

Include-EU

Regional and local expertise,
exchange and engagement for
enhanced social cohesion in Europe.



Fostering participation and
encounters with host societies



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Introduction



Includ-EU project description

The goal of Includ-EU is to contribute to building more inclusive and cohesive European societies by enhancing transnational knowledge sharing, cooperation, and partnerships between local and regional authorities in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain.

Includ-EU capitalizes on the diversity of local expertise and approaches as well as existing policy and practice in the field of integration. Funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union, the project focuses on:

- a) improving knowledge and capacities to facilitate the integration of Third Country Nationals (TCNs);
- b) implementing and assessing pilot projects that promote the integration of TCNs at the regional and local level;
- c) establishing an informal network of regions and local authorities with different levels of expertise.

Aim of the briefing

One of Includ-EU's specific objectives is to enhance local and regional actors' knowledge and capacities to implement innovative integration measures, including through the analysis of existing good practices and the formulation of thematic policy recommendations.

In line with this, the aim of this briefing is to present the state of TCNs' political and social participation in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain, focusing on possible implications for broader inclusion. This briefing also examines existing good practices contributing towards improving TCNs' participation and exchanges with host societies in the European Union (EU).

This briefing is the result of a collaborative mapping process of successful multi-stakeholder, multi-level, and public-private partnerships in different dimensions of TCNs' inclusion in the Includ-EU target countries, in line with the new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-27.

Participation in the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion

While the responsibility for integration policies lies primarily with the Member States, the EU has established a variety of measures to incentivise and support national, regional, and local authorities as well as civil society in their efforts to promote integration. In this framework, the Action Plan sets integration policy priorities, proposes concrete actions, provides guidance, and delineates funding opportunities to translate policy into practice.

The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 (the Action Plan) recognises that the involvement of TCNs in the design and implementation of integration policies is essential to the very success of inclusion efforts. The Action Plan sets out to ensure that more TCNs are included in consultative and decision-making processes at the local, regional, national, and EU level. In this respect, special attention should be paid to gender aspects, the situation of children, and people belonging to religious and ethnic minorities.

The Action Plan also wishes to support Member States in increasing opportunities for encounters and exchanges between TCNs and other residents through art, culture, sports, and social life. Support to TCNs' participation in society should aim to narrow down perceived differences and combat prejudice and discrimination. It should also find venues to channel TCNs' participation into policy processes, as in the case of the Expert Group on the Views of Migrants in the Fields of Migration, Asylum, and Integration Policies established by the European Commission (see following section).

Last but not least, the Action Plan invites Member States to set up and expand measures that support inclusion and participation also through community sponsorship initiatives. Community sponsorship schemes are key to ensure that inclusion is smooth and that receiving communities are well-prepared to welcome newcomers. For this reason, they foster truly mutual inclusion processes.

From political participation to social mixing

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration contains a clear commitment to “empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion” (Objective 16). It emphasizes the need to “*facilitate migrant participation [in the receiving society]*” (16f) and “*support multicultural activities [...] to facilitate mutual understanding and appreciation of migrant cultures and those of destination communities*” (16h). In addition, the Global Compact emphasizes the importance of promoting intercultural dialogue at the local level by engaging with migrants associations, diaspora organizations, and mentorship programmes in order to “*improve integration outcomes and foster mutual respect*” (16f).

Overall, migrants’ participation in the political and social life of receiving countries can take different forms of political and social involvement.

Political participation includes voting in local, national, or regional elections, standing as candidates, joining associations or political parties, and sit in consultative bodies (IOM 2020, p. 197). Active participation of TCNs should be sought also through involvement in **local public life**. In this respect, municipalities are at the forefront of establishing networks of civil society organizations, migrant associations, and other local stakeholders to organise public spaces and activities to **favour collective experiences and social mixing** (OECD 2018a, p. 115).

In this respect, recent efforts have focused on providing project managers and fieldworkers at the international, national, and local levels with up-to-date tools to favour social mixing, both face-to-face and online. An example is the [Joint Global Initiative on Diversity, Inclusion and Social Cohesion \(DISC\)](#), developed by IOM. Through the [Power of Contact](#) publication, the DISC Initiative provides recommendations on how to develop and carry out social mixing interventions based on inter-group contact theory with the aim of increasing meaningful social interactions and cultivating trust (IOM 2021). In developing these types of interventions, [building and developing the capacities](#) of local communities on diversity and social inclusion is also imperative given the heterogeneity and intersectional identities of migrant communities.

The COVID pandemic has especially triggered **digital innovation** to keep communities connected. In its [Digest on Digitalisation](#), DISC has also explored how digitalisation can be leveraged to strengthen social relations and promote participation in virtual spaces..

Participation in decision-making processes as well as in social activities and local life in general is a precondition for TCNs’ **empowerment** and for the very **success of inclusion policies**. Through direct contribution to policy design and implementation, it is possible to ensure that these policies reflect **real needs**. Enabling TCNs to participate actively is also a way for states to maintain democratic legitimacy and promote social cohesion (IOM 2020, p. 198).

For this reason, in 2020 the Commission established an Expert Group on the Views of Migrants in the Fields of Migration, Asylum, and Integration Policies, composed of migrants and organisations representing their interests. The Expert group was created to involve migrants in the development of EU migration and asylum

policies, and will have a consultative role on how to make policy design and implementation more effective and responsive to actual needs. With 24 expert participants from migrant organisations, migrant councils, civil society, academia, business, and trade unions, the Expert Group represents a concrete step taken towards greater participation of all migrants in the decisions that affect them most.

Similar mechanisms exist at the national level, but often lack continuity or are not fully structured. In Italy, for example, between 2017 and 2020, the National Diaspora Forum worked on engaging diaspora organisations in international development cooperation. Most recently, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and IOM Italy have signed an agreement to establish a permanent venue for diaspora engagement.

Venues for community engagement are active at the local level, too. In Tilburg, in the Netherlands, the Refugee Advisory Board encourages migrants' empowerment and involvement in local policy making. The Board was active in 2019-2020 with six advisors with migrant background collaborating with the Municipality of Tilburg on a voluntary basis. The Board stopped its activities during the pandemic, but the municipality, as part of the Includ-EU pilot's activities, is currently recruiting new members and a professional coach to revive this consultative body. Other meaningful examples of participation fora at the local level are the Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants in Spain (see page 13) and the Territorial Migration Councils, present in all Italian prefectures. Both bodies provide a venue for consultation, information, and monitoring on integration and are composed of national and local public officials, non-profit organisations, and other local stakeholders.

Along with political and social participation, **intercultural dialogue** is an essential aspect of promoting truly two-way inclusion processes. Intercultural dialogue should span social contexts as diverse as schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, faith groups, and sport events. These venues can provide opportunities for people with different backgrounds to interact in meaningful ways, narrowing perceived gaps and learning more about each other.

