

A group of women wearing hijabs are shown in a close embrace, suggesting a sense of community and support. The image is the background for the text overlays.

**Integration
of persons
granted
international
protection**

– Dissemination of
good practices
on European and
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level

INCLuDE



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Međuresorna
suradnja u
osnaživanju
državljana trećih
zemalja

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Authorised person:
Alen Tahiri, MA (Pol. Sci.)

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Olivera Jovanović
Silvija Lipovac
Mirela Šavrljuga

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For more information please contact:
Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities
of the Republic of Croatia
Mesnička 23, 10 000 Zagreb
Phone: +385 (1) 4569 358
E-mail: ured@uljppnm.gov.hr

Integration of persons granted international protection — Dissemination of good practices on European and international level

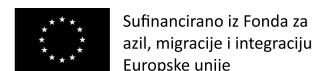
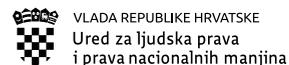


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International conference 'Integration of persons granted international protection – Dissemination of good practices on European and international level'

13–14 October 2022, Zagreb

On 24 November 2020, the European Commission presented the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027. The vision of the new European integration framework is to ensure that migrants and EU citizens of migrant background can exercise their rights smoothly and participate equally in the socioeconomic life in their new communities while fulfilling their full personal and professional potential, thus contributing to the development of the member states and the whole European Union. Integration is possible if the reception and integration structures, with a special emphasis on the role played by local communities, ensure the prerequisites for social, economic, cultural and political participation of migrants, and if the migrants in turn decide to actively participate in the socioeconomic development of the community.

The EU's new integration framework lists priority areas of activity and presents guidelines and recommendations for improving national integration policies. In this respect, it defines integration as a long-term process whose success requires action in all its stages, with a special focus on the early stage, when persons first arrive in the receiving society. All future integration outcomes depend on migrants having unhindered access to guaranteed rights and services as soon as they arrive in the receiving society.

Also, the findings of the evaluation of the national framework for the integration of persons granted international protection correspond to the challenges detected and guidelines provided by the European

Commission in all key aspects, especially with regard to the need to intensify cooperation and build reception and integration capacities of the local authorities, cooperation with persons granted international protection on drafting and implementing integration policies and practices, availability of guaranteed services, and additional support in employment and participation in everyday life in the community.

Following international and national recommendations, Croatia invested substantial efforts in the past to ensure a multilevel approach to the integration of persons granted international protection by formalising the cooperation with the local authorities and implementing interactive educational activities for the representatives of institutions and organisations operating on the local level. Efforts have been invested in taking advantage of the integration potential of local communities and recognising more clearly the responsibilities and commitments of the local level and the decisionmakers on the national level alike, while not neglecting the need to implement a synergy approach. Furthermore, continual activities have been implemented to disseminate information and raise awareness in the general and local public and the professional community about the guaranteed rights in the integration system, the application of antidiscrimination principles and successful models of intersectoral cooperation, as well as about special cultural and traditional features of third-country nationals and the advantages of building a welcoming society.

However, activities of different stakeholders in the integration system on the national and local levels have also highlighted areas that require proactive action to reach the reception and integration standards that Croatia committed to as a full member of the EU.

The conference ‘**Integration of persons granted international protection - Dissemination of good practices on European and international level**’ was designed as a platform for discussing various aspects of socioeconomic integration of third-country nationals, with a focus on persons granted international protection, from the perspective of decisionmakers on the European, national and local level, as well as government administration bodies and public institutions, non-governmental and international organisations, and third-country nationals.

Alen Tahiri, MA (Pol. Sci.)

