Interview feedback highlighted negative perceptions about migrants due to differences in culture, language, and religion. The presence of refugees in Greece was also reported to influence its position in the EU.

Lisbon, Portugal.

The challenges identified in supporting the integration of migrants in Lisbon include access to housing, high living costs, dependence on social support, difficulty in moving up the housing ladder, and the need for a community centre. Respondents in the focus group expressed concerns about the lack of affordable housing and high living costs, making it difficult for refugees to become self-sufficient. They highlighted the importance of a community centre for creating a sense of belonging and social cohesion. Lisbon municipality also faces several challenges, including the lack of an integration centre, improving digital skills, increasing housing supply, improving communication with migrants, increasing "hosting" capacity, dependence on funding, regularisation not working, and increasing xenophobia.

However, Lisbon has also several strengths that can support the integration of migrants, including an open and diverse society, a network for employability, and a "Housing First" approach to housing. The respondents



Gdansk



Ioannina



Lisbon



Alcorcon

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By Deenseel - Lisbon, CC BY 2.0

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in the focus group also appreciated the welcoming and hosting services provided by the government and JRS Portugal, access to language skills, education and business opportunities, access to jobs and training opportunities, school enrolment for children, access to shelter and affordable housing, access to health care, psychological support, access to social security support, fiscal and legal support, and access to services and documents.

The governmental welcoming and integration services were the practice that most respondents in the survey were familiar with, and 96% believed they were effective in supporting integration. However, 50% of respondents suggested improvements, such as reducing bureaucracy and response times and providing more language and employment support. The respondents appreciated the sense of solidarity and support in accessing formal services.

Alcorcon, Spain.

The main challenge identified in the focus group was the need for capacity building for disabled people. While there were no other needs identified specifically, the Covid-19 pandemic was noted as a challenging time for the community. The strengths identified in the study included the availability of eLearning, reflecting on caring for the team, and education and awareness-raising activities.

The practices and services offered by Solidaridad Sin Fronteras (SSF) include legal advice, employment integration services,



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Oberhausen

job hunting advice, in-person workshops for unemployed individuals, online courses, awareness-raising workshops in educational centres, and intercultural mediation together with the Municipal Service of Intercultural Mediation of Alcorcon and the Centre for Participation and Integration of Migrants of the Southern Metropolitan Area of Madrid. The job placement programme was the most familiar programme among participants, with 24% having experience with it. However, all practices and services were reported as effective in supporting integration. Participants highlighted the trustworthy nature of the staff, the individualized service provided, and the effective access to the job market provided. Suggestions for improvement included longer operating hours and a focus on integration at the local level. Survey respondents reported the highest rate of good mental health and fulfilling social and community life in comparison to other cases.

Oberhausen, Germany.

The challenges identified in supporting the integration of migrants in Oberhausen include local perception of migration, lack of a welcoming community, and negative media representation of refugees. Respondents in the focus group expressed concerns about the negative attitudes towards migrants in the local community, which can hinder their ability to integrate. They highlighted the importance of creating a welcoming environment and changing the negative perceptions of migrants in the media.

Oberhausen has several strengths that can be leveraged to support the integration of migrants. Respondents in the focus group were positive about the housing situation in the city and the participatory activities that engage the community. Moreover, the city has established several effective practices and services, including the communal Integration Centre, the Adult Education Centre, and the Integration Point Jobcentre, that provide language classes, networks and community, and financial security. The respondents in the focus group also highlighted the importance of the Refugees' kitchen and Terre des Hommes Oberhausen, which provide support for refugees and create a sense of community.

The Adult Education Centre was the practice that most respondents in the focus group were familiar with, and 92% of respondents believed it was effective in supporting integration. However, 17% of respondents suggested improvements, such as a greater emphasis on careers, greater social outreach and networking, and more precision/definition of specific target groups' needs. The respondents appreciated the provision of networks and community, language classes, and the welcoming nature of the centre.

Sisak, Croatia.

Many of the respondents lived in Sisak due to its supportive laws. However, the language barrier and lack of social networks have been identified as the main challenges to integration. The needs identified for supporting the integration of migrants in Sisak include language learning centres, virtual support groups for sharing stories and providing advice, immediate access to schools for children, increased access to jobs, and promoting Sisak as an attractive first choice destination for migrants. Respondents in the focus group and interviews highlighted the language barrier as a significant challenge for migrants. The lack of language proficiency among long-standing communities and the time required for migrants to learn an unfamiliar language create communication difficulties. Therefore, language learning centres can be instrumental in bridging this gap. Additionally, immediate access to schools for children is guaranteed, while the municipality and local NGOs support migrants in the registration process, as well as searching for job opportunities which can help them and their families to establish their lives in Sisak.

Sisak has several strengths that can be leveraged to support integration. Respondents



By Aktion / CC BY 3.0

Sisak

in the focus group and interviews highlighted the city's religious tolerance and the sense of solidarity and warmth towards newcomers from outside the region as strengths. Additionally, Sisak has a strong housing scheme that can support migrant families. Supportive inclusion in the elementary education system is also effective in supporting integration, according to 96% of the respondents in the focus group. The majority of respondents in the focus group found tourist oriented public events and events through which NGOs are being presented as the most effective practice for supporting integration. The ability to socialize, make networks, and be informed were the main reasons for this positive response. Additionally, 91% of respondents in the interviews reported being optimistic about the future, which is the highest rate of all cases. Only one respondent in the focus group wanted to change anything about the current practices, which was to have more free public entertainment.

Zagreb, Croatia.

The findings from the need assessment focus group and interviews suggest that Zagreb has several strengths that can support the integration of migrants. However, language barriers, competition in the job market, and the need for vocational training and right to work are some of the challenges that must be addressed. The current practices of the centre for integration from the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), state-owned apartments for the first two years, and the Refugee Shop have been effective in supporting integration. Therefore,

these practices can be expanded and improved to support the needs of migrants in Zagreb.

Other challenges identified include high unemployment, job losses during COVID, the unfamiliarity of the city and the country, and multiple destinations before reaching Zagreb causing deception and hardening the settling down and providing choices to migrants to select Zagreb as their final destination. Moreover, the COVID measures for employability are over, and online activities require different skill sets, creating additional obstacles. Therefore, increasing the right to work and providing vocational training can be instrumental in bridging this gap. Coexistence with the local community can be improved by improving coordination between different migrant NGOs, and shorter programme times can meet the needs of migrants with competing demands.

Zagreb has several strengths that can be leveraged to support the integration of migrants. Respondents in the focus group and interviews highlighted the city's advocacy role, the initiatives such as the Journal written by refugees for refugees, and the availability of affordable recreational activities such as theatre. Additionally, the city's international protection law for asylum seekers, the church-supported youth programme and workshops for integration, home country society formation supported by the church (Iranian Christian Community), and unrestricted access to high-skill jobs were highlighted as strengths.

Many respondents in the focus group and interviews were most familiar with the centre for integration from JRS, and 88% believed it was effective in supporting integration. However, 41% said they would change something about the practice they were most familiar with, to improve coordination between different migrant NGOs and reduce programme times. The availability of resources such as employment and language support were the main reasons why the respondents believed the practice was effective in supporting integration.



CHAPTER 03

CAPACITY BUILDING

INTRODUCTION

To start the EIPC journey with the deep baseline analysis described in the previous chapter was needed to base the following actions on a clear understanding of each city's needs and priorities. Discussions on migrants' integration are very often abstract in proposing solutions, and some previous efforts tended to focus on sharing of experiences, and not on engaging in practical peer-to-peer transferral of know-how with the further implementation of concrete actions. EPIC wanted to tackle this by generating a city-driven approach that identifies concrete solutions and facilitates the transferral of knowledge and experience, thus maximising the impact on the ground. During the period 2021-2022, the 16 partners embarked

on a capacity-building process to discuss the results of the baseline analysis, identify together key priorities during several working groups meetings, carry out a matchmaking exercise pairing cities based on the priorities and once matched, to do a series of job shadowing activities where the cities engaged in a mutual capacity building. This process saw a city with experience in one priority area and another that needs support in that specific area paired to understand how that priority has been developed and implemented and how it could be transferred to the other city. At the end of the capacity-building process, the matched cities finished their job shadowing activities and started to plan the strategy to replicate the lessons learned in their territories. The final match and themes selected are presented in Figure 4.

This mentor-mentee exchange allowed the eight cities to acquire first-hand information on how their corresponding city delivered their integration services and to teach the other something in return.

Given the COVID-19 restrictions during the period, the job shadowing city-to-city field visits and exchanges could not take place physically and partners decided to record documentaries that would allow them to show their counterparts the work they do to support migrants. Facilitated by the WP leader, all cities hosted joint sessions to screen the documentaries together and hold a post-video Q&A session to address questions and comments. This knowledge transfer has been essential for the eight cities to design their

respective pilot projects aiming at testing new public services presented in the following chapter.

The **Job shadowing section of the EPIC website** gathers all videos that illustrate the different good practices of EPIC cities that were shared during the job shadowing, and that are generating the basis for transferring successful integration services to other territories. Hereafter we present such integrating cities as they have been designed and implemented in each territory.