Last but not least, promoting active participation of TCNs in policy design, local economies, politics, sports, arts and volunteering is crucial to **defeating stereotypes, discrimination**, distrust, xenophobia, and racism. Grassroot participation in politics, education, employment, and in leisure and cultural activities bring people closer together and foster a sense of belonging. Importantly, this should be coupled with **accurate and fact-based communication** around migration and integration to knock down prejudice (OECD 2018a, p. 115).

The state of TCNs' participation and intercultural exchanges in the EU

The level of social and political engagement of TCNs largely depends on structural and individual factors. As for **structural factors**, the **right to vote** in national or local elections as well as the right to stand as candidates are generally restricted for migrants. Lengthy **naturalisation and regularisation procedures** further restrict spaces for empowerment and political engagement of migrant communities (Bertelli 2019).¹ Limited **economic rights and access to basic social services** (healthcare, housing, education, language learning) may also (in)directly hamper participation in different spheres of community life.

In addition, pre-existing structural inequalities and residential segregation prevent participation in community activities and reinforce existing stereotypes, prejudices, and social tensions (IOM 2021, p. 8). **Individual factors**, including **legal status, employment, socio-demographic characteristics**, age, level of education as well as the duration of residence, also play a role in enabling or hampering participation (IOM 2020, p. 198). For disadvantaged TCNs participation becomes difficult due to a challenging daily life, conflicts with jobs and care responsibilities, as well as emergency issues linked to health, housing, and financial problems. **Poor mental health** can also lead to a state of inertia and lack of motivation negatively affecting social life. In addition, lengthy bureaucratic procedures to obtain legal documents, language barriers and distrust from residents often discourage migrants from engaging further in the local public life.

More generally, social mixing activities may not appear relevant or appealing due to a **perceived disconnect** between the migrants' and the host community's cultural norms and traditions, negatively affecting one's motivation to participate or engage with the local context (IOM 2021, p. 9). Alternately, newcomers or other residents may prefer to spend time with people whom they perceive to be more similar to them, showing **reluctance** to engage in social mixing opportunities (IOM 2021, p. 9).

Barriers to participation may also arise from **lack of support** from institutions and authorities, which often limit or do not support social mixing activities, or **outright exclusionary management** of community activities (IOM 2021, p. 10).

The impossibility to participate in society can exacerbate the feeling of **disorientation and loss** associated with uprooting and forced displacement. In addition, reduced opportunities for peer-to-peer exchanges with other residents contribute to **stereotypes, distrust, stigmatization, and socio-spatial segregation**.

¹ See also the Global Citizenship Observatory, globalcit.eu/news-and-commentary/infographics.



Impact of COVID-19 on TCNs' participation

The impact of COVID-19 has been felt most by those who are already excluded from society. Community-centred initiatives that foster social cohesion such as neighbourhood centres, language cafes and social mentoring programmes have suffered greatly during the pandemic. While TCNs' social networks are often limited, the closure of libraries, places of worship, community centres, language schools, voluntary work locations, sports clubs and cafes has **limited or completely erased the few options that migrants did have to socialise and participate in their community.**

Insufficient access to digital equipment and connectivity has adversely impacted their well-being and added to their isolation, affecting access to education and the loss of paid employment.

Disruptions in key service provision has also hampered participation and inclusion. The fast-changing regulations related to the COVID-19 pandemic pose challenges for migrants in accessing or interpreting accurate information, leaving them in uncertain and sometimes irregular situations.

More generally, the pandemic has deepened the **state of isolation** already felt by many migrants in all Includ-EU countries. Many TCNs in **Slovenia** reported not having visited their families in their homelands for fear of losing their jobs upon return due to mandatory quarantine. Researchers in **the Netherlands** have found that elderly migrants are particularly susceptible to loneliness during lockdown, more so than their Dutch counterparts (Kennisplatform Integratie and Samenleving 2020).

Migrants who have struggled with uncertainty, isolation, and confinement before, during and after their immigration to the Netherlands are experiencing flashbacks due to the pandemic. Symptoms of so-called "**Corona stress**" include physical complaints, as well as psychological concerns such as a withdrawal from society, lack of motivation to participate, bad mood, and inability to stick to daily routines (Prins 2020).

Despite its many negative implications, the pandemic has brought to the fore the value of multi-stakeholder engagement and cooperation within communities and accelerated innovation in migrant inclusion practices, particularly using digital tools. Additionally, migrants and diaspora groups have become key actors in the response to the pandemic and in socioeconomic recovery globally, especially through their contribution to essential sectors like healthcare, food production, cleaning, retail, and logistics.



Mitigation measures

Includ-EU countries have focused their efforts on making sure that participation and exchanges are still possible by **moving initiatives and services online**. In **Spain**, public administrations and service providers have transferred services and opportunities for participation online. Still, in practice the existing **digital divide** remains a great obstacle for participation.

In **Italy**, efforts have been made towards using different languages to spread information on existing support actions and legal advice: targeted messages were published on the Regions' and Municipalities' websites, together with free-toll numbers to call in case of questions. Crucial

support in this direction was provided by the third sector and international organizations present in Italy.

Other initiatives have also attempted to give **visibility to TCNs' participation** in carrying out actions to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis has brought new emphasis on the role played by a significant share of migrants performing low-skilled occupations, especially during periods of forced closure. In **Italy**, campaigns were launched to acknowledge the importance of TCNs in key sectors, such as healthcare, agriculture, and delivery services. In many cases, **support services came directly from TCNs**. Some examples included the initiatives organized by the reception system in Italy, where reception centres organised the production and distribution of face masks, or carried out initiatives to support vulnerable groups (e.g. grocery shopping for the elderly).² Diaspora organizations were also very active in emergency relief actions in Italy.³

As for mental health, during the pandemic, counsellors in the Netherlands acknowledged the **limited capacity to help through virtual means**, but recommended **keeping regular phone calls** with isolated individuals and matching migrants to buddies or migrant representatives. A targeted '[Corona Helpline](#)' for elderly persons with migration background is now available **in the Netherlands**. Facilitated by the senior organization KBO-PCOB and the network of Organizations for Older Migrants (NOOM), the telephone line is intended to support elder migrants by providing information, but also to quell feelings of loneliness.

Participation during humanitarian crises: the influx of people fleeing Ukraine

Russia's attack on Ukraine has caused an **unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Europe**. To offer quick and effective protection to those fleeing Ukraine, the European Commission has urged the activation of the **Temporary Protection Directive**. Under the Directive, Ukrainian citizens and non-Ukrainian citizens who are unable to return to their country of origin will receive immediate protection, including protection of residency rights, access to the labour market, access to housing, social welfare assistance, medical or other assistance, and means of subsistence (European Commission, 2022). The implementation of this Directive across Member States raises concerns of discrimination against non-Ukrainian nationals and its long-term details are still unclear.

The outlook of displacement within and outside Ukraine is still unclear. Therefore, it is hard to predict what initiatives will be needed to ensure the participation of Ukrainian refugees in the social life of welcoming communities. In fact, while there is currently overwhelming support for these conflict-affected populations, a "solidarity fatigue" may ensue and social tensions may rise as displaced Ukrainians settle in and eventually 'compete' for resources and opportunities. In this context, policy and operational measures that tackle the root causes of discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance will become increasingly important.