Panel 1

— Establishment and operation of one-stop shop integration centres

1. Introduction: one-stop shop integration centre as a good practice example in providing services to refugees and migrants

Generally, a one-stop shop refers to the concept and practice of setting up a single point where citizens, entrepreneurs and other entities can access a variety of administrative services and information, instructions, advice, licences, documents and so on, which fall within the area of competence of various public authorities. The purpose of this concept is to facilitate and simplify the communication between the users of public services and the public authorities in a single point of contact. This results in the development of a user-friendly and citizen-oriented public administration, lowering costs, saving time both for the users and the public servants, and making the public services more reliable. The one-stop shop can be set up as a physical place (office) or a digital concept (web-platform). Practical implementation of the one-stop shop concept requires the outward-facing unit that provides the services (front office) to be supported by well-organised cooperation and communication between public authorities with different competences (back office). Such coordinated actions by public authorities require a number of organisational, functional, technological and legal measures, along with educational and awareness-raising ones.¹

The establishment of one-stop shop integration centres for refugees² and migrants, where all the different information and services are offered in one place, can help this vulnerable group in the society navigate the public administration system and access the range of public services

¹ Koprić, Ivan, 'Jedinstveno upravno mjesto (one-stop shop) u europskom i hrvatskom javnom upravljanju' (One-stop shop in European and Croatian public administration). In: Koprić, Ivan, Musa, Anamarija, Giljević, Teo (ed.), 'Građani, javna uprava, lokalna samouprava: povjerenje, suradnja i potpora' (Citizens, public administration, local self-government: trust, cooperation and support). Zagreb: Institute of Public Administration, 2017 (pp. 561–574).

² The term 'refugee' is used as a general term covering persons granted international protection (asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection) or temporary protection (displaced Ukrainian nationals).

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13 provided by public authorities. On the other hand, on public administration side, especially on the local level, the establishment of one-stop shop integration centres can help improve the cooperation between the competent authorities, and ensure a more coherent approach to the integration of refugees and migrants.

Examples of one-stop shop integration centres exist in a number of countries, especially on city (local self-government) level. Some cities have established one-stop shop centres that serve as welcome offices / orientation centres of sorts for the newcomers in the local community while also providing integrated information about public services available to refugees and migrants in one place. Also, in addition to providing information, these centres often also serve as mediators, providing access to public services (such as healthcare services, social welfare, education), and provide some services on their own premises (networking with employers, evaluation of competences, recognition of diplomas, legal assistance etc). Their beneficiaries include migrants who have only just arrived (regardless of their reason for immigration) and refugees (regardless of when they were granted their status or if the procedure is still in progress and the decision on their application for protection pending), and, in some centres, nationals of European Economic Area member states and their family members, as well as migrants whose status in the receiving country is not regulated.

In addition to providing a physical point where beneficiaries can access information and services, these centres usually also offer a variety of information on user-friendly websites (simply worded in languages that many of their beneficiaries have working knowledge of). With respect to organisation, the cities run the centres directly through city offices or departments (e.g. by deploying social workers to provide advice to refugees and migrants about accessing the key public services) or outsource their running to the non-profit sector (civil society organisations, associations) or to the private sector. Some public services (schools, nursery schools, hospitals etc) often join the centres' activities too by organising extracurricular activities in schools, organising health seminars, etc.³

³ OECD, Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264085350-en>

2. Panel ‘Establishment and operation of one-stop shop integration centres’

The objective of the panel ‘Establishment and operation of one-stop shop integration centres’ was to inform the professional community about the various approaches to the inclusion of persons granted international protection in the host society by establishing centralised service-providing mechanisms in key integration areas on the national and local levels.

Three good practice examples were presented at the panel, two from Croatia, and one from Portugal.

Sónia Pereira, Chair of Alto Comissariado para as Migrações (High Commission for Migration) from Lisbon, Portugal, presented the Portuguese one-stop shop model of establishing national migrant support centres.

Matea Bušić of the Integration Department of the Directorate of Immigration, Nationality and Administrative Affairs with the Croatian Ministry of the Interior presented the project ‘New neighbours – Inclusion of persons granted international protection in the Croatian society’.

Maja Kadoić, Head of the Refugee Integration Support Unit in the Migrant Protection Department of the Croatian Red Cross, presented the activities of the Integration House operated by the Croatian Red Cross.