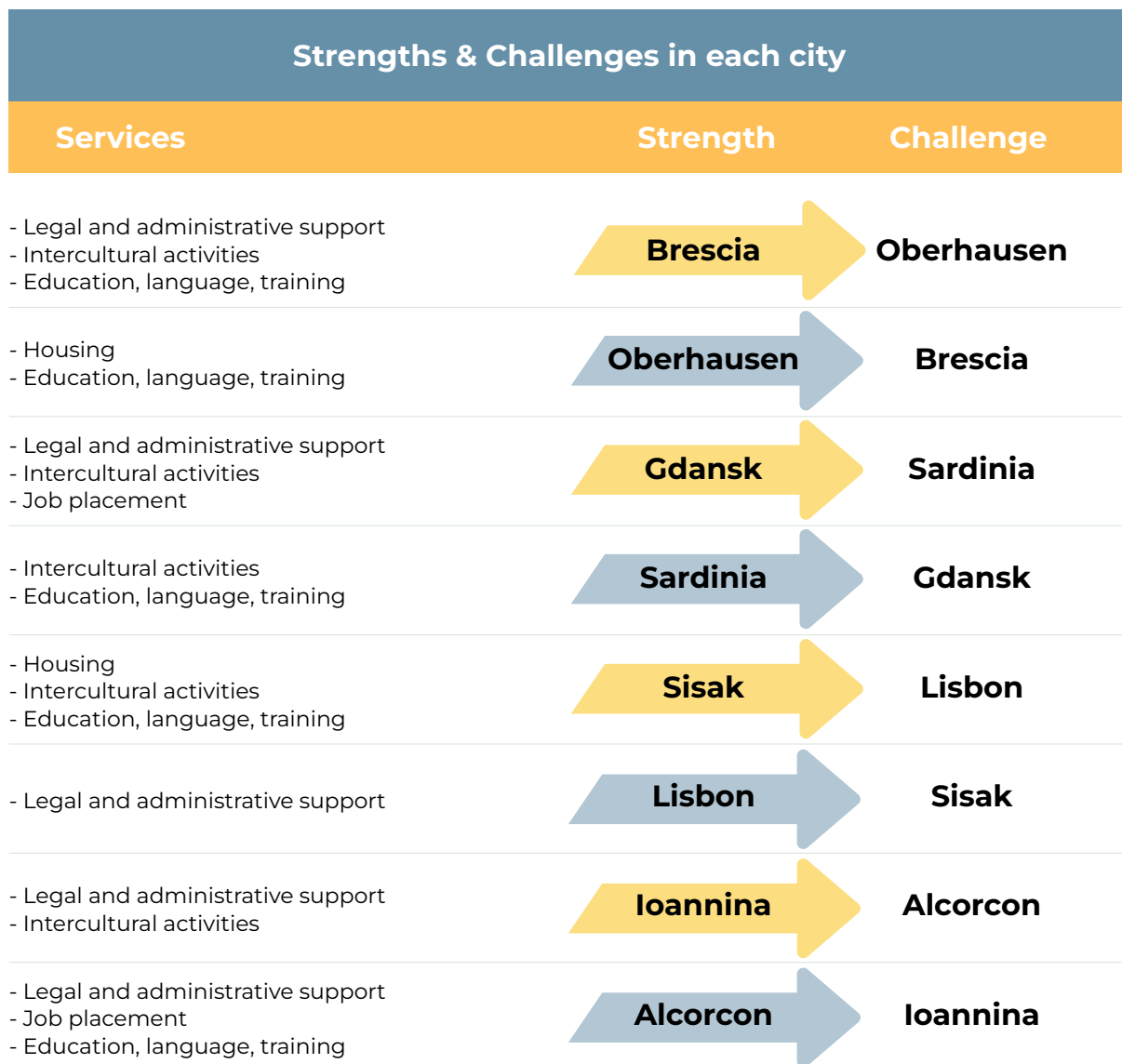


Figure 4. Match of cities and topics.

ALCORCON: MULTISTAKEHOLDER INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT MIGRANTS' INTEGRATION IN MADRID



Figure 5. Picture of the SSF team in Alcorcon

Alcorcon is a city in the metropolitan area of Madrid with a significant community of foreign population. For this reason, the city is running a number of services, such as the project: “For Family Reunification” that does not only offers administrative support but also psychosocial support by organising activities that allow these families and their regrouped members to interact among them to develop ties and support networks; the training program “Know your Laws” that provides foreigner people regularising their situation in Spain with knowledge about Spanish culture and law; and the “Commission of Immigration” which is a community service instrument carried out by the Municipality of Alcorcon in conjunction with the different entities specialised in social intervention with migrant people in the territory. The commission meets frequently to address the different issues migrants in Alcorcon face. In this framework, but not only, is where the EPIC partner SSF collaborates with the Municipality of Alcorcon for many years. SSF is a non-profit organisation actively involved in offering job counselling services for migrants. The methodology they use involves individual attention guiding the clients through relevant workshops and training. SSF is also actively contributing to open-minded society building.



Alcorcon
Full Video



Alcorcon
Summary Video



Alcorcon
Testimonials

BRESCIA:

THE NETWORK OF MIGRANTS DESK AND THE CAREER GUIDANCE FOR REFUGEES



Figure 6. Picture of the representatives of the Network of Migrants Desk in a meeting in Brescia

Brescia, a city in Northern Italy with up to 19% of migrant population, is successfully managing migrants' inclusion and integration process through the work of a network of voluntary associations and operators, called the Network of Migrant Desks. This public service created in 2008 consists of six voluntary associations: Offices for Foreigners of ACLI, CGIL, CISL, MCL, UIL, and the Centre of Migrants. Each of them works closely with migrants helping them to obtain legal status in the country, providing supportive measures and services (such as training, internship, job placement, etc.), as well as facilitating effective communication and dialogue between the migrant and the Municipality, police, and Prefecture.

The EPIC partner Association ADL Zavidovici works closely with the municipality of Brescia as well and provides career guidance for refugees in the territory. The programme consists of coaching and a series of interviews that help the person to prepare for real-life job interviews. The overall aim of the services is to make the migrant people autonomous and capable of independently acting in the job market.



Brescia
Full Video



Brescia
Summary Video



Brescia
Testimonials

GDANSK: ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIGRANTS IN POMERANIA

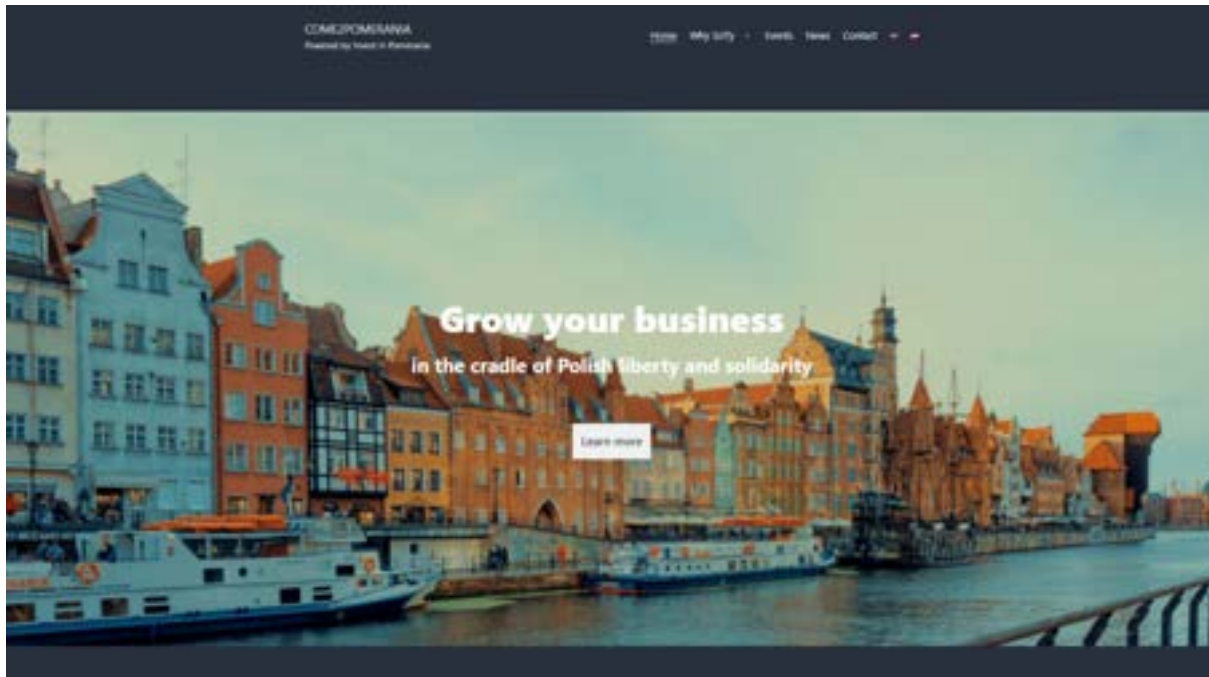


Figure 7. Portal of the Come2Pomerania programme

Pomerania is a region in Northern Poland that encompasses three cities: Gdansk, Sopot and Gdynia. It is one of the fastest growing regions in Poland and thus very attractive to new arrivals, such as migrants, business owners and people with business-like minds. The authorities have introduced several programmes to help migrants get settled in the region. The most renowned and important of them is the Come2Pomerania programme. It has an informative website, a database of available jobs as well as workforce, organises webinars and acts as a hub for people and migrants looking for new professional endeavours. The programmes aim to make sure that after the migrants arrive in Pomerania, they know where and how to find a job on their own but also to benefit employers but creating a network attractive to companies and therefore making it easier for all parties to find suitable opportunities.



Gdansk
Full Video



Gdansk
Summary Video



Gdansk
Testimonials

IOANNINA: GOOD PRACTICES IN MIGRANT AND ASYLUM SEEKER INTEGRATION. BY THE MUNICIPALITY OF IOANNINA AND SYMBIOSIS



Figure 8. Members of the Urban Working Group in Ioannina

Ioannina is a small city in the region of Epirus in the north-western part of Greece with more than 2000 refugees currently hosted by the Municipality. The Municipality has established numerous services designed to develop social inclusion and smooth integration of the migrant community into the city's population. In August 2020, the Municipality of Ioannina established the Migrant Refugee Integration Council. This is an advisory body aimed to make suggestions to the Municipal Council for the Development of Local Actions to promote a smooth social integration of migrants and refugees. The Council is providing feedback to local authorities about migrants' living conditions and other challenges, to make sure their voice is adequately heard and taken into account. In the framework of the EPIC project, the Municipality of Ioannina works hand in hand with Symbiosis. The NGO based in Thessaloniki aims to promote democratic participation in social and political processes without discrimination and exclusion. In 2020 the mayor of Ioannina invited Symbiosis to participate in the Ioannina Urban Working Group, a consultative body in effective urban management with the ultimate goal of creating a welcoming city.



Ioannina
Full Video 1



Ioannina
Full Video 2



Ioannina
Summary Video 1



Ioannina
Summary Video 2

LISBON: A COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT FOR ACCOMPANYING NEWCOMERS



Figure 9. JRS Portugal Academy during a job market session.

JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service) plays a crucial role in the process of migrant population integration in Lisbon. The Social Office in JRS operates on several fronts. There are medical services available at the venue, including the possibility to run tests and get medication. There are also legal advisory services that are provided through CLIMB - Local Support Centre for Migrant Integration. CLIMB was born to fill the gap to explain how to obtain legal status and manage relevant paperwork upon arrival to Portugal. Previously, many irregular migrant arrivals could remain in the country for years without documents and a clear understanding of how the process works. Today, CLIMB is helping to disseminate this information using a network of 140 centres all over Portugal. The Employment Office at JRS helps migrant customers to prepare for their professional life, receive job-seeking advice and enter the labour market. The process starts with individual consultations that map the person's professional capabilities. In all of the work that JRS is doing, there is an important aspect that should not be overlooked - social networking and cultural diversity. Providing the environment to facilitate social and cultural network building is crucial for migrants who often arrive alone in the country and miss out

on important family and social ties. The project Fica Bem Entre Linhas (Looks Good Between the Lines) offers an opportunity to create social networks and build trustful relationships through participation in professional workshops.