² For a collection of good practices see SIPROIMI Projects to support some basic services during the pandemic – collection of good practices www.siproimi.it/storie-buone-pratiche/i-progetti-della-rete-sprar-siproimi-per-il-contenimento-del-covid-19.

³ See www.cartadiroma.org/osservatorio/factchecking/emergenza-covid19-il-ruolo-attivo-delle-diaspore.

Many refugees leaving Ukraine have joined family members or their personal network in EU countries. In an emergency situation, such networks are a crucial source of material help as well as a platform to connect with local communities.

Diaspora organisations present across Europe have made their voices heard to advocate for a speedy response to the humanitarian situation within and outside Ukraine. Listening to the diaspora's claims and ensuring that the latter are included in relevant national and international fora is an essential step as the war in Ukraine continues.

Last but not least, mitigating measures put forward during the pandemic for digital and remote participation have become ever more relevant to support displaced Ukrainians. In this respect, the initiatives for distance learning in Ukraine and in receiving countries in Europe are proving key to ensure the right to education and social life during this conflict (UNESCO 2022).

These issues and the current outlook of Ukrainian displacement suggest that, on the one hand, it is crucial to implement structural solutions to promote the participation of all those who suffer disproportionately from the digital divide. On the other hand, the current humanitarian crisis shows that it is also important to have flexible tools to support the involvement in society of those temporarily displaced, making sure that existing services and policies can also cater for evolving protection needs.

Above all, without early support and planning, new arrivals can end up undermining local reception and integration capacity, and feed into rising social tensions around looming food insecurity and increased competition for housing and jobs. Without timely initiatives that address medium and long-term needs of migrants and refugees as early as pre-arrival, this situation can end up aggravating existing prejudice and xenophobic sentiments.

Participation in Includ-EU countries

The following section focuses on the state of TCNs' political and social participation in the six Includ-EU countries, including the main barriers and avenues for engagement at the local, regional, and national level.



Greece

According to the 2020 Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), there are **major obstacles** for immigrants' political participation in Greece. In this category, this country scores 20 on the 100-point MIPEX scale, well below the international average of 56 (MIPEX 2020a). Specifically, immigrants in Greece have no right to vote and foreign citizens are generally excluded from the democratic process. Moreover, overall, immigrants do not receive information on political opportunities nor are they consulted on a structural basis and allowed to vote in local elections (MIPEX 2020a).



Despite this, MIPEX indicators show positive changes when it comes to the **involvement of migrants in information provision, service design, and delivery of health services** (MIPEX 2020a).

In the last few years, **several institutions and bodies have been established** to enable TCNs' political and social participation in Greece. The Migrant Integration Councils, created in 2010, are consultative bodies in the Greek municipalities which support local authorities to acquire knowledge on problems encountered by the immigrant population. Community Centres, operating under the supervision of the Directorate of Social Solidarity and Health, serve all residents of municipalities and function as hubs for social welfare services (OECD 2018b, p. 40). Established in 2017, the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee issues acts as liaison among several institutions and the Municipality of Athens in order to promote integration locally. Last but not least, Cities Network for Integration is an intermunicipal network led by municipalities across Greece that jointly design and exchange good practices in the field of integration, in cooperation with UNHCR, IOM, and the Municipality of Athens.

Italy



Overall, **migrants in Italy continue to encounter obstacles to their political participation** (MIPEx 2020b). They are not allowed to vote and find little support for political engagement. Consultative bodies do exist across the country, but they are considered generally weak (MIPEx 2020b). Decree Law no. 113/2018 has also set a B1 language requirement for naturalisation, with a negative impact on overall long-term integration prospects in the country (MIPEx 2020b).

According to Art. 42 of the Consolidated Law on Immigration (Legislative Decree 25 July 1998, n. 286), the State as well as regions, provinces, and municipalities are in charge of promoting the active participation of TCNs in cooperation with migrants' associations. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, in partnership with the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), provides yearly analyses on existing activities to favour participation as well as shared strategies for the promotion of TCNs' integration in Italy. Regional authorities promote migrants' active participation to the socio-economic and cultural life through the IMPACT AMIF Call, which regards the implementation of the Regional Plans for TCNs' integration.

Migrants' associations are active across the country, with an important role played by immigrant women associations promoting participation in Italian society. In addition, TCNs who subscribe the Integration Agreement, which is mandatory for holders of residence permits with a duration of at least one year, participate in **civic orientation programmes**.

In the last years, a wide range of projects and activities have received funding at the local and national level to favour social mixing through volunteering, sport, and culture activities. For example, the Ministry of Interior has encouraged Prefects to sign agreements with the local institutions to engage asylum seekers in voluntary work for the benefit of the local community. Another example is the Protocol signed with the CONI (Italian National Olympic Committee) for pathways of socialization through sports.

Lastly, **the National Anti-Racial Discrimination Office (UNAR)** oversees the respect of the right to equal treatment before the law regardless of ethnicity, race, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability, including practical assistance to the victims of discrimination.

The Netherlands

TCNs with resident permits in the Netherlands enjoy **relatively favourable conditions** for political participation and can vote and stand in local elections (MIPEX 2020c). Migrant-led political parties are growing in prominence - however on a day to day basis, there is little support for consultative bodies and migrants experience limited opportunities to have their say on the policies and practices that affect them most (MIPEX 2020c).



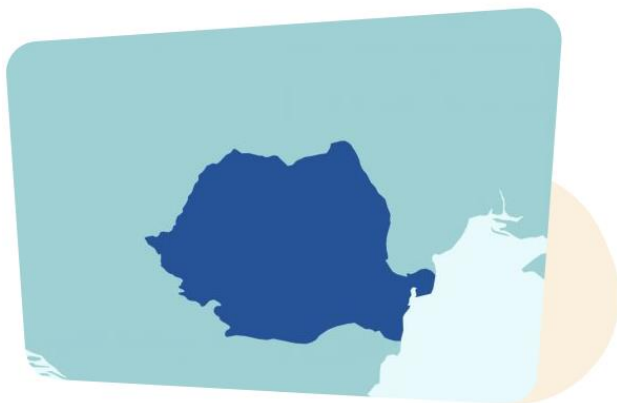
In general, the Dutch integration system encourages newcomers to seek opportunities and **participate in society from an early stage after arrival**. In 2017, a Participation Certificate Programme was introduced, which requires individuals who wish to apply for a residence permit to sign a commitment to respect shared Dutch values and practice the standards and rules of Dutch society (European Website on Integration 2021).

Asylum seekers who secure a Dutch resident permit can benefit from the **buddy system** of the Dutch Refugee Council. The majority of Dutch Refugee Council buddies are volunteers trained to support migrants with navigating their first few years in the Netherlands. Buddies can also provide a pivotal avenue to social participation and exposure to the Dutch culture.

The increase in migrant arrivals in 2015-2016 saw the introduction of many **neighbourhood and citizen-run initiatives**. Smaller communities (i.e. villages, towns) tend to offer informal welcoming support toward new arrivals, from neighbours, schools, colleagues; more so compared to larger cities (De Gruijter and De Winter-Koçak 2018).