Associate Professor Goranka Lalić Novak, PhD, of the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Law, also the President of the Croatian Law Centre, was the moderator of the panel.

3. Good practice examples presented at the panel

3.1. One-stop-shop model of establishing national migrant support centres in Portugal

High Commission for Migration (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações – ACM) is a public institute participating in the implementation of the migration policy in Portugal with the primary objective of ensuring successful integration of migrants and refugees into the Portuguese society. The ACM’s mission is to help define, implement and evaluate horizontal and sectoral integration and migration policies, and its key role is to bring different public services together through migrant and refugee support offices and centres. The ACM also does important work in combatting discrimination based on race, nationality, ethnicity or religion, and in developing inclusion programmes for the second generation of migrants. To achieve these objectives and perform these tasks, the ACM has set up a number of specialised departments focused on providing services to refugees and migrants.

The ACM is the successor of another authority, the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (ACIME), established by the Portuguese Government in 1996, which reported directly to the Prime Minister. The ACIME was set up to ensure the participation of representatives of minority communities and migrant organisations, social partners and public services in defining and evaluating public policies focusing on migration and the prevention of exclusion and discrimination. As the ACIME’s competences and needs grew and evolved, in 2007 it was transformed into the public institute named High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI). As Portugal’s migration profile changed and the country faced new challenges arising from demographic changes and population ageing, the Institute was assigned new competences in 2014, including the coordination of public migration policies, and was renamed ACM.

Four national migrant integration support centres (CNAIM) operate under the ACM, offering support in the field and coordinating access to public services provided to migrants and refugees. The CNAIMs were established in 2004 in response to increased immigration of persons

who did not speak Portuguese and therefore ran into issues when communicating with the public services and competent authorities, and when accessing public services, due to lack of coordination between their activities. This made the public services inefficient and prevented migrants from renewing their permits and successfully integrating into the society.

The CNAIMS respond to these challenges by bringing together a variety of public services provided to migrants and refugees in one place, ensuring a coordinated response to their problems and integration challenges. Innovative support services were also developed, providing services that had not existed in the public administration system before. This model of integrated service provision within the network of so-called Citizens' Shops was launched in April 2004, and was further consolidated by regulations adopted in 2005. The Citizens' Shops are an innovative one-stop shop concept designed for all citizens, bringing together several public and private entities in one place to facilitate the communication of citizens and businesses with the public administration. The first Citizens' Shop was opened in Lisbon and Porto in 1999.

The CNAIMS are an example of a one-stop shop model of integration centres where a range of services, offices and organisations responsible for providing services to migrants operate in one physical place. CNAIMS are currently active in Lisbon, Porto, Faro and Beja. The following institutions operate at the CNAIM office in Lisbon:

- ACT (Working Conditions Authority) – provides information about the employment of foreign workers;
- CRC (Central Registry Office) – receives citizenship applications;
- ME (Ministry of Education) – responsible for orientation, Portuguese language courses and scholarships; promotes the inclusion of students in primary and secondary schools; mediates with educational institutions in solving problems in practice;
- MS (Ministry of Health) – facilitates access to healthcare, including for migrants whose status in the country is not regulated;
- SEF (Immigration and Borders Service) – renews temporary and permanent residence permits, issues permanent residence permits, is responsible for family reunification etc;
- SS (Social Security) – deals with issues related to social services.

CNAIM Lisbon also has specialised offices focusing on providing support

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17 and information in different areas: Welcome and Screening Office (GAT), Voter Registration Support Office (GAR), Office of Housing Support (GAH), Office of Support to Qualification (GAQ), Office of Employment Support (GAE), Support Office for the Migrant Entrepreneur (GAEM), Office of Support to the Immigrant Consumer (GAIC), Support Office for the Over-indebted Immigrant (GAIS), Office of Support to Family Reunification (GARF), Office of Legal Support for Immigrants (GAJI) and Office of Social Support (GAS).