Lisbon
Full Video



Lisbon
Summary Video



Lisbon
Testimonials

OBERHAUSEN: REBUILDING TOGETHER AND MAKING OBERHAUSEN A HOME FOR ALL



Figure 10. Participants of the Refugees' Kitchen project run by kitev in Oberhausen

Oberhausen is a city in the northwest of Germany that took in a large number of refugees during the 2015-2016 migration influx and faced a serious housing shortage for the new arrivals. Refugees that escaped the Syrian war, but also from Afghanistan and many African countries were initially housed in public gyms and halls around the city. The conditions in these places were uncomfortable and it quickly became clear that the emergency shelters are only a temporary solution, while a more comprehensive and systematic approach was needed. The city of Oberhausen tackled this issue with a new concept of private housing that nowadays stands out for its experience of successfully renting flats from private owners with the aim to dispose of the properties further to the city's migrant population. This kind of migrant private housing project is a big step forward from previous collective shelters that operated in public gyms and halls during the great migrant influx in 2015-2016. Also, in Oberhausen, the EPIC partner Kitev offers highly engaging socio-cultural, artistic, and community-building activities. One of its latest projects - GENAU - is to renovate an old high-rise near the main train station, involving migrants' help, and eventually create a well-functioning community hub

that will host workshops, regular events, and a café. Once finished, it will act as a migrants' community hub, a socio-cultural centre that also offers courses and seminars. These will be complementary to the already existing long list of activities organised by Kitev.



Oberhausen
Full Video



Oberhausen
Summary Video



Oberhausen
Testimonials

SARDINIA:

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITIES FOR A VIBRANT AND WELCOMING SARDINIA



Figure 11. Multicultural activities with children in Sardinia

The Italian island of Sardinia is home to more than 50,000 people of foreign origin, constituting 3.4% of the island's 1.5 million people. Sardinia has a variety of projects and organisations providing educational and extracurricular activities for the migrant population. Sardinian local administration is actively involved in educational activities, both in the field of formal and extra-curricular education, to help migrants effectively integrate into Sardinian society. The Universities of Cagliari and Sassari offer post-graduate and masters level education to residents of the refugee centres who have been successfully enrolled on university studies thanks to the European Passport for Refugees Scheme. Among initiatives targeting younger migrant groups, we find the project "On the same page" implemented by an art school in the town of Oristano, which used colourful wooden blocks to create a street installation that will be permanently present in the town centre, symbolising integration, diversity, and participation. The board game "Tutti i ballo" (Let's All Dance) was invented by the EPIC

partner Cooperativa Sociale Studio Progetto 2 for elementary and primary school children. The game, which got its inspiration from the local Sardinian dance festival, is focused on welcoming and relationship-building, through the act of dance.



Sardinia
Full Video



Sardinia
Summary Video



Sardinia
Testimonials

SISAK: WELCOMING NEW NEIGHBOURS AND WORKING FOR AN INTERCULTURAL SOCIETY



Figure 12. A member of the CCD preparing the welcome of a refugee facility to their new apartment.

Sisak, a small town in central Croatia, has developed some good practices for refugee housing. Once international protection is granted to the person, he/she will be eligible for housing that frees the person from living in the asylum centre. The Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing, in cooperation with local NGOs, provide the migrant and his/her family with fully a refurbished flat. In 2021, 20 housing units were prepared and successfully rented out with the right to live free of charge for two years. The flats given to migrants are owned by the government and are usually situated in residential blocs. Private flats or houses are a rare case, although they too have been provided. For this project, the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing is using funds from the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. A remarkable aspect of the housing project is the effort and care the authorities are putting into preparing the flats for the migrant lodgers. The Center for Cultural Dialogue (CCD) through the “New Neighbours - inclusion of people who have been granted international protection into Croatian societies. On the day they move the flat is set up with cake, coffee and symbolic gifts, to make the inhabitant feel good and welcomed in his/her new home. After the moving and preliminary administrative steps are completed, the integration process continues with learning the Croatian language. The Open Public

University of Zagreb together with JRS Croatia (Jesuit Refugee Service, partners in the EPIC project) have been actively teaching Croatian to more than 100 students over the last two years. Language training was combined with vocational training ensuring the migrants also have professional skills when entering the labour market. Some 40 people were trained to fulfil the labour deficit for jobs such as chefs, painters, hairdressers and computer operators.



Sisak
Full Video



Sisak
Summary Video



Sisak
Testimonials



CHAPTER 04

PILOT PROJECTS

INTRODUCTION

After more than two years of intense analysis, exchanging of good practices, several events and debates, capacity-building sessions and a lot of planning, the time to test new initiatives on the ground with the potential of making certain local services more efficient for the integration of newcomers had arrived. From housing to education, legal and administrative support or intercultural activities, language and training, a common denominator for the pilot projects planning was agreed upon by the consortium: to design and deliver the pilots through a human rights approach, which focuses, among others on:

- **Engaging partners in co-creation to bring more empowerment than simply delivering services to “passive beneficiaries”.**
- **Looking at migrants as rights holders, not solely help-seekers.**
- **Attempting to address the cause of the challenge, not solely the effects.**
- **Thinking in a systemic, long-term approach and rooting the pilot projects’ practices into regular practices in the municipalities.**
- **Stressing the need for migrants’ participation and maximum co-ownership of projects and their actions.**
- **Stressing the need for inclusive language.**

PILOT PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

The long-time frame (42 months) of EPIC implementation has given the partners an incredible chance to look at and recognise the complexity of local realities within its migration and administrative contexts while forcing them to be flexible and innovative to face the several unpredictable crises during the period 202-2023 have meant worldwide. As the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit migrant communities more harshly than other communities, and the ongoing war in Ukraine, which brought unprecedented challenges, several EPIC partners at the frontline of reception had to give priority to urgent solutions focusing on immediate help and – as will be shown in the presentation of eight pilot projects, changed the course of many initial plans. Due to war, many partners have been overwhelmed with responding to the refugees' needs that arose and needed to be addressed (housing, childcare, safety, and material needs). EPIC has shown how much of the efforts and implementation is the responsibility of NGOs.

The capacity to continue with a more reflective approach to deliver the pilot projects, focusing on their sustainability and rights paradigm, was – to some extent - exchanged with exhaustion to manage most unforeseen urgent activities.

On the other hand, though, the implementation of some pilot projects turned out complex due to local administrative and/or legal constraints. It is important to note then that innovation around integration is hard to do within the public administration, which has certain ways of operations, resistant to more systemic and inclusive approaches.

Despite EPIC's innovative and right intuition of the need to bring LAs and NGOs together, a power dynamic in local communities plays a big role in both planning and implementing the pilot projects. NGOs are dependent on local governments and don't have enough power to challenge local modus operandi around integration. LAs and public administration in general, are risk averse which is also a structural phenomenon, independent of individual administrative interest in change-making, which needs to be taken into account when planning different actions.



EPIC has shown most local governments lack a dedicated migration-management structure – EPIC's pilot projects were seldom a part of a bigger integration framework, rather – a project commissioned to an NGO, which will last as long as an external fund is available and may not be continued once the project stops. Obviously, this is again a systemic, pan-European challenge to be addressed, which occurs within EPIC as a symptom of a prevalent problem. Local governments should look into transforming their practices and aiming at the inclusion of migrants. Currently, migrants' placement in a "parallel/separated" system of services (or outside of the system) may, unfortunately, lead to more separation, exclusion and discrimination.

We are certain that the pilot projects planned in EPIC have and will have a very good impact on the local community. The remaining challenge is about the capacity to bring a structural change that will allow migrants to be part of communities, not (solely) beneficiaries of help services.

**PILOT PROJECT
IMPLEMENTATION
IN 8 EUROPEAN
CITIES**



ALCORCÓN, SPAIN

The 1-year pilot project in Alcorcon consisted of the 1st **“Content Competition Against Discrimination against Youth on the Grounds of Diverse Cultural Origin”** for which the implementing partner Solidaridad Sin Fronteras (SSF) obtained the support and involvement of Alcorcon City Council, six public high schools and vocational training centres in Alcorcon, and some immigrant organisations belonging to the municipality Migration Board. The pilot aimed at:

- Promoting the knowledge of different cultures and the richness of interculturality in the Municipality of Alcorcon.
- Raising awareness of the discrimination suffered by some young people (and also adults) for reasons of origin.
- Enhancing a positive mindset in the Alcorcon population towards interculturality and different people.

Throughout 2022, SSF trainers held several awareness-raising meetings with the educational staff of different schools and subsequently carried out a series of workshops on intercultural coexistence in schools in Alcorcon where almost 100 young students participated. After that, a series of artworks were created for the competition. Finally, SSF organised a ceremony where besides giving the award for the competition, some raising awareness and public debate activities took place. It was also a key moment to get direct feedback about the project activities from the participants. SSF has also worked very closely with the City Council of Alcorcon in its efforts to counter hate narratives and discriminatory attitudes in the Municipality. The Intercultural Mediation Service of the Alcorcón City Council is considering the possibility of holding a second edition of the Competition and/or other similar relevant initiatives to reach more stakeholders after the success of this 1st edition piloted by EPIC.



CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS:

- The pilot project in Alcorcon relates to narratives held by young people and the City Council of Alcorcon.
- The project shows a common challenge of engaging migrants in both co-creating as well as implementing projects/ activities in local communities.
- The NGO's capacity for partner engagement and reach out to migrant communities as well as its rights-based approach to cooperation (empowerment, ownership, decision-making, representation) is a very valid topic to be discussed within the EPIC network and beyond.
- The City Council is interested in sustaining the pilot project by hosting further competitions with the same approach, carried out by SSF.

BRESCIA, ITALY

MiTHA - Migrants Tailored Housing Action

is the name of the 12-month pilot project executed by the Municipality of Brescia, more precisely the Housing Services and Inclusion Sector of the Municipality to provide an operational office and to guarantee a strong connection with the other activities carried out by the Public, and ADL Z, bringing to the table different members of the local community, including social workers, CSO representatives and migrants. Brescia's initial plan for the pilot project was focusing on cross-sector (engaging social services and other administrative bodies) cooperation aimed at developing a housing inclusion model through deep community work. Because of the difficulties of the topic and the global context (the pandemic and war) but also the momentum created by the local campaign "living together" (presented in the next chapter) in different public spaces of the city, the pilot focused took a very practical-oriented approach of engaging migrants to share their experiencing and recommendations regarding housing.