The **long waiting periods** that residence permit holders spend in reception centres before relocating to independent housing take a high toll on the inclusion process. Consequently, greater efforts are being made by national and local authorities to shorten waiting times, and to use the latter as constructively as possible through the provision of early integration support – often phrased as ‘meaningful waiting.’ New recipients of resident permits are encouraged to take up volunteer work to build their skill set, practice their Dutch language skills, and immerse themselves into Dutch society.

Romania



TCNs face **major obstacles to participation** in Romania. They lack political rights and are not consulted on a structural basis on the policies that regards their inclusion (MIPEX 2020d). Overall, Romanian integration policies create major barriers to immigrants' integration in this area, with the country scores 5 on the MIPEX ranking (MIPEX 2020d).

The social inclusion of TCNs is governed by Emergency Ordinance no. 44/2004 and its subsequent amendments. As per the provisions of the Ordinance, TCNs may register in the Integration Programme

coordinated by the General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII). The programme consists in a series of services of assistance provided through a cooperative effort of local authorities and non-governmental organizations.

The **Integration Programme** lasts for a maximum of twelve months and offers information and counselling about legal rights and obligations in the country, Romanian language courses (for adults and children), orientation courses, counselling for access to employment, housing, medical and social assistance, social security and education, psychological support, and other types of support depending on the specific needs of each migrant (e.g. accommodation for a period of up to 12 months for vulnerable persons).

In addition, **the 2021-2024 National Strategy for Immigration** aims to improve the availability of information on entry, stay, and exit conditions, and foster social inclusion by supporting their participation to social, economic, and cultural activities.

Slovenia

In the last few years, Slovenia has been **successful in improving avenues for TCNs political participation** by strengthening their inclusion in national consultative bodies and creating info points (MIPEX 2020e). However, some major obstacles remain. All long-term permanent residents have the right to vote in local elections since 2002, although TCNs cannot be member of political parties and cannot stand as candidates in elections. Moreover, immigrants' associations are consulted only formally since 2015 (MIPEX 2020e).



Slovenia's **Migration Strategy** points out that an inclusive local environment is essential for the successful integration and promotes engagement of civil society organizations in the implementation of integration activities.⁴ However, integration of TCNs at the local level is not formally disciplined and cooperation between local and national authorities is often poor. In practice, integration happens at the local community level and is sustained by various non-governmental sector programmes or short-term projects (mostly funded nationally or by the EU).⁵

Slovenia's **anti-discrimination laws** cover most forms of racial, ethnic, religious and nationality discrimination (MIPEX 2020e). In 2016, the Protection Against Discrimination Act strengthened discrimination protection mechanisms and established the Advocate of the Principle of Equality. Unfortunately, some of the Advocate's statutory tasks are implemented to a very limited extent due to the lack of financial resources and staff shortage (Advocate of the Principle of Equality 2019).

While there are no active migrant associations in Slovenia, **many organizations involve TCNs in their work**. This way, the majority of TCNs in Slovenia – especially those from countries of the former Yugoslavia – enjoy at least some form of advocacy support. This is particularly important because it proves difficult for smaller TCN groups to find venues to counter discrimination effectively (Bajt and Pajnik 2010, p. 7).

⁴ Migration Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia. Available at: www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MNZ/SOJ/STR17072019.pdf.

⁵ National Integration Evaluation Mechanism. Slovenia Report for year 2018. P. 6. Available at: www.forintegration.eu/pl/pub/national-reports-2020/dnl/56.

Spain



In Spain, the involvement of migrants in information provision, and service design and delivery has generally improved since 2014. Overall, **Spanish integration policies are more inclusive than those of other EU countries** (MIPEX 2020f). Immigrants have more opportunities to participate politically although some obstacles remain (MIPEX 2020f).

Spanish law (Organic Law of 2/2009) provides for the creation of the **Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants**, a space for the promotion of migrants' participation as well as a body for consultation,

information and advice on integration issues made up of Public Administrations, immigrant associations and other stakeholders.

Immigration competencies are shared between the central government and the **Autonomous Communities**. The latter foster dialogue and meeting platforms with the migrant population as tools for promoting active participation. Some good examples are the Andalusian Forum for the integration of people of migrant origin and the Regional Forum for Immigration in Madrid or the Forum of Immigration in Aragon.

Along with these forums, Spain also promotes the participation in specific projects directly related to the integration and participation of migrants, in addition to other transversal grant lines related to the promotion of volunteering, integration in neighbourhoods or work with groups of vulnerable people.

Promoting greater TCNs' participation in Europe

Active participation in society is key to pursue **truly reciprocal and successful pathways to social cohesion**. The examples that follow show how it is possible to translate policy objectives in this field into concrete practices at the national and local level.

Specifically, existing good practices suggest that it is possible to bring about greater opportunities for participation and exchanges through **actions in four areas**, namely **empowerment, awareness-raising outreach, information and orientation, and shared events and leisure time**.

These actions can be **effective** in promoting active engagement **even when other avenues to advocate for greater political participation and TCNs' enfranchisement of TCNs are curtailed or more difficult to pursue**.

1. Empowerment

The first step towards greater participation and intercultural encounters is ensuring that TCNs have access to the tools and venues to **participate in society on equal footing with other residents**. Actions that favour their empowerment in this direction should both **remove barriers** and actively promote **participation tools** for meaningful exchanges.

The Co-Athens Platform, for example, brings together refugees and other locals to the benefit of the whole community. Through the creation of citizenship and immigration roundtables, the Region of Catalonia has created a space for dialogue that promotes decentralised cooperation in the field of immigration policies based on the active



1 © Zen CHUNG / pexels.com

participation of both migrants and other residents. Other initiatives empower youth as agents of social change. Similarly, higher education systems and institutions can play a decisive role in narrowing down perceived distances and bringing down barriers to participation in society.



Good practices at a glance

Curing the Limbo and Co-Athens for more active neighbourhoods - Greece

Implementing actor(s): Municipality of Athens, in partnership with the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (UoA), the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA)

Curing the Limbo (2018-2021) is a European pilot programme of the City of Athens implemented with the strategic partnership of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (UoA), the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA). The project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) initiative.

Curing the Limbo proposes a holistic social inclusion model to address the issue of long-term forced “inactivity” affecting a large part of the refugee population.

The programme supports refugees that have been granted asylum and currently live in Athens to overcome social exclusion. Beneficiaries receive enhanced priority integration support, ranging from a social rental agency, language courses and soft skills training, to case monitoring and psychosocial support. At the same time, participants can establish partnerships and connections with other locals and participate in citizen-led activities.

In order to favour collaboration between refugees and other locals, in 2013 the City of Athens created the Co-Athens Platform (SynAthina in Greek). Co-Athens empowers them to co-develop actions that have a positive impact on the local context, and also bring people together. The programme consists of open calls, a funding scheme for urban start-ups, workshops, ideation sessions, mentoring and capacity building, public debates, neighbourhood outreach events, and other activities.