Migrant support helplines were also established. The telephone interpretation service (STT) helps overcome language barriers as one of the major difficulties that migrants encounter while communicating with different services. This service connects the service providing body, the translator and the migrant via a videoconferencing call. It is available to users free of charge on weekdays on a dedicated migrant support helpline, where users can also receive the basic information about their rights and duties, along with advice about employment, housing, healthcare, education, and other matters.

There are also the local migrant integration support centres (CLAIM) as a decentralised form of providing services on the local level. The purpose of this network of local offices is to provide support in the migrant reception and integration process on the local level, work with local self-government authorities, and promote interculturality on the local level. The CLAIMS provide support and general information in several areas, including status regulation, citizenship, family reunification, housing, voluntary return, labour, health, education, and others. There are 154 of them at the moment in Portugal and on the islands, and they have been established based on a cooperation protocol between the ACM and the local authorities, the regional self-government of the autonomous region Madeira, and civil society organisations. In some areas, the CLAIMS use mobile teams to provide services to beneficiaries who would otherwise not have access to these services due to any number of reasons.

3.2. Project 'New neighbours – Inclusion of persons granted international protection in the Croatian society'

The planning and implementation of this project is based on the Act on International and Temporary Protection (Official Gazette 70/15, 127/17). The Act guarantees a number of rights to persons granted international protection: residence, family reunification, housing, work, healthcare,

education, freedom of religion, free legal assistance, social welfare, assistance with integration into the society, ownership of real property, and acquisition of Croatian citizenship (Articles 64–77). Under Article 76, which is particularly important, asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection are entitled to assistance in their inclusion in the society for a maximum of three years after they have been served with the decision on their status. The assistance includes the preparation of an integration plan for the asylee or foreigner under subsidiary protection, taking into account their individual needs, knowledge, competences and skills, assistance to the asylee or foreigner under subsidiary protection in implementing this plan, and supervision of the plan's implementation. According to the Act, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for these activities.

Under this provision, the Ministry of the Interior entrusted the Centre for Dialogue Culture (CKD) association with project implementation. The project is implemented in the period between 10 March 2020 and 31 December 2022, and the total project value is HRK 14,446,184.87 (of which the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund covers 90%, and the remaining 10% is covered by the state budget).

The goal of the project is to improve the living conditions and the quality of life for persons granted international protection in Croatia. The targets of the project include: increase the success of integration of persons granted international protection; increase the awareness of the local population of their new neighbours; build the capacities of public institutions and media representatives for the implementation of integration policies and practices in the international protection system through a programme of joint activities and a training and development programme; ensure the efficiency of the project; and conduct an evaluation study to increase the database of primary information on the success of the integration of persons granted international protection into the Croatian society.

A concept for working with the beneficiaries was designed under this project, which includes the following: working with single persons or families on the implementation of all objectives and commitments defined by the beneficiaries themselves, and drafting an individual integration plan that includes personal information, previous education and work experience, and objectives they want to achieve (administrative steps, education, work, housing, social welfare, healthcare, and

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19 other activities depending on their needs and interests). Mobile teams composed of the case officer and cultural mediator play an important role. There are a total of seven such teams in Croatia. The activities mostly take place in Zagreb, Sisak, Rijeka and Karlovac, because they have the biggest populations of persons granted international protection.

This project has led to noteworthy results: 147 beneficiaries were involved in the activities in the short term or through plan implementation; get-togethers and joint activities were organised for the beneficiaries and/or the local community; holidays were celebrated; workshops, trips, and sports, cultural and religious events were held; the visibility of the beneficiaries and the project itself was increased through media coverage (social media, articles, interviews, programmes, documentary and video series); and cooperation was established with other civil society organisations and international organisations, bodies of government and public administration, and local and regional self-government units by organising and holding conferences, round tables, coordination activities and panels.