To implement this pilot project, several actions took place:

- Interviews with about 70 people of migrant background living in Brescia were conducted by expert researchers of the coop. K-Pax, followed by 4 focus groups with 28 participants and a lab with 12 individuals.
- Sharing and discussions of the migrants' house-related experiences with cross-sector actors.
- A "grassroots' decalogue" of good practices for housing and a publication of positive stories of cohabitation in Brescia was written by migrants and is being disseminated.



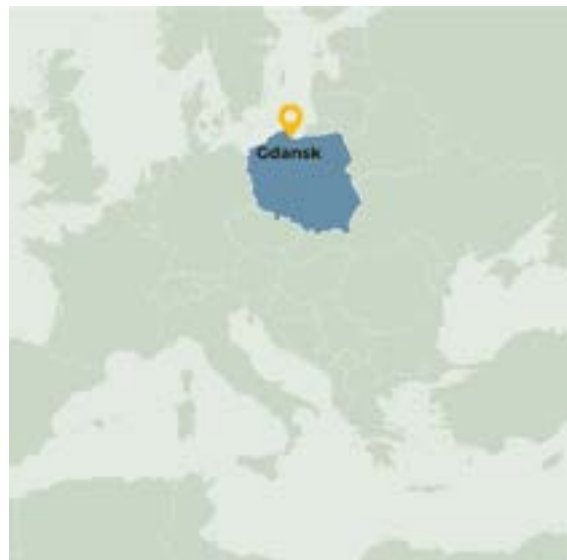
CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS:

- The initial scope for this pilot project turned out to be too ambitious for the time and resources available for it, showing that, first of all, housing is a very complex matter in all local communities; and secondly, it is difficult to work out long term solutions in the engagement of public administration that may be dependent on other short-term elements (i.e., elections).
- The housing crisis is a political matter demanding discussion on responsibilities and role ascribing (both multi-layered and cross-sector), which is a challenge.
- Dissemination of Brescia's "grassroots' decalogue" of good practices for housing among EPIC's partners and beyond can be very useful for future actions in this territory (Scale up to other areas) and also to be transferred to other places.

GDANSK METROPOLITAN AREA, POLAND

In Gdansk Metropolitan Area, the pilot to **train professionals in assisting refugees suffering from trauma** consists of two parts. The initial one, focusing on education is still under implementation. A second one, due to the war in Ukraine, was established in March 2022 and covered the urgent need for raising the capacities of public services, volunteers, translators, and other actors when cooperating with refugees, who often experience trauma. Over 120 service deliverers (job advisers, social centre workforce, cultural institutions staff, private people hosting migrants, and student translators) were prepared and supervised in their work with refugees, which is an action aimed at a long-term and systemic response to the need for culturally adequate services.

With the war and the actors arising to respond to increasing challenges, it has been very challenging to implement a pilot project in Poland. For instance, at a moment when the Gdansk Metropolitan Area was dealing with many legal challenges to contract education activities to external entities, other international organisations entered rapidly local communities with many millions of euros to be spent in the education sector in less than 9 months. This has of course brought great chances to the schooling and childcare sector, but also fatigue and surfeit of actions addressed to one professional environment. Therefore, after consulting with a group of school and psychological-pedagogical help units, the pilot project explored the existing gaps and actual needs. Based on that, largely technical assistance for schools and psychological-pedagogical help units are being delivered.



CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS:

- The war in Ukraine has brought obvious changes but also flexible adaptations to the pilot project in Gdansk which allowed amendments and funding for the actual needs.
- The lack of shared vision and concrete data-based action plans for sectoral areas (education, labour market, housing, health and social help) makes it almost impossible to fit in with a systemic and long-term, sustainable solution in a project-funded environment.
- War and refugees' reception and integration have had an urgent character and concentrated on delivering help, not long-term integration. It is best when both processes are parallel, to not keep migrants in help beneficiaries roles but to empower them to become part of a community with clear input and impact.

IOANNINA, GREECE

The **pilot project in Ioannina “+Ergasia”** was oriented towards the **facilitation of labour market integration** and considering the preparation of the beneficiaries and the cooperation between employers, employment services and migration authorities. During the 8 months of its implementation, the pilot project provided guidance in finance/ accounting, the tax preparer, and the employability counsellor, and all the required support needed to tackle the administrative obstacles migrants face when trying to obtain the documents and services for accessing the local labour market. Simultaneously, the expert in the labour market elaborated a strategic plan for the employment of refugees and asylum seekers in the local labour market with the collaboration of the migrants and refugees’ integration.

Much of the project efforts and budget were addressed to direct support migrants in their capacity to enter the labour market. Important to underline is the more systemic and all-of-government part of PP: development of a local strategy for the labour integration of refugees and asylum seekers, which includes a proposal for an education and vocational training strategy, as well as the specialization of education, training and development actions.



Figure 13. Poster informing about the pilot project offers in Ioannina.



CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS:

- About 50 beneficiaries have received individual job counselling during the implementation of the pilot programme. A training course, 3 meetings and 4 workshops were held with a large number of stakeholders supporting migrants and refugees in Ioannina to harmonise and combine efforts.
- As in many other pilot projects, services regarding inclusion are implemented by NGOs rather than the specialized public administration offices (like job centres).
- The above might benefit migrants as they get more personalised and culturally adequate services. Nevertheless, a parallel process of developing capacity in public offices is very important.
- The local strategy for the labour integration of refugees and asylum seekers can be a good example for other cities seeking to tackle the same issue.

LISBON, PORTUGAL

Amid the refugee crisis provoked by the war in Ukraine and capitalising on the mobilisation of citizens who wanted to be part of the humanitarian aid response in Portugal, the pilot project carried out by JRS Portugal in the framework of the EPIC project aims to provide a **more comprehensive response in terms of not only reception and first reception but also the integration of Ukrainian refugees, addressing the lack of responses at the regional level** and those outside the Lisbon area, in the spirit of scaling up support schemes to other territories in Portugal where they do not exist yet.

In this context, JRS developed a partnership with Seminário Redentorista Cristo Rei (Porto region). This partnership allowed the pilot to have a new space to welcome refugees and provide first support in the process of integration. One of the main goals of the project is to promote their autonomous life. To achieve this, the pilot office supports refugees in learning the Portuguese language, getting a job, and finding a home. Throughout the pilot project in 2022 and early 2023, over 200 refugees have benefited from this initiative. The services focused on:

- Checking the legal status of migrants.
- Shared work on their life plan.
- Referrals to the employment and vocational training centre.
- Creation of CVS's and letters of motivation.
- Help in getting a house for migrants.
- Support with health issues (accompany to the hospital or health centre, explaining how the health system works in Portugal, getting free dentist consults).
- Supporting refugees to get a sense of integration into Portuguese society.



CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS:

- The pilot project addressed the “traditional” needs of migrants, supporting their competencies and managing within new communities and society in the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis.
- As many projects “for migrants”, a question of how long the migrants will require support when accessing health centres and other public services, what are the vision and action plans in local communities to create more inclusive institutions and raise migrants' self-sufficiency.
- Many of the housing practices developed and tested by JRS Portugal can be very interesting to share in countries with more recent housing crises – Poland, Croatia and others – also during the final conference.

OBERHAUSEN, GERMANY

The partners kitev and the Municipality of Oberhausen are behind the pilot project **LIO – Leben In Oberhausen (“Life in Oberhausen”)** which consists of a **digital platform** bringing together all the support available in the city to those in need, in the spirit of creating a solid support network that can joint efforts, do not work in silos, avoid duplications, and fills each other’s gaps. The platform provides an overview of the offers for support for those in need in Oberhausen and automatically connects all active players with each other. The implementation process of this pilot had to sort out some barriers, like those for administrative reasons encountered by other partners: the process of getting the authorities to approve it and shifting the budget for the pilot project from the municipality to the NGO when it was considered as more efficient for the action took a very long time. The implementation was delayed several times because meetings could only take place online and short-term coordination was often only possible with a delay. The project has a strong participative component of shared ownership by multiple local actors as well as engaging migrants as experts, including the IT expert behind the platform. The dummy for the digital platform has already been created and will now go into the one-month test phase after which an official launch date will be set. The Municipality of Oberhausen and kitev are disseminating the platform among different professionals, stakeholders and the large local community in different online and physical meetings, and events and using their different communication channels (institutional website, NGO social media, etc.) as those of some media outlets (local radio and newspapers).



CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS:

- The delays and difficulties in funding the actions of a “complicated/technical pilot project” to an external subcontractor have been common within the EPIC project and should be addressed as barriers to innovations in the integration field.
- The digital platform itself is a unique achievement but also the co-creation process done to develop it, encourages the co-ownership of the different actors involved and brings those who will potentially benefit from it to the core of the design.

SARDINIA, ITALY

Sardinia has initially planned on testing a labour market practice implemented in the Gdansk region – a public regional portal directly matching migrant workers with local employers, without middlemen or temporary work agencies. This ambitious practice, for both the Gdansk and the Sardinia regions, seems to be a game-changer in the quality of employment and equal treatment in the labour market. Unfortunately, the existing Sardinia portal which was meant to be adapted to manage employment issues as well turned out to be technically too challenging to change and adopt this new platform. With this encountered new challenge and the context of the war in Ukraine, the partners in Sardinia readjust the pilot project and manage to eventually deliver a large number of activities through a double pilot project:

First, **“InPari per gli Ucraini” - (Together for the Ukrainians)** is a pilot project that EPIC partners have carried out in collaboration with the Regional Committee for Emigration - CREI ACLI in Sardinia and the support of a large number of stakeholders (ANOLF, AMAL, Blue Sardinia Asd, A.Doc., FAP ACLI, OCI, Spazi D’Ascolto, Mereu Autotrasporti, USUP). It offers Ukrainian refugees career counselling, educational, sport, art and cultural orientation and enrolment, and psychological support through a series of individual meetings, weekly labs and workshops over at least 5 months (duration of the pilot), monthly guided tours, and 3 Italian language courses, in which 44 refugee children, 71 refugee women, 2nd generation kids but also Sardinian kids have been enrolled. By spring 2023, approximately 300 refugees have participated in these activities, where Ukrainian-speakers cultural mediators played a critical role in guaranteeing to remove language and cultural barriers. This pilot, similarly to others already presented, had per objective to create under a single umbrella a comprehensive support system for refugees that can lighten and speed up the integration process for newcomers.