As of today, the platform supports 9 collaborative projects with 40 participants working on a range of thematic priorities related to local needs: a neighbourhood initiative for the creation of a football academy, a green energy cooperative, an exchange food laboratory, theatre and music platform, a pilot documentary-based educational programme, and a training collective for street theatre and acrobatics.

Co-Athens’ coordination mechanism is based on a crowdsourcing model. An agile group of project officers and a manager coordinate the collectives through a structured framework. Each collective is then responsible for developing partnerships with refugees, neighbourhood communities, and local stakeholders.



CONNGI – National Coordination Mechanism of the New Italian Generation Association for Social Promotion - Italy

Implementing actor(s): CONNGI Network, several associations of second generation, with the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (MLSP) and others

The National Coordination Mechanism of the New Italian Generation (CONNGI) Association for Social Promotion was created in 2017 upon an initiative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and associations of youth with migration background. CONNGI now gathers 32 associations and 4,200 young members. CONNGI members advocate for TCNs' active participation and rights recognition. They also support actions related to education, employment, and social inclusion.

CONNGI aims to promote a new approach to inclusion that takes into consideration the real needs of younger generations. This initiative strives to consolidate collaborations with institutions and organizations to bring to the fore the young people's ideas at the national and international level.

This is achieved by organizing activities based on the principles and priorities set out in the association's Manifesto, a programmatic document signed by all CONNGI members and updated regularly. The 2019 version has the following key components: school; work; culture sport and participation; citizenship and political representation.



TandEM - Towards Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe - Spain, Italy, Malta, Greece, Croatia and Cyprus

Implementing actor(s): IOM, European University Association and Italian Islamic Religious Community

TandEM (Towards Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe) is a regional project funded by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). It was implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with the European University Association (EUA) and the Italian Islamic Religious Community (COREIS).

The project aimed to identify and compare TCNs' needs and obstacles to access and succeed in higher education in Spain, Italy, Malta, Greece, Croatia and Cyprus, while also offering recommendations on how to address those barriers. In addition, the initiative let youth have their say on what inclusion is, leaving space to their creativity, ideas and lived experiences of diversity and migration. To achieve these objectives, TandEM relied on communication and peer-to-peer exchanges between youth from various backgrounds, with an emphasis on the student community as a shared social space.

Specific actions included:

- empowering youths as agents of migration narratives. Young TCNs and their local peers designed a Southern European social media campaign emphasizing youth's multiple identities;
- mobilizing youth to improve inter-faith dialogue in education;
- improving TCN's access to and participation in higher education by conducting a comparative cross-country study on access-related needs and barriers;
- engaging youth in peer-to-peer support by establishing student mentorship schemes. Results of pilot activities in three universities in Italy (Pisa, Rome la Sapienza, Naples L'Orientale) showed that both educational and local communities benefited from mentorship schemes. Partnerships with universities were also forged in all other project countries, creating a network of 12 universities in Southern Europe committed to the values of the project.



Social Activation Programme - Slovenia

Implementing actor(s): Association Odnos and OLOOP Institute.

Social Activation is a 3-year pilot project financed by the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the European Social Fund. It is implemented within the European Cohesion Policy framework by NGOs Odnos and Oloop.

The Programme aims to promote social inclusion, equal opportunities, active participation, and greater employability. It targets adult women from diverse cultural backgrounds, who do not speak Slovenian, have a permanent residence permit in Slovenia or Slovenian citizenship, and receive social support, are unemployed or inactive.

The Social Activation Programme's goal is to empower these women and motivate them to enter the labour market through improving their employability. To achieve this, the project strengthens cooperation between various local and regional stakeholders working with migrant women, such as the Centres for Social Work, the Employment Service, the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants, municipalities, health and educational institutions, NGOs, employers, etc.

An individual programme lasts eight months and is divided into three parts. In the first part, participants work in small groups on their own strengths and personal growth. In a second step, beneficiaries participate in training on employment and education opportunities, and develop new competencies. Lastly, participants are prepared to enter the job market or continue their education with additional information and counselling services provided.



Citizenship and Immigration Board in Catalonia - Spain

Implementing actor(s): Departament d'Igualtat i Feminismes (DIFE) of the Generalitat of Catalonia

The Citizenship and Immigration Board is a consultation and participation body for migration policies promoted by the Departament d'Igualtat i Feminismes (DIFE) of the Generalitat of Catalonia. The Board was created by Decree 86/2008 and replaced the Immigration Advisory Council.

The Board aims to provide the Catalan autonomous government, local bodies, entities, unions, and employers with a space for dialogue and exchange of information regarding strategic cooperation in the field of immigration policies.

The objectives of the Citizenship and Immigration Board are as follows:

- encourage the active participation of the immigrant population, returnees and other residents in monitoring all matters and policies linked to migration;
- contribute to inclusion in Catalonia;
- raise awareness about migration and non-discrimination;
- formulate evidence-based proposals on how to respond to specific needs of migrant and returnees.

The Board is composed of several internal bodies, including the Plenary, the Standing Committee, Working Groups, and Territorial Tables. Currently, more than twenty entities are part of it.

2. Awareness-raising and intercultural outreach



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Effective intercultural mediation is key to allow true participation of TCNs in all realms of social and political life. A precondition for this meaningful mediation and participation is that **information on migration is accurate, evidence-based, and sensitive to intercultural dynamics**. Several initiatives have developed in this direction, working on the intercultural competences of both migrant and local communities.

Association Carta di Roma in Italy, for example, is part of a broader effort to combat racism, xenophobia, prejudice, and stereotypes in the media. Services have also been adapted to ensure that all users, including TCNs, have full knowledge of their rights. Formal and informal networks of public and private stakeholders at the local level collaborate in knowledge exchange awareness actions, and intercultural

advice. Other programmes foster cultural sensitivity in public youth services and welfare provision.




Good practices at a glance

Association “Carta di Roma” - Italy

Implementing actor(s): National Council Of Journalists (CNOG) and the National Federation of the Italian Press (FNSI), together with several NGOs and IOs

The Association Carta di Roma was founded in December 2011 with the goal of implementing the Journalist’s Code of Conduct on immigration, called [Carta di Roma](#). Carta di Roma was signed by the National Council of Journalists (CNOG) and the National Federation of the Italian Press (FNSI) in June 2008. Its members are NGOs and permanent invitees, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR), and IOM.

The Association is a reference point for those who work in the media industry and on minorities issues, including journalists, media operators, as well as various institutions, associations and activists involved in promoting the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, minorities, and migrants in the field of media reporting.



The Association carries out training activities for media operators, research and monitoring activities, seminars on narratives around asylum seekers, refugees, victims of human trafficking and migrants in media. Other activities include special awards and public events aimed at encouraging accurate and responsible reporting, collaboration between media operators, universities, civil society organizations, and editors.

Since July 2012 the Association carried out 12 meetings or short training sessions for the staff of the mainstream news agencies (i.e. La Repubblica, Corsera, ANSA, ADN Kronos, TG2 and La7), training sessions in 8 schools of journalism. In addition, the Carta di Roma training is now mandatory for all schools of journalism in Italy.