Regarding challenges in implementation, there were two external circumstances that posed significant challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to decreased contacts and postponed public events; and the earthquakes of 2020, which caused damage to housing units in Sisak where some beneficiaries were living. Beneficiaries also face challenges on the personal level: some are not ready to adjust their personal expectations, lifestyle and habits to the new culture, and beneficiaries frequently leave Croatia because they want to join their family members residing in other EU member states. Challenges on the systematic level include lack of continuity in the delivery of Croatian language, history and culture courses; lack of access to the healthcare system due to non-recognition of beneficiaries, administrative difficulties regarding their registration in the system, and the financing of healthcare service costs; and challenges related to the inclusion of beneficiaries in the education system and the labour market, especially due to long-lasting procedures of translation and recognition of foreign educational qualifications.

3.3. Integration House operated by the Croatian Red Cross

Croatian Red Cross is an association that works as a non-profit legal entity within the territory of the Republic of Croatia to address humanitarian situations, organise healthcare and social welfare programmes, prepare

people for acting in mass accidents or disasters, and mitigate and eliminate the consequences thereof. The public competences, activities and financing of Croatian Red Cross are regulated by the Croatian Red Cross Act (Official Gazette No. 71/2010).

In line with its mandate, Croatian Red Cross implements programmes to assist and protect applicants for international protection and persons under international and temporary protection, and other migrants in need, in cooperation with and with the support of the Ministry of the Interior and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as other relevant institutions and civil society associations. Croatian Red Cross has been active in the fields of asylum and migration since 2003 as the UNHCR's implementing partner. Some of the first applicants for protection in Croatia were housed at the housing facilities in Šašna Greda near Sisak, operated by the Croatian Red Cross and the UNHCR. When the first Reception Centre for Asylum Applicants was opened in Kutina in 2006, followed by the Reception Centre for Applicants for International Protection in Zagreb sometime later, the Croatian Red Cross was the central provider of a number of social services to this population. As the number of persons granted international protection increased, Croatian Red Cross become more actively involved in their integration into the Croatian society. Croatian Red Cross ran the integration programme since January 2011 to address the beneficiaries' need for additional support in facing everyday difficulties in their lives during the integration period.

The Integration House was opened on the Croatian Red Cross' premises in Dubravkin trg under this organisation's Integration Programme. Any beneficiary could visit the House between 8:00 am and 4:00 pm on weekdays and talk to an adequately qualified officer about the challenges they encountered in integration. In 2018, the Integration House moved to its new location on Ulica Crvenog križa, where an info centre was set up, along with a space for integration activities. The Integration House is an important factor in the development of integration policies, especially in Zagreb, supplementing the efforts invested by the national authorities in the initial and later stages of inclusion of refugees in the educational system, the labour market, the social welfare and healthcare systems, and the receiving communities and society in general.

Lacking adequate staff, Croatian Red Cross involved about ten volunteers, who were trained in providing psychosocial support, in the

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21 activities of supporting its beneficiaries from the very beginning. The volunteers were split into two groups. One provided assistance in the field (accompanying beneficiaries to various institutions), and the other provided professional services (learning assistance for school-age children and Croatian language courses for adults). The volunteers had the support and assistance of an integration professional with any questions that they might have had.

Croatian Red Cross provided a number of services to refugees, in addition to supporting them while exercising their rights, including in the enrolment of children into nursery, primary and secondary schools, pre-enrolment testing of children, healthcare services, social welfare services, and more. These services were provided with the support of a translator, who served as a key link between the beneficiaries and the institution. Translators often supported not only the beneficiaries, but also the institution that was supposed to provide the beneficiary with a certain service. A variety of activities for children were organised and implemented, such as summer vacations, presentations of holiday gifts and school supplies, and clothes and shoes for physical education. The donation programme for new-borns 'It makes no difference if I'm different' was launched two years ago, providing assistance to families for three new-born babies (diapers, baby food and clothes).