The second Sardinia project **“Conoscere riconoscendosi – Teatri di vita” (Learning while knowing yourself – Life theatres)** is pretty unique in comparison to other EPIC’s pilots because it aims at reducing inequalities experienced by accompanied and unaccompanied migrant children aged between 14 and 18 years who are in care, and at facilitating Italian language acquisition and educational inclusion in the metropolitan city of Cagliari and in southern Sardinia. The artistic coordinator has designed a programme based on David R. Hawkins’s map of consciousness focusing on therapeutic healing and the conscientising of the potential of drama workshops. The group of youth engaged in workshops is very diverse (mainly of Ukrainian, Albanian, Egyptian, Palestinian, Tunisian, and Turkish origin but also others) and aged between 15 and 17 years old. As the project targets youngsters, most of whom are in a very vulnerable situation, social services have been closely involved in the whole process, and the planning phase has been quite lengthy to ensure that the various needs and ethical issues were properly addressed.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS:

- Systemic and systematic interventions, such as a labour market portal in a public administration, are hard to transfer and implement due to a number of barriers, from technical to challenging the status quo at local labour markets.
- The pilots implemented are rich and important but have a smaller scale and long-term sustainability.
- The culture of “wrapping” integration into projects outsourced to NGOs seems to be prevalent in many cities, but this often addresses the effects and not also the causes of migrants' exclusion.
- The need for both complementary/partner work of both LAs and NGOs on integration (also within project-funded processes), as well as need for developing tools for the systemic inclusion of migrants, should be addressed at the high level of EU and national administrations.

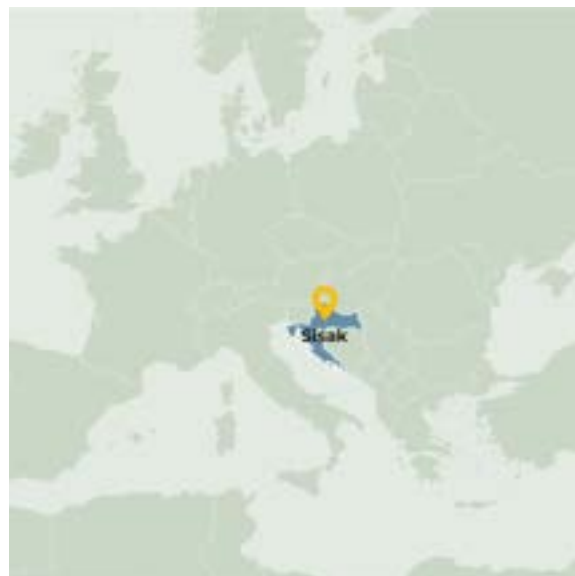


Sardinia

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SISAK, CROATIA

The pilot project **“Inclusive Sisak”** led by the municipality and its key partner Local Democracy Agency (LDA) Sisak, was implemented in collaboration with a wide partnership (JRS Croatia associates, Centre for Cultural Dialogue, NGO Civil Rights Project Sisak, Red Cross Sisak, Library of the City of Sisak, Employment Bureau Sisak). After a research analysis conducted by the mentioned actors about migrants in the city, it was found that there was no local example of engaging migrants in any community development work, where they can actively contribute to creating activities and get involved in the decision-making process of any kind, including about their integration activities. Having that in mind, and recognising the need to provide support in job search to people who do not understand yet how the local market operates, the pilot project offers two-way support:



- A set of educational workshops to increase the employment possibilities of migrants in Sisak, through education, support and promotional activities.
- To develop a sustainable welcome and integration network at the local level.

This pilot project aims to introduce the path, which will enable the migrants to learn about a new culture, build their capacity, get employed and help them to stand on their own feet, instead of being lifetime-dependent on government support and other humanitarian aid organisations.

Implementation of this project had five major activities in which migrants received training to strengthen their own employment and active citizenship capacities. Further on, the pilot also set up a library corner in the local library with a quality offer of books in migrants' own languages and books translated to migrants' languages, did some cultural exchange activities, such as workshops for

children whose parents are involved in the employment activities, together with other children, and a total of 5 events for migrants and other neighbours in Sisak where authors from migrant countries were introduced from the books purchased for the library corner.. After this, LDA Sisak announced a tender in early 2023 to employ one resident from a migrant background who would be a cultural mediator acting as a bridge builder between the migrant community and the native-born local community activities ensuring that the voice and needs of the migrants are heard and the activities are organised in a tailored-made manner . This person will be employed on a full-time work contract with the project partner LDA Sisak.

Moreover, the LDA Sisak is working on employing a local coordinator for integration of migrants – also from a migrant origin. For this engagement, an Employment Integration Plan (EIP) for the new employee is being developed with the support of JRS Croatia which has strong experience in employing migrants.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS:

- The pilot project has a strong component of empowerment of migrants as well as labour market inclusion. Near a hundred people have directly benefited from these activities, of which around 50 were newcomers in Sisak and 10 of them employers.
- The Employment Integration Plan (EIP) as well as an experience of employing migrants to public sector positions are the good practice that can benefit other territories.





CHAPTER 05

POLICY HARMONISATION

While the project has followed a place-based approach for many of its activities, EPIC also has a strong EU dimension through which the transnational exchange of knowledge comes as a cornerstone to build on what it works. This means bringing together diverse local, regional, and national actors and stakeholders that in one way or another influence or implement migrant policies and cross-pollinate to harmonise policies and practices that have the potential to make a difference.

To have joint debates and an analysis of how different stakeholders across Europe are dealing with different, yet similar, issues when it comes to migrants and refugees integration, the

project has allowed the stakeholders involved to analyse through a more global lens their own context and get inspired to design new approaches thanks to the lessons learned.

Policy harmonisation at different levels also means future-proofing new services considering the collective knowledge gained by different national and international actors, making them more resilient in the event of rapid changes or crises.

To combine both the local-based and transnational dimensions, EPIC addressed two levels of intervention through what we called the International and the Local Networking Paths.

INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING PATHS

On the international level, the project aimed at creating a network of relevant stakeholders, such as LAs, NGOs and CSOs, working together towards a shared policy direction, to encourage migrant integration at the local level. To do so, the International Networking Paths served as a forum through which partners and stakeholders discuss initiatives that can be implemented, sharing their knowledge and experience.

The international networking paths were, therefore, a chance for partners to meet and reflect on common paths for the integration of migrants at the local level, but also to discuss with external stakeholders on policy harmonisation, project integration and local-to-local cooperation. Moreover, these events were an occasion for all the stakeholders, LAs, and CSOs involved in discussing European migrant issues and challenges and preparing the ground for the possibility to take common positions and political statements addressed to the European Institutions. An example is the Memorandum of Understanding explained below.

Overall, 3 International Networking Paths meetings were organised throughout the project: one in Sisak (Croatia), after the end of the job shadowing activities; one in Amadora (Portugal), halfway through the pilot projects; and one in Gdansk (Poland), coinciding with the final event.

International Networking Path in Sisak

The first International Networking Path took place on November 9th and 10th, 2021 in the Croatian cities of Sisak and Zagreb. Because of the good practices identified by the EPIC project in these territories, the main angle of the policy harmonisation was around housing opportunities for newcomers based on a public-private partnership, as well as how to organise multicultural activities around the housing initiatives so that the flats represent a new home in a society that welcomes the new neighbours with open arms.

On the first day, EPIC partners visited the City of Sisak, about an hour from Zagreb, to meet with local stakeholders.

Different representatives from Sisak Municipality and local CSOs and NGOs took turns to explain the activities and services implemented on the territory to favour

migrants' social inclusion. For instance, a representative of the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing from Zagreb highlighted the particular challenges arising from the 2020 earthquake, which caused extensive material damage in the region, and the actions implemented to create safe conditions for households to return to the affected areas, which involved the reconstruction and/or construction of housing, provision of financial assistance and temporary accommodation; a Representative of the Sisak Red Cross also presented the wide range of their activities involving medical, educational, administrative, employment and welfare assistance, the provision of clothing, food and school supplies and the organisation of cultural exchange workshops, as well as the joint actions with the Municipality of Sisak to create a private residence to support inclusion of persons with international protection. Moreover, a representative of the Center for Culture Dialogue presented their activities for welcoming newcomers and the workshops for economic and social integration in Sisak. Finally, the audience had the opportunity to hear the testimony of a newcomer in Sisak, highlighting the importance for both newcomers and host societies to counteract negative stereotypes about migrants and refugees.

After this, EPIC partners went to visit a flat accessible under the Housing Services for Migrants programme, guided by the Representative of the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing. These apartments are fully equipped and furnished and provide families with a safe place to live as soon as they arrive in the city, allowing them to properly settle in. Accommodation is free of charge, including utilities, for two years, which is considered sufficient to allow families to integrate into the labour market and social life of the city and to find a new home.

Back in Zagreb in the afternoon, EPIC partners participated in a working session on narratives, which had the objective to get to know the overall planning of the eight local communication campaigns, as well as exchanging among partners possible ideas and actions that the consortium wished to undertake at the project level.



Watch the video summary of the international networking path in Sisak.



Figure 14. EPIC partners in a consortium meeting.

International Networking Path in Amadora

On 28th September 2022 EPIC brought together a range of stakeholders working on social integration to gather in Amadora, Portugal, for its second International Networking Path. On this occasion, given the international context heavily affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the policy harmonisation was focused on how to move from a narrative of humanitarian crises to a structural approach for the reception and integration of migrants that can capitalise and build on lessons learned. Participants from across Europe had the opportunity to listen and interact with policymakers from local to international levels, such as the Major of Amadora, the DG for Migration and Home Affairs of the EC or IOM, and NGOs and CSO representatives from different European countries working to make integration services for newcomers more accessible and resilient.

“Success in integration does not come without a joint effort to give a response to the emerging needs, especially when it comes to welcoming refugees coming under unexpected circumstances, such as people fleeing wars and conflicts, as happened in 2015 and now with the war in Ukraine”, said the Major of Amadora, Carla Tavares.

About the importance of having an international platform like the model that EPIC offers, she added that **“to engage and exchange experiences with other territories around Europe that are going through similar issues and are putting in place processes to provide responses is very fruitful so that we get to know good practices that we can also build in our territory”**.

Eventually, the audience had the opportunity to hear the testimonies from those that have embarked on a journey with the hope of a better life in Europe. Reflecting on these testimonies as well as on their own experiences providing immediate responses to the latest humanitarian crisis, the national and international experts of the closing roundtable of the conference, “What solutions at the local and national level to overcome the emergency?”, concluded that the current war in Ukraine and the fast mobilisation deployed by the EU27 showed how many of the traditional existing barriers could be removed to accelerate the process when there is political willingness.

The event also took participants on two field visits, which concluded the event. The first one was the “12-15 Project”, a project aimed at fighting school dropout, and significantly decreasing absenteeism and the

underachievement of youngsters aged between 11 and 16, mainly from a migrant background, who dropped out of school or who are at risk of doing so.