In 2013 the EU Commission's DG Home Affairs mentioned Carta di Roma as a best practice at the EU level. In addition to being multi-stakeholder, innovative and culturally sensitive, this good practice is also transferable: other countries, including Greece and Bulgaria, have adopted similar mechanisms to report misconduct and discrimination in the media.



Diversity in Youth Policy Programme - the Netherlands

Implementing actor(s): ZonMw; CBS (Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics); SCP (Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office); NJi (Dutch Youth Institute); NCJ (Dutch Centre for Youth Health); NVO (Dutch Association of Educators); NIP (Dutch Association of Psychologists); MBO-Raad (Dutch Council of Vocational Education); Verwey-Jonker Institute

Migrant youth and their parents have unequal access to public services such as parenting support, youth support, and sports and cultural services, with negative implications for their growth and development. To counter this, the Diversity in Youth Policy Programme aimed to develop knowledge and expertise based on the cooperation between migrant youth and their parents and professionals and service providers.

The Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations allocated roughly 10 million euro to the Diversity in Youth Policy Program. ZonMw led the programme and coordinated the activities. The programme was divided into three work packages, namely Intercultural Knowledge, Intercultural Craftmanship, Strengthening of local Youth Services. Each of the work packages was developed one of the project's stakeholders, namely CBS (Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics), SCP (Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office), NJi (Dutch Youth Institute), NCJ (Dutch Centre for Youth Health), NVO (Dutch Association of Educators), NIP (Dutch Association of Psychologists), MBO-Raad (Dutch Council of Vocational Education), Verwey-Jonker Institute.

The aim of the programme was to "diversity proof" the youth policy sector, with the measurable goal that migrant youth profit equally from all public youth services and welfare provisions as non-migrants. More concretely, the programme proposed to improve access to services, and early identification and prevention of issues in parenting. The programme also sought to improve the existing mechanisms to reach migrant youth and their parents at an early stage in order to mitigate the damage caused by possible periods of neglect by support services.

In addition to migrant youth and their parents, the project targeted professionals, migrant organizations, municipalities, knowledge institutes and educators to build capacity and support existing service providers. The activities conducted included an awareness raising campaign, cultural sensitivity trainings, identification of barriers in services access, creation of a measurement tool for the intercultural quality of interventions.



Andalusian Forum for the integration of migrants - Spain

Implementing actor(s): Dirección General de Coordinación de Políticas Migratorias (General Direction of Coordination of Migration Policies) Junta de Andalucía

Andalusia is one of the regions of Spain with the largest migrant population. The Forum for the Integration of Migrants, composed equally of men and women, brings together the key stakeholders in migration management in the region to promote social inclusion, cohesion, and interculturality.

The Forum is an initiative of Andalusia's General Direction of Migration Policies Coordination (Dirección General de Coordinación de Políticas Migratorias, Junta de Andalucía).

The forums are made up of a plenary session and a permanent commission. These spaces are made up of members of the public administration from different areas: housing, health, childhood, women, employment, companies, migrants' associations, trade unions, municipalities, media, and experts. The plenary session and the commission can create specific groups to address various realities that affect migrants.

In order to help Andalusia design public policies that ensure social inclusion and participation, the Forum carries out the following activities:

- advising the local government on migration policies;
- formulating proposals and recommendations regarding the preparation, execution, evaluation and review of plans on integration in Andalusia;
- receiving proposals and recommendations from social organizations work with migrants;
- monitoring programs and activities related to migration developed in the public and private sectors;
- fighting against racism and xenophobia by creating awareness campaigns in the media;
- promoting inter-territorial coordination with other bodies to improve social inclusion;
- maintaining a coordination mechanism with all agents involved in social inclusion in Andalusia

3. Information and orientation

Information on and access to right-related services is a precondition to participate in social activities and be active members of society. In this respect, TCNs' communities have an important role in designing information services and identifying needs.

The good practices below are examples of how to improve accessibility and quality of inclusion services, including counselling, job placement, healthcare, education, social services, in collaboration with their users. Through the EAMISS activities, for example, the Filipino community in Spain promotes actions with the local government to ensure full integration of migrants and fight abuses.

These projects also show the importance of providing information on opportunities available locally by linking up with all relevant local stakeholders and organizations. Other initiatives have focused on promoting direct participation in collective experiences that promote diversity and gender equality through improved service access.

To fully harness the benefits of participation in host communities, information and orientation should be provided since the early stages of migration projects. IOM has promoted pre-departure and post-arrival cultural orientation programmes in various countries, including in Includ-EU partners [Italy](#), [Spain](#) and [the Netherlands](#), to manage the newcomers' expectations and inform them about challenges and opportunities. This type of orientation not only allows migrants to become aware of social conventions and norms, but also links them early on to appropriate services and networks in their destination countries.



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Good practices at a glance



InterACT + Active participation and integration of migrants - Romania

Implementing actor(s): IOM Romania, AID Rom, Schottener Foundation Social Services

The overall objective of this initiative is to enhance TCNs' socio-economic inclusion in Romania through a cooperation between IOM, AID Rom, Schottener Foundation Social Services and the



Romanian Government. Thanks to this partnership, a network of one-stop-shops set up in Bucharest and Brasov has been providing tailored assistance for migrants in Romania for over a decade.

As of today, there are 12 Regional Integration Centres (two managed by IOM Romania in Bucharest and Brasov) operating as one-stop-shops where adults and children with a residency permit can access information and counselling on local services (employment, healthcare, education, housing, social services, etc.); material and medical assistance; orientation courses; Romanian language courses for adults and children (including after-school activities); tailored support for women through group counselling; socio-cultural activities involving the local community.

IOM Romania monitors the activities through regular data collection and quarterly coordination meetings with the General Inspectorate for Immigration and the organizations managing the Regional Integration Centres.



Living in a New Country: Development and education centre Novo Mesto (RIC Novo mesto) - Slovenia

Implementing actor(s): Development and education centre Novo Mesto (RIC Novo mesto)

Novo Mesto's Development and Education Centre was part of the project General and Non-formal Adult Education, which consisted of 15 adult education programmes targeting active adults aged 25 to 55 years, adults over 55, unemployed, Roma, migrants, prisoners, and adults with special needs. Participants were mostly individuals without access to the Initial Integration Programme.

The project was developed to fill the gaps of existing integration programmes and give more migrants the chance to learn Slovenian, improve their functional literacy, access employment, and become part of Slovenian society.

About 20 participants joined the programme each year and attended the trainings, discussions, and activities offered. After the conclusion of the programme, many participants remained in contact with the organization through the activities of the Adult Education Guidance Centre Novo Mesto.

The programme was first implemented between 2012 and 2014 by the Development and Education Centre Novo Mesto and funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport and the Municipality Novo Mesto. The same programme run also between 2016 and 2019.



EAMISS – Equip d’Atenció i Mediació Intercultural Sociosanitarií - Spain

Implementing actor(s): Equip d’Atenció i Mediació Intercultural Sociosanitarií

EAMISS is a non-profit association established by the Filipino community in Catalonia. Its main objectives are to act as an intercultural mediator between the community and local services and institutions, and to promote participation, diversity and gender equality.