Croatian Red Cross also ran the two-year project 'Red Cross activities for the integration of relocated and resettled persons - ARCI', aiming to improve and promote the process of integration of persons arriving in Croatia under the relocation and resettlement programme. The project was implemented between January 2018 and May 2020 and included a number of activities aimed at empowering this category of refugees. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was the project leader, and the project was implemented in cooperation with the Bulgarian Red Cross and German Red Cross, and funded under the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The project 'Building systematic and comprehensive support for persons under international protection by developing inclusive social services', financed under the European Social Fund and implemented between May 2020 and April 2022, is also noteworthy.

At the beginning of integration efforts, ensuring that beneficiaries can access their rights was the greatest challenge, mainly because the legislative framework was insufficiently defined (then Asylum Act), and

the staff of the competent institutions was unfamiliar with the matter and lacked training. Beneficiaries faced problems accessing healthcare services, education (enrolment into schools or study programmes), social welfare services (financial assistance, one-time allowance, child care allowance, recognition of disability, leaving apartments and then returning), employment (knowledge of language is a key competence required by employers) and recognition of qualifications (persons often do not have the documents to prove their qualifications). Integration challenges changed over the years, with the focus shifting to the employment of refugees. Croatian Red Cross established contacts with employers who were open to hiring asylees, irrespective of their qualifications and knowledge of language. Two or three times a year, Croatian Red Cross organised meetings that were attended by employers and prospective employees. Mostly men were employed initially, but in the past three years the number of men and women who found employment has been approximately equal. An increasing number of women from immigrant families opt to seek employment, but employment of women who have no work experience and no qualifications is a particular challenge. Fulfilling the women's wishes and needs is also a challenge, especially in case of women working in service industry jobs that require full-time employment. However, the employers Croatian Red Cross is in touch with have put in a lot of effort to help immigrant women hold jobs: women work a single shift, work from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm, to be able to care for children, have organised transport to their jobs, do not work on the weekends, and attend language courses in their workplace. A leaflet for employers was designed in cooperation with the UNCHR, containing the answers to employers' frequently asked questions regarding the employment of beneficiaries.

To sum up, the Integration House operated by Croatian Red Cross in Zagreb was a meeting place where refugees were able to get information, help and support on a daily basis in accessing and exercising their rights. They were able to get legal assistance and counselling, which was provided in cooperation with the Croatian Law Centre, along with psychosocial support, help accessing healthcare services or making appointments for medical examinations, and help dealing with any difficulty or challenge they faced in their integration into the society. Social workers, a translator and a nurse were at their service every day, and trained volunteers were there to help them as well. Even though the

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23 activities of the Integration House have been limited since 2020 due to COVID-19, it still remains a successful example of providing one-stop shop services and support to refugees, end empowering them for independent life in their new community.

4. Recommendations for improving the integration system in Croatia:

The following recommendations can be identified based on the good practice examples presented above regarding one-stop shop integration centres with the aim of improving the integration system in Croatia, especially on the local level.

Ensure continuity in providing services and support to beneficiaries

Under the Act on International and Temporary Protection, the Ministry of the Interior is the competent authority responsible for enforcing the right to receive help with integration into the society for a maximum duration of three years. Since the Ministry can be expected to continue to outsource these tasks to civil society organisations, with funding under the AMIF, we recommend that the Ministry invites tenders for these contracts while the previous project is still in progress to ensure continuity in providing services and support to the beneficiaries.

Establish one-stop shop integration centres

We recommend the establishment of one-stop shop integration centres in major cities where a substantial number of refugees are residing and/or where migrants are expected to settle in substantial numbers, as physical places where beneficiaries could receive information about accessing different integration services. Integration centres can provide these services to different categories of migrants and refugees, and especially provide them to the latter after the expiry of three

years of support that are funded under the Act on International and Temporary Protection (medium-term and long-term integration into the society). Better coordination in providing information from the scope of competence of different authorities also helps strengthen the refugees' and migrants' trust in public authorities and thus in the country and society in general.

Ensure strong and clear cooperation