The second, on the other hand, took place at the Centro Pedro Arrupe (CPA), inaugurated in 2006 to support homeless migrants and refugees by JRS. With a capacity of 25 residents, the CPA was created in response to a need felt by JRS when monitoring many users in situations of severe economic distress. The CPA is open all day long and provides individualised follow-up for each resident, making available a multidisciplinary technical team, composed

in part of former residents. In general, the objectives are to accompany individuals and families in emergency situations towards sustainable autonomy through access to the labour market, full citizenship and housing so that they can become an integral part of society.



Watch the video summary of the international networking path in Amadora at the EPIC YouTube Playlist.



Figure 15. Roundtable during the International Networking Path in Amadora.

International Networking Path in Brussels

This last International Networking Path took place from on the 6th and 7th of June 2023 in Brussels, Belgium, in conjunction with the project's final conference.

The event was a moment to present the results of the project to a wider audience, present the LAs working on the action and let them explain the importance and the challenges of integration in the different key areas identified and the best practices and recommendations achieved, and to hold round tables of discussions among policy-makers and stakeholders. To maximise the impact of a bottom-up approach, each partner invited local stakeholders with whom it collaborated in local activities.

The international networking path in Brussels represented also the final event of the creation of a Community of Interest, composed of working groups which gather stakeholders and practitioners working both at the local and EU level, intending to favour the emerging of joint policies and initiatives in the area of migration and integration. Partners and stakeholders could exchange through a marketplace and a world café session. The community will be kept alive through the continuous exchanges between the partners and the ALDA migration hub, with the idea of capitalising on these efforts to create a strong consortium of stakeholders with the possibility to write a new project on the matter.

LOCAL NETWORKING PATHS

The Local Networking Paths, organised in each targeted territory of the project, took different forms: from citizens' panels to focus groups with experts, consultations, roundtables and meetings with migrants' communities and organisations.

These events were an occasion for the partners of the project to engage the local population and gain feedback from their citizens about the concrete actions they were doing, such as the pilots and the campaigns, to understand if those were taking the right direction to address the needs on the ground. The organisation of such events served as means to grant full ownership to the activities implemented and to support the bottom-up approach, which underpins the project. Moreover, the Local Networking Paths was an occasion to reflect within the communities on how to improve migrants' life and their integration within the hosting community and to discuss with citizens on solutions to existing local integration. The partner NGOs played a key role as they are many often interlocutors between some groups and the administration.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions, in the early stages of the project, it was difficult for the partners to have direct contact with citizens and the migrant community and actively involve them in activities, so these events also served as an occasion to meet in person and start building stronger relationships with them.

The ultimate aim of the Local Paths was indeed to sustain an integration-positive mindset and to engage with citizens to understand what the perceived needs and challenges related to migrants' inclusion are and propose concrete solutions to existing integration issues to be taken into consideration by the LAs when proposing a policy change in the local legislation. In this respect, at the end of the project, all partners will be also given the opportunity to sign the so-called Memorandum of Understanding, a document in which they engage in implementing some of the EPIC activities in their local legislation.

MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING

To make the tested services of the project sustainable and promote structural changes within their local, all context, the partners committed to signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) committing to engage in future shared projects to support capacities' exchange on migrant integration, integrate pilot projects in their institutional frameworks, and/or promote changes in local legislation.

Partners decided to sign this document in the final phase of the project after a thorough reflection on this 3-year journey. In particular, by signing the MoU, the LAs involved in the project committed.

- To engage in the community resulting from the local networking path, as well as making efforts to keep it alive and growing.
- To contribute to the creation of a working group with NGOs and local stakeholders, aimed at co-designing an action plan identifying the measures and financial resources necessary to ensure the sustainability of EPIC pilot actions impacts and potential follow up.
- To inform and involve NGOs in the policy-making processes related to migrants' integration in the field of housing, employment, education, job placement or legal and administrative support; and to cooperate with NGOs and stakeholders to raise awareness on the migration issue, fight against hate-speech and counteract existing prejudices among residents about newcomers.

Whereas the respective NGOs committed

- To maintain contacts and expand the local network of stakeholders working on the social inclusion of migrants and strengthen cooperation with the municipality to respond in a cohesive and integrated manner to migrants' needs.
- To take an active part in the co-design of an action plan for the sustainability and policy harmonisation of EPIC pilot actions impacts and potential follow up.
- To engage in supporting the municipality in policy-making processes related to the reception and inclusion of migrants.



Figure 16. The vice mayor of Ioannina at the EPIC local networking path.

- To support the municipality to raise awareness on the migration issue, fight against hate-speech and counteract existing prejudices among residents about newcomers; and, finally to monitor the impacts of local networking path and promote future actions.

Ultimately, the objective of the MoU is to grant the sustainability of the pilot projects, a core success for EPIC, and to favour the establishment of a stable network in the field of integration and migration among the participants and beyond, thanks to the efforts already made during the Local and International Networking Paths.

The signing of the MoU did not come without some barriers to be sorted out, such as those related to both the political and bureaucratic spheres. Local authorities have limited competencies when it comes to decisions on migration-related policies. Therefore, the

document had to be agreed on in a way that included activities that the signatories could effectively implement in their local legislation.

Furthermore, another issue arose from the general elections that took place in some of the municipalities involved in the project. In some cases, the election of a new mayor led to a change in the political orientation and consequently in the willingness of the local authorities to implement the activities related to the pilot project in their legislation. To prevent and overcome these obstacles, ALDA, the project leader, adopted a strategy based on a series of bilateral meetings with each municipality, which took place over the last year of project implementation, and made sure to maintain continuous interlocutions with each LA and associated NGO. By doing so, it was possible to listen to everyone's concerns and expectations and find an agreement concerning the content of the MoU and the commitment they were willing to make.



CHAPTER 06

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ABOUT MIGRATION

INTRODUCTION

As part of the project's overall objective to address various migration-related challenges, EPIC has made it a key cross-cutting activity for all its partners to analyse how appropriate communication can eradicate certain prejudices and misinformation among the local population.

Just as necessary as understanding the main difficulties newcomers face in accessing integration services and experimenting

with innovative approaches that can effectively remove these difficulties, is proper communication around them. The lack of adequate information on things like how public services work and who can benefit from them and how are sometimes manipulated by some actors who want to generate controversy and use immigration as a scapegoat. When the EPIC partners decided to test new services in their cities to make integration processes more efficient, it was therefore, totally clear that we'd need to make the effort in educating ourselves on how to communicate what we were doing

and why it was needed. Starting with the International Training on Media and a series of follow-up participatory workshops, partners were guided to develop an alternative narrative campaign, targeting local citizens, to promote unbiased, balanced and evidence-based reporting on migration. AEIDL coordinated their work, preparing an action plan and calendar, hosting a series of participatory workshops, and providing guidance and advice to the local partners.

The document EPIC toolkit offers an overview of the steps followed during the process of putting together and delivering the communication campaigns. Altogether, the preparatory and implementing work done for this activity has lasted a year and a half approximately. In the next pages, a portrait of what each campaign was about, and the results achieved are presented.



Access to the EPIC toolkit



Figure 17. Speakers from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan shared their experiences as refugees during a project conference.

**THE 8 EPIC LOCAL
CAMPAIGNS** ▶



ALCORCON: #SAMEDREAM (#MISMOSUEÑO)



Figure 18. Examples of posters done by the participants of the campaign workshops in Alcorcon

Thematic focus

Harmful narratives against unaccompanied foreign minors (so-called MENAs in Spanish – those are migrant boys, girls, and teenagers under the age of 18 who are separated from their parents and who are not under the care of any adult). Much of the increasing narrative against children and adolescents is based on misrepresentation of reality. Some media, political parties and civil associations have tried to alarm society about the danger posed by MENAs. However, many have been denied as false to manipulate public opinion against foreign minors.

Objectives

- To change the negative perception young people and society might have about MENAs.
- Raise awareness about fake news and how to act against them.
- Empower foreign young unaccompanied minors into shaping a narrative about them.

Campaigner

Solidaridad Sin Fronteras (SFF), NGO in Alcorcon (Madrid, Spain).

Target Audience

Parents with children aged 12-22 years old and young adults in Alcorcon (Madrid, Spain).

Slogan & key messages

#SameDream/ #MismoSueño

- Despite cultural differences, at the end of the day, we want the same in life.
- The fact that MENAs are unaccompanied foreign minors does not imply any threat. They need support as national minors do when they do not have their parents with them. They are a vulnerable group that needs special protection, support, and empathy.

The campaign was present at the Regional Fair of children and youth leisure (Juvenalia) which brings together social organisations, educational centres, and young people, where SSF did an activity to address discriminatory attitudes and behaviours among young people. It was the right moment to test the #SameDream campaign, reflecting on the reality of MENAs with young people and some professionals and trying out the activity of creating a poster with counter-narratives of hatred towards MENAs.

The campaign was officially launched both physically and online on 16 December 2022 in a face-to-face event, on the commemoration of International Migrants Day. SSF, in collaboration with the Intercultural Mediation of the City Council of Alcorcon and other CSO, organised an event in Alcorcon to present the #MismoSueño campaign through different debates, a video and a participatory activity encouraging attendees to reflect on several messages around the MENAs debate and propose alternative ones they found more accurate. Following the activity, SSF organised a round table with representatives of migrant organisations with the intervention of migrants as well to discuss the reality of migrant people in the municipality, their needs, obstacles and challenges. Different posters with messages extorted from the event were weekly published on social media accounts.

The last phase of the campaign was the creation of a video with the materials from the participatory activity carried out during the launch event of the campaign and its dissemination through different channels. The City Council of Alcorcon has collected the feedback received from the campaign activities to improve their own services and propose new initiatives in the Municipality to address origin-based discrimination. For the purpose of the campaign, SSF created and disseminated a website where the campaign was initially presented <https://nodiscrimina.wixsite.com/concurso/campa%C3%B1a>

The website shows the development of the MismoSueño campaign, and all materials produced.



The EPIC local alternative narrative campaign in Alcorcon at EPIC website



BRESCIA: BETTER TOGETHER (MEGLIOVICINI)



Figure 19. A bus carrying out different routes in the city of Brescia with the poster of the MEGLIOVICINI campaign.

Thematic focus

Combating stereotypes in multicultural neighbours to get more housing opportunities for migrants. The local communication campaign carried out by the Municipality of Brescia and ADL Zavidovici aimed to tackle the difficulties newcomers face when trying to rent private apartments due to stereotypes and the reluctance of some neighbours to rent or live near newcomers. This campaign invites citizens to be less frightened of what they do not know and more open to getting to know them and discovering how interesting can be to mix with different cultures, backgrounds, and traditions.