EAMISS operates in close contact with the Departament d'Igualtat i Feminismes (DIFE) of the Generalitat of Catalonia, reaching out to Filipinos that might require support and help.

The association works to support the Filipino newcomers in the different stages of reception in Catalonia, giving information on rights, services, language training. EAMISS facilitate access to education and healthcare, informs caregivers and domestic workers about their rights, offers immigration-related services, helps Filipinos obtain work permits, offers translation services and information sessions on gender violence.



POMP - Psychosocial support to families of immigrants - Slovenia

Implementing actor(s): MISSS Institute

The POMP programme (Psychosocial support to families of immigrants) of the MISSS Institute aims to promote migrants’ active inclusion into the local community. Its aim is to reduce isolation and social exclusion of migrant families through a multidisciplinary approach.

Based on actual needs and problems experienced by migrants, the programme focuses on five major areas, namely intercultural learning and dialogue; functional and computer literacy; support for primary and secondary school pupils; information on rights and duties; individual counselling.

POMP aims to mitigate barriers migrant children face at school, improve the quality of family life, and provide all necessary information, support and advice on various family issues, social rights, education, healthcare, employment, housing.

Starting from only a handful of pupils from a nearby school, the programme later included a growing number of primary and secondary schools and the number of adult participants also increased.

POMP is carried out by a social pedagogue and a sociologist, with the help of senior students of Social Work. It is financed by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and Municipality of Ljubljana.

4. Social mixing interventions



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Finding the time to **cultivate relationships and pursue one's interests** is often out of reach for many TCNs in disadvantaged conditions. Financial and legal problems, care responsibilities, and often unfavourable working conditions make it harder to establish relationships with other residents on equal terms and **find relief from migration-related stress**. In this sense, therefore, enabling TCNs to have some “free time” to pursue their interests is an important social inclusion objective.

The activities below were conceived to facilitate intercultural dialogue and understanding, while also allowing TCNs to enjoy time off from work, education, administrative and legal procedures. They contribute to establishing **relations of mutual respect**, encouraging intercultural dialogue and solidarity, as well as narrowed down perceived differences. Additionally, they give newcomers the opportunity to celebrate their traditions and share them within their new community.




Good practices at a glance

The Bahar project: Many recipes, one city - The Book – Greece

Implementing actor(s): Athens Coordination Center for Migrant & Refugee issues (ACCMR) with the support of ActionAid Hellas

Cooking brings people together regardless of their background. As part of this project, women who live in Athens were invited to cook in a feast of flavours and cultural exchange. Visitors were invited to taste dishes from Greece and abroad, to get to know each other, dance, and have fun.



These events resulted in the Bahar project book, published by the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant & Refugee Issues (ACCMR) with the support of ActionAid Hellas and Melissa Network of Migrant Women. The book includes 12 recipes that were prepared during the feasts as well as the stories that cooks shared.

According to Hanna from Ukraine, an active member of Melissa Network living in Greece, cooking is linked with family. "Cooking reminds me of my family," she said.

"My daughter plays with all the other kids at school, no matter where they come from, and I encourage her to do that. Soon enough, she'll go to university with these kids, they'll spend an entire lifetime together, they need to communicate," shared Spyridoula, who lives in Kolonos, a multicultural neighbourhood in Athens.

The publication was produced within the framework of the "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Migration – Multipliers and Journalists addressing Decision Makers and Citizens in the EU", a three-year project financed by the European Commission. The programme aims to raise awareness about the SDGs, migration, and their interplay.



Cluj-Napoca Multicultural festival – Romania

Implementing actor(s): Human Rights Defence League Cluj-Napoca (LADO), Cluj-Napoca Municipality, migrant communities

Cluj-Napoca Multicultural Festival is an annual celebration of diversity. The Festival's activities promote intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation among people from different cultural backgrounds. They also aim to combat stereotypes and prejudices.

Together, locals and newcomers present their cultures and traditions in the form of dance and music performances, art, costumes, and food. The first edition of the event was organized in 2012 and brought together representatives of 12 countries as well as foreign-born citizens of Cluj-Napoca. In 2015 the Multicultural Festival was included in the Days of Cluj event organized every year by the Municipality and its partners (private sector, NGOs, academia, etc.). In 2019, the event lasted four days and saw 300,000 participants.


The Human Rights Defence League of Cluj-Napoca (LADO) supports the organization of the festival by coordinating the migrant communities' representatives, who are responsible for the preparation of the event. The Municipality of Cluj-Napoca provides financial support.



Sport for all - the Netherlands

Implementing actor(s): NOC*NSF (Dutch Olympic Committee and Dutch Sports Federation), Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers (COA), Kenniscentrum Sport (Dutch Knowledge Hub for Sports), Right to Play

From November 2015 to March 2017, NOC*NSF (Dutch Olympic Committee and Dutch Sports Federation), COA (Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers), and Kenniscentrum Sport (Dutch Knowledge Hub for Sports) implemented the project "Sport & Refugees" ("Sport & Vluchtelingen").



This project was made possible by the cooperation between COA and established sports clubs, and aimed to facilitate interaction between the residents of 23 reception facilities in the Netherlands and the local population.

The project fostered cultural sensitivity amongst host communities and asylum seekers by facilitating sports activities during which host communities and asylum seekers interact with each other. The Dutch NGO Right to Play organized workshops on the nexus of sport, trauma and refugees.

Sensitivity to gender and age differences was crucial to the project. One of the main findings of the baseline study done by Kenniscentrum Sport, for example, was that young female asylum seekers participated less in sports activities than middle-aged male asylum seekers. The project specifically addressed this gender and age imbalance.



U-RLP Utrecht Refugee Launch Pad (Plan Einstein) - the Netherlands

Implementing actor(s): Municipality of Utrecht, Socius Living (SME), COA , New Dutch Connections (NGO), Volunteerhub Utrecht, de Voorkamer (NGO), Theatre Stut, Radio Einstein, School of Economics (USE) and Centre for Entrepreneurship (UtrechtCE), University of Utrecht, People's University of Utrecht (English language division), Social Impact Factory (NGO), Dutch Council for Refugees (NGO)

The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad (Plan Einstein) was an innovative solution to housing and social cohesion as a response to the increase in asylum claims during 2015-2016. Between November 2016 and October 2018, the project housed asylum seekers (both with and without a residence permit) in the same complex as local youngsters in the district of Overvecht.

The project promoted co-learning, inviting residents from the neighbourhood to take courses together and engage in social activities in a shared social space. Courses in English and entrepreneurship were offered as subjects of 'futureproof' value, useful to participants' professional future regardless of the country they would ultimately reside in.

The co-housing and co-learning reception facility, known locally as 'Plan Einstein', aimed to develop asylum seekers' social networks with neighbours, while providing opportunities for participants to develop their skills, to enhance wellbeing and improve community cohesion in the neighbourhood. As such, the project aimed to engage with concerns from receiving communities, activate asylum seekers 'from day one', and reverse the negative spiral of boredom, anxiety, isolation and worsening mental health that are common in migrant communities.