Objectives

- To support the activities that the Municipality of Brescia is promoting to improve housing solutions for citizens with migrant backgrounds.
- To promote a positive narrative about being neighbours with migrants, supporting the spreading of positive messages and real stories of peaceful cohabitation.
- To promote the integration of migrants at the local level, starting from the housing unit, but also as an opportunity for mutual knowledge and mutual aid.
- To transform the fear of the “other” into the discovery of the other.

Target Audience

Citizens, both native-born and newcomers, living in the neighbourhood where the Pilot project will take place: Borgo Trento neighbourhood and Don Bosco neighbourhood.

Campaigners

The **Municipality of Brescia** and the NGO **ADL Zavidovici**, Italy.

Slogan & key messages

#megliovicini/ betterclose

It represents the idea that we need to get back to being close, leaving the fears of meeting people and inviting the audience to share what they love most and being open to discovering how interesting can be to meet their neighbours without being trapped into stereotypes.

The campaign has achieved two main types of outcomes.

Firstly, producing a large number of communication materials (banners with the slogan of the campaign, brochures, vignettes, leaflets, infographics, etc.) disseminated in some strategic points of the city and through Facebook groups and YouTube channels to inform about the campaign objectives and activities and engage the audience in further activities. Remarkable here is the public buses going around the city with the campaign posters which allowed the campaign to get a high visibility.

And secondly, a series of awareness-raising and networking events were organised. In spring 2022, two campaign events took place in Borgo Trento and Don Bosco, involving local associations,

municipality representatives, religious communities, and local stakeholders. The campaign was presented, and some participants could share their positive stories of living in a multicultural environment with the rest of the audience, along with food and drinks to get people to talk to each other.

A final public event was hosted by the campaigners on 19 May on the occasion of the International Day of Living Together in Peace - celebrated with the screening of the film “All of Us” by Pierre Pirard -, after the presentation of the campaign launched by the EPIC partners in Brescia.



The EPIC local alternative narrative campaign in Brescia at the EPIC website.



GDANSK: ENSURING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR EVERY KID



Figure 20. Picture of a workshop organised by EPIC

Thematic focus

Educational challenges in Poland as a result of the war in Ukraine.

Refugee children account for more than 40% of all refugees in Poland. Even before the war broke out, teaching and integrating Ukrainian pupils posed a challenge for Polish schools. That challenge was overwhelming when the number of people in need of shelter more than doubled in 2022. In this context, it has been observed that about half of the children

were not enrolled in Polish schools, continuing with an online education linked to Ukraine. However, experts in education and child psychology warn of the great risk of children being educated in a parallel way, of increasing cognitive gaps and, ultimately, of the high risk of a “lost generation” as the war is perpetuated over time. At the same time, Polish schools are so overwhelmed with the number of pupils they already have that there is a consensus that they do not want to take in any more children.

Campaigner

Metropolitan Association of Gdansk, Polish school directors (advocates), refugee parents, educational institutions, social help institutions and NGOs working with refugees.

Target Audience

Political leaders, public opinion in Poland, refugee parents whose children are not in the education system.

Objectives

The seminar and the campaign wanted to open the debate on the need for compulsory education for all refugee children and to raise awareness of the negative consequences for the children and the host society if they are left out of the formal system in the long run.

Slogan & key messages

Education is key for each and every child.

The first outcome of this campaign was a series of meetings first among public authorities, international organisations and NGOs working with refugees and school directors from the end of 2022 to spring 2023 to advocate for the importance of all children attending schools and the severe consequences of not guaranteeing this. Being such a complicated and sensitive issue, the efforts of the campaign were to advocate as much as possible via face-to-face meetings with partners and stakeholders to start finding some common ground and move forward with a plan.

Secondly, some awareness-raising meetings with refugee parents whose children were not in the education system were organised to encourage them to enrol their children.

Given the particular context lived in Poland, the campaign continues after the end of the EPIC project and therefore, the impact that the raising awareness efforts the Metropolitan Association of Gdansk have made will be assessed in the following months.



The EPIC local alternative narrative campaign in Gdansk at EPIC website



IOANNINA: “+ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ” JOINT EFFORT FOR THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN THE LABOUR MARKET



Figure 21. Image of the promotional video of the campaign in Ioannina.

Thematic focus

The Municipality of Ioannina (Mol) developed a campaign around to tackle the lack of information about the resources available and how this benefits the local society as a whole. Joint efforts among all the Mol's implicated departments (e.g., administrative, legal, financial and IT departments) and media (local newspapers, TV stations and sites) were needed to coordinate activities and optimise results.

Objectives

The primary objective was to raise awareness among the local population, and above all refugees, migrants and local stakeholders, of the services designed and implemented by the Mol to tackle the administrative difficulties the local migrant communities are facing when entering the local labour market.

This is also connected to the second objective on how to address such difficulties, and therefore, making a joint effort to accelerate the labour market integration of migrants and refugees in Ioannina benefits ultimately the city as a whole.

The partners were aware that efforts to 1) better communicate the services to make them more accessible to the potential beneficiaries were needed, as well 2) the fact that the overall local population needs to get a better understanding of how integrating services to contribute to building a more prosperous city for all, avoiding biased information and misperceptions that can trigger discrimination or hate speech.

Campaigner

The **Municipality of Ioannina** (Mol), Greece.

Target Audience

Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers living in Ioannina and seeking a job.
Stakeholders of the Mol.
The local community.

Slogan & key messages

“+Εργασία”: Joint effort for the social inclusion of refugees and migrants in the labour market.

After the launch of the campaign in June 2022 (with a press release on the official site of the Mol, posters in the media and public local places, TV spots, flyers, and banners) more people were aware of the EPIC project and the consulting services provided by the employability counsellor and tax preparer during the implementation of our Pilot Project “+Εργασία”. By December, when “+Εργασία” was concluded, 81 people had been served and benefitted from the provided services. To close the campaign, a physical public conference, entitled “Current issues of social integration of migrants and refugees” was held on 23 September 2022 at the cultural Multicentre “Δημ. Χατζής”. The conference was useful to raise awareness among the local community about current migration/refugee integration issues and inform them about social integration programs implemented by the Municipality of Ioannina, public and private camps, and social organisations operating in the region.

The conference is available at the following link:
https://youtu.be/q_yjKbfYbk8



The EPIC local alternative narrative campaign in Ioannina at EPIC website



LISBON: WHAT IF IT WAS ME?

Objectives

- To address the most common hate or uninformed comments a lot of citizens have about refugees arriving in Portugal.
- To inform civil society about the costs of becoming a refugee, not just economic but also psychological - create empathy and respect.
- To make people aware that it is not an easy choice, that it is hard, that civil society is not paying for people to live comfortably forever, and that the journey is far from ending once they reach the new country.



Figure 22. Picture of the closing conference of the campaign in Lisbon.

Thematic focus

Raising awareness among native-born people of what it means for refugees to leave everything behind and how the loss will never be fully repaired.

Slogan & key messages

What if it was me?

We all enjoy family gatherings, our freedom of choice and speech, our friends... What if I was forced to leave all that behind to reach shelter, unsure if I would ever meet it again?

Campaigner

JRS Portugal

Target Audience

- People that although don't express hate towards the topic of migration but don't have a lot of info about it.
- People who are clearly against migration, either because they believe in the stereotypes or simply because they are very nationalists.
- Possible partners, who may not be aware of the JRS's work in Portugal and could be strategic in terms of facilitating the integration of the people they serve every day.

A social media campaign was designed in late 2022 with the help of an agency specialized in social issues to invite the audience to reflect on the difficulties refugees face after being forced to leave everything behind, moving the discourse from an economic angle to a human-entre approach. Pictures, banners, video testimonies broadcasted on YouTube and different informative posts were disseminated in the first quarter of 2023 to launch the campaign, raising awareness, and generating momentum towards the public event.

The "What if it was me" campaign was largely disseminated with news published about it on different platforms such as the following publications:

- <https://agencia.ecclesia.pt/portal/events/jrs-portugal-migrantes-partilham-testemunhos-no-encerramento-da-campanha-e-se-fosse-eu/>
- <https://setemargens.com/campanha-do-jrs-chega-ao-fim-com-testemunhos-de-migrantes/>
- <https://www.netthings.pt/2023/02/E-se-fosse-eu-campanha-tenta-sensibilizar-portugueses-sobre-situacao-dos-migrantes.html>

- <https://www.briefing.pt/2023/02/01/a-jrs-da-movimento-aos-refugiados/>

The closing event of "What if it was me" wanted to raise awareness of the vulnerable condition of migrants. At the event, various local initiatives and most importantly, migrants and refugees, shared very inspiring stories and initiatives in the context of the integration of migrants in Portugal and some commitments to continue collaborating were made.



The EPIC local alternative narrative campaign in Lisbon at EPIC website



OBERHAUSEN: LIFE IN OBERHAUSEN

Thematic focus

The local alternative narrative campaign carried out by the EPIC partners kitev, and the Municipality of Oberhausen wants to address the “perceived” inequality among the residents of Oberhausen. With the increase of new arrivals, refugees started to be misperceived by a growing group as a threat to their own prosperity. The campaign theme is also directly linked to the pilot of a digital platform bringing together all the support services and offers in Oberhausen. The campaign serves to support this message of the pilot project and to create a sense of helpfulness.



Figure 23. Picture of the announcement of the local campaign on the facade of the train station.

Objectives

- To ensure the accessibility for very diverse, partly marginalized groups to existing services in Oberhausen through a single digital platform for all.
- To create a feeling of group or community among the participating initiatives, to be more open to cooperation.
- To deconstruct wrong perceptions about newcomers in Oberhausen.

Campaigner

The Municipality of Oberhausen and kitev.

Target Audience

Oberhausen residents from different backgrounds.

Slogan & key messages

Oberhausen has a lot to offer!

You will get support the support you know. This is how.

Do you want to get active? Here’s how.

The campaign has meant the creation of a supporting network around the development of the digital platform and the local campaigns, thanks to the number of internal meetings hosted by the EPIC partners in Oberhausen with many different local initiatives and the target group. Such efforts are meant to pay off in making the results of the campaign more visible and the supporting network sustainable and collaborating beyond the project.

Highly visible art installation with the campaign identity and information: On several days in a row, towards the evening, a projection with the slogans of the Life in Oberhausen campaign was shown at three different locations in the city centre. A projection was visible on the outer facade of the station tower and due to its size, it had a large reach beyond the station forecourt. A second projection primarily appealed to the passers-by at the main train station and could be seen in the interior of the vacancy café next to the main entrance to the station hall. A third projection was at the same time in a converted supermarket downtown, near the shopping street. The projection was placed on monitors in the supermarket’s shop windows and inspires the passing public to stop.

Networking and cultural events organised by the campaign have brought people together, such as the kick-off workshop to launch

the campaign, the e Insta-Walk carried out in connection with the spray activity on the sidewalks and squares in the city centre, where a certain number of participants were asked to take photos of the action and post it on their Instagram account with the appropriate hashtag. A local networking event once the digital platform was officially launched was also organised by kitev and the Municipality of Oberhausen to bring all the initiatives cooperating in the city as well as the different target groups together.

The campaign also got a lot of visibility through different social media channels (Facebook, and Instagram). An announcement text about the campaign appeared on the homepage of the city administration as well as of kitev and was published in different local newspapers.



The EPIC local alternative narrative campaign in Oberhausen at EPIC website



SARDINIA: NO ONE IS A STRANGER TO HUMANITY (NESSUNO È STRANIERO ALL'UMANITÀ)

Thematic focus

The added value of diverse societies and the need to respect each other



Figure 24. Panels for the messages and visual identity of the campaign were offered to citizens in different public spaces of Sardinia.

Objectives

To counter hate speech and anti-migration narratives, to promote the integration of people with a migration background in hosting societies in the Italian region of Sardinia.

To inform a wide audience on the added value of migration to hosting societies, by showing the process of integration of people with a migration background into hosting societies.

Campaigners

The Region of Sardegna and the social cooperative **Studio e Progetto 2**.

Target Audience

Citizens of different backgrounds in historic cities of the Sardinian region.

Slogan & key messages

No one is a stranger to humanity / Nessuno è straniero all'umanità.

The campaign was divided into five events, each coinciding with a significant international day in 2022. By utilising public spaces, each event was an opportunity to connect with and motivate the local community, generate enthusiasm, and raise awareness of the challenges faced by migrants in Sardinia.

The first event, held on International Women's Day in March, used the slogan "Live free, free to live" to denounce the specific discrimination and prejudices faced by migrant women. On this occasion, the Councillor for Labour, Alessandra Zedda, delivered a speech expressing support for migrant women and calling for increased efforts for their inclusion at all levels, to work against all forms of violence and in favour of rights and freedom. The public event was held in the city of Cagliari, along the streets of the city centre where volunteers met around 600 visitors and 300 postcards, and 300 bookmarks of the campaign was shared. The publications about the campaign for this day reached almost 10,000 views in the regional newspaper/website.

On International Workers' Day in May, the campaign conveyed the message: "The exploitation of labour cancels out human dignity?". The campaign was launched simultaneously in several cities across the region, including Cagliari, Sassari, Iglesias, Pula, and San Giovanni Suergiu. The Council of Christian Solinas, the President of the Region, addressed all workers, regardless of gender, age, or nationality, highlighting the need for an inclusive society that recognises the contribution of all. Near 2,500 bookmarks were shared among the participants.

In October, the campaign took place in observance of two significant international days: the International Day of Non-Violence and the International Day against Human Trafficking. On the International Day of Non-Violence, the campaign spread the slogan "No one is a stranger to humanity". High school students participated in a competition on the issue of labour exploitation, as part of the Region's broader efforts to promote a culture of non-violence and raise awareness among citizens, especially the younger generation. On International Day against Human Trafficking, the campaign called "Civilization does not allow chains" aimed to combat stereotypes, prejudices, hate speech and anti-migration narratives. 5,000 bookmarks were shared, and the campaign slogan and leaflets were posted and shared inside public transport in the cities of Cagliari, Sassari, Nuoro and Olbia.

On International Human Rights Day in December, the campaign conveyed the message "Equal in dignity and rights". This initiative involved high school students in a round table discussion on human rights, and the President of the Sardinia Region reaffirmed his commitment to promote and defend human rights. The campaign aimed to reduce inequality, promote equality, and respect differences to build a more equitable and sustainable society.



The EPIC local alternative narrative campaign in Sardinia at EPIC website



SISAK: GET TO KNOW ME!



Figure 25. The materials with the slogans created by the students are given to the school.

Thematic focus

Empathy among students in multicultural schools regardless of their differences. Since this campaign was specifically addressed to children, the focus was not put on migration, but on how we can be different in many ways and still enjoy ourselves together. This was intentionally done not to make migrant students the subject of the activities but equally participants of them.

Objectives

To strengthen the students at a school in Sisak (from 1st to 8th grade) the universal values of respect, solidarity, and equality to treat their fellow students with respect and reflect together on how they can support each other in their daily lives.

Campaigner

The Municipality of Sisak and JRS Croatia.

Target Audience

Students from the Primary school „Braća Bobetko“ Sisak, where the majority of migrant children study in Sisak.

Slogan & key messages

Get to know me! We may seem different but in reality, we are all equals and by supporting each other we can be happier and have more fun.

The campaign started with a series of activities at the school object of the campaign, where approximately 100 students were invited to draw images and write the messages they came up with after reflecting on the campaign presentation made by the team. Such designs would then become the theme and basis of the campaign. Therefore, a very significant outcome is the fact that the students were encouraged to come up with a positive sentence that became the campaign slogans, carrying messages about the importance of helping fellow students in many possible ways, the importance of being accepted although being different, developing friendships, etc.

After the sessions with the children, organised in close cooperation by the Municipality of Sisak, JRS Croatia and the Elementary School of Braća Bobetko, the partners gave all the materials to an external organisation and together, came up with a large number of educational and communication materials that have been shared among all the school students to keep raising awareness after the campaign. Such materials include different devices for the students to play with, puzzles, cards, sponges, eco bookmarks and large posters with the messages and drawings of the campaign.

When all the material for the campaign was ready, it was given to the school for them to organise a series of workshops and activities with students to raise awareness to accept and help the migrant children. As the target group are children, we gave our best that the material for the local campaign will be very modern, digital and interesting for the young generation. The beautiful event when Grad Sisak gave the materials to the school was covered by the local media.



The EPIC local alternative narrative campaign in Sisak at EPIC website



CONCLUSIONS

Even though migrants' integration is currently a primary objective of policymakers' agendas, most existing data and evidence are limited to the national level. Nonetheless, migrants' integration remains a phenomenon that affects and is deeply affected by local dynamics. Understanding more in detail the local characteristics, through an in-depth analysis of political, legal, and institutional dimensions, as well as the perceived opinions of local citizenship both at the local and network level was essential for the positive development and implementation of the project activities, such as the local campaigns and the pilots.

The baseline analysis done in the first year of the project, 2020, underlines the importance of recognising the diversity in migration and 'integration' trajectories, their subjective and emotional dimension beyond overarching, rigid and ultimately racist frameworks.

Policy design and support practices should reflect this, by shifting focus from imposing linear 'integration' trajectories to removing obstacles to urban equality. The analysis further evidences the coloniality (the permanence of colonial patterns) of the current policy and discursive notion of integration and proposes alternative frameworks that focus on

collective urban life. While migration research has advocated for this for a long time, policy and practice in the EU continue to be framed by an idea of integration that is still problematic. To change this, institutions and organisations can work toward co-creating their own de-colonised lexicon to describe and address migrant 'integration' in terms of urban equality.

The complexity of the global context in which the project has been navigating for more than three years has meant major modifications to the initial plans, forcing at certain times to respond to unforeseeable urgent needs and to reorient the course of the project a posteriori.

The war and subsequent refugee crisis in Ukraine have also shown how much of the efforts in providing an immediate response fall on the shoulders of NGOs and the goodwill of civil society.

In addition to the unforeseen challenges lived in the latest years, EPIC started with the fundamental idea that cities and regions in the EU have been dealing with migration issues for many years – some longer, some shorter but the nature of challenges is similar therefore cities could (and should) learn from each other to manage those challenges in most effective for both migrants and host societies, ideally making them a cohesive whole.

The capacity-building process of the project allowed such a mutual learning process and show that working on a concrete practice to be transferred, in this case through job shadowing, seems to be a much better cooperation idea than "traditional" study visits offering a general overview of integration practice, allowing for establishing cooperation culture and long term effects. Nonetheless, such transfer of practices might be challenging due to many factors: administrative specifics in each territory that suppose a barrier or other priorities that may arise in a very dynamic migration context.

EPIC's innovative and right intuition of the need to bring LAs and NGOs together, as two complementary actors that need and strengthen each other, does not also come without a challenge. We can often see a power dynamic in local communities where NGOs are dependent on the local government's decisions and don't always have enough power to challenge the local modus operandi around integration. While innovation within the public administration, in the case of EPIC of testing a

new service or launching a local campaign, can find some resistance.

EPIC has also shown that local administrations and NGOs have to develop capacities of participatory approach to integration, such as cooperating with migrants in engagement, empowerment and co-creation of activities aimed at supporting them. On the other hand, one should not forget about resources and the fact that managing the many difficulties migrants experience is granted to a very limited group of people. EPIC has proved that most public administrations lack a dedicated migration-management structure, but rather a project commissioned to an NGO, which will last as long as an external fund is available and may not be continued once the project stops.

Public administrations should investigate transforming their practices and bringing integration as a cross-cutting service, rather than placing migrants in a "parallel/separated" system of services, which could unfortunately lead to more exclusion and discrimination.

The war in Ukraine and the fast mobilisation deployed by the EU27 showed how many of the traditional existing barriers could be removed to accelerate the process when there is political willingness. Now that new mechanisms have been deployed to this end, it remains to be seen if countries are willing to set up an emergency mechanism based on the lessons learnt that suppose a more efficient and rapid response to an unforeseen crisis and, ultimately to a more integrate humanitarian response and subsequent integration process where newcomers can access the services and urban spaces where they live.

We are certain that the pilot projects planned in EPIC have and will have a very good impact on the local community. **The remaining challenge is about the capacity to bring a change that will allow migrants to be an integral part of communities, not (solely) beneficiaries of help services and workforce for our ageing market.**

For this structural change to happen we all have a role to play. It is certain that local authorities and NGOs are the ultimate antennae implementing national policies and therefore, those responding to immediate solutions. But we should not assume that such a responsibility to integrate newcomers ends there. As some of the EPIC local campaigns have communicated, integration starts in our neighbourhoods, in our schools, and in our houses. It is everybody's responsibility to make our cities inclusive places to live in.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADL Z	ADL ZAVIDOVICI - Associazione per l'Ambasciata della Democrazia Locale a Zavidovici Onlus – Impresa Sociale
AEIDL	European Association for Innovation on Local Development
ALDA	European Association for Local Democracy
AMIF	Asylum Migration and Integration Fund
CDD	Centre for Cultural Dialogue
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EPIC	European Platform of Integrating Cities
EU	European Union
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
LA	Local authority
LDA	Local Democracy Agency
MoI	Municipality of Ioannina
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PP	Pilot Project
Q&A	Questions and answers
SSF	Solidaridad Sin Fronteras
UCL	University College of London
WP	Work Package