The project was initiated by the City of Utrecht thanks to direct EU funding and further developed by participants, locals, professionals, volunteers, and organizations. The organizations involved were: Social Impact Factory, Socius Wonen, Utrecht Center for International Entrepreneurship (part of Utrecht University), VluchtelingenWerk West and Midden-Nederland (Dutch Refugee Council), Welkom in Utrecht, de Volksuniversiteit Utrecht, COA, New Dutch Connections, Volunteerhub Utrecht, de Voorkamer, Theatre Stut en Radio Einstein.

Includ-EU's contribution to participation and intercultural encounters

In addition to promoting the good practices presented above, Includ-EU has launched **two pilot actions** in the field of participation and intercultural encounters. The first one, **in Romania**, focuses on making essential information more accessible, both online and offline, as a precondition for participation in all aspects of social life. The second pilot project, implemented **in Spain**, targets young girls, and empower them through peer-to-peer support and mentorship.

The go-to place for newcomers in Cluj Napoca

This Includ-EU pilot project will facilitate participation in society for TCNs who move to Cluj Napoca, providing them with complete, up-to-date, structured, and user-friendly information, as well as specific guidance and assistance throughout the process.

Based on a collaboration between the Municipality of Cluj Napoca and IOM Romania, the project will establish a **One Stop Shop** designed as part of the city's actions to support integration. The One Stop Shop will collect and process all information needed by TCNs to make themselves at home in Cluj, including information about housing, education, employment and entrepreneurship, language and culture, registration and legislation, health and medical systems, leisure and sports.

The One Stop Shop will be available both online and offline. The online version will be a platform with three guides and links to additional useful information, specifically:

- General Integration Guide (How to settle in Cluj);
- Employment Guide (How to find a job in Cluj);
- Entrepreneurship Guide (How to start your own business in Cluj).

The offline version will be a service desk in the centre of Cluj, open to any newcomer who wishes to have information, guidance, assistance or has questions regarding their inclusion process.

The pilot project will benefit from national exchanges with other municipalities in Romania as well as with international exchanges regarding good practices implemented in other countries.

Catalonia's Social Mentoring Programme for girls on the move

In Catalonia, the Direcció General d'Atenció a la Infància i l'Adolescència - DGAIA (Directorate-General for Child and Adolescent Care) currently supports 3.521 unaccompanied migrant children and young people who already became of age. Approximately 4 per cent of them are female (Departament de Treball, Afers Socials i Famílies, 2021). Most of the girls who benefit from one of the programmes offered by the DGAIA are 18 or 19 years old, representing 57.25 per cent of the total number of girls assisted.

The pilot programme "Social mentoring for former unaccompanied migrant girls or young national girls that have gone through a similar migratory experience" will establish a mentoring relationship between this group and young university students to improve their social inclusion. Simultaneously, it will empower both mentors and mentees to counter gender-based violence.

The Directorate-General for Migrations, Refuge and Anti-racism of the Government of Catalonia will lead the project, which will be implemented in collaboration with the Direcció General d'Atenció a la Infància i l'Adolescència and third-party organizations. Local universities will support the search for mentors.

The pilot action aims to improve the inclusion of former unaccompanied migrant girls or Spanish girls who have migrated within Spain. The main objective is to enhance their training and employment opportunities, as well as prevent gender-based violence. Specifically, the project aims to:

1. empower young women to prevent gender-based violence and/or develop strategies to alleviate the effects of gender violence;
2. create a network to foster their social inclusion through mentoring relationship and by identifying places where they can participate in activities and meet new people;
3. improve the autonomy of mentees to facilitate the transition to adulthood, including improving their Catalan language skills, and becoming more aware of socio-cultural and employment opportunities;
4. break with the stigma of the host society, including by deconstructing the mentors' own stereotypes.

During various meetings, mentors and mentees will practice the language, create social ties and discover the resources available. The aim is to create spaces of trust, as well as opportunities to build a social network within the host society. In addition to individual meetings, a training session will be organized for both mentors and mentees together: the session will consist of a workshop on prevention of gender-based violence, so as to provide the participants with tools to deal with situations in which they may find themselves, and create a safe space where they can share their experiences, if willing to.

Conclusions

Political, social, and cultural participation in society is an **integral part of truly achieved inclusion**. Participation in public life also improves democratic legitimacy and policy-effectiveness because it allows TCNs to **have their say** in the decisions that impact their lives.

Through **contributing to the life of their local community**, TCNs can combat the sense of uprooting linked to migration, bring down stereotypes that affect their daily lives, and thrive in their new home environment.

Receiving communities should also actively engage in peer-to-peer exchanges and social mixing activities with newcomers and ensure that **communication on migration is accurate** and does not feed into xenophobic or discriminatory narratives.

Unfortunately, TCNs find **little avenues for political participation** in Includ-EU countries, both for structural and individual factors. Still, the good practices presented in this briefing suggest that **it is possible to promote active engagement even when greater political participation and enfranchisement prove difficult to pursue**.

This overview of good practices on how to promote participation and intercultural exchanges, and support the diffusion of social mixing activities across Includ-EU countries suggests that the following actions are crucial to remove barriers to meaningful engagement:

- ⇒ **develop capacity among TCNs and frontline local actors – and especially among women, youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities – to fully engage in all opportunities for social, civic, political, and economic participation:** the first step towards greater participation and intercultural encounters is ensuring that TCNs have access to the tools and venues to participate in society on equal footing with other residents;
- ⇒ **invest in awareness-raising and intercultural outreach:** to enable TCN's engagement in all realms of social and political life, it is important to ensure that information on migration is accurate, evidence-based, and sensitive to intercultural dynamics. This should involve actions and measures that combat racism, xenophobia, prejudice and stereotypes, as well as the full implementation of anti-discrimination and equal treatment legislation;
- ⇒ **improve information and orientation services at the local level:** information on and access to right-related services is a precondition to be active members of society. TCNs communities should be directly involved in designing information services and identifying needs. Information on opportunities available locally should be provided to all TCNs by linking up with all relevant local stakeholders and organizations;

- ⇒ **Promote social mixing through events, joint activities and shared leisure time as ways to heal trauma, defeat stereotypes, and create more cohesive societies:** establishing relationships with other residents on equal terms and finding relief from migration-related stress should become top priorities of inclusion policies. Enjoying time off from work, care, and other duties, especially in the context of exchanges with other residents, contributes to mutually enriching relations of respect.

For these recommendations to be actionable, it is essential to **advocate for or invest in policy and legal frameworks that ensure the sustainability of these initiatives.** For instance, anti-discrimination interventions need legal, policy, and institutional reforms to remove barriers that inhibit migrants from accessing information, resources, and services in various domains of community life (housing, employment, health, internet, etc.) and to combat all forms of intolerance. At the same time, practitioners and policy makers should develop sustainable social mixing activities by including appropriate monitoring and evaluation instruments, involving a broad range of stakeholders, and seeking institutional support across multiple governance levels.

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Fostering participation and
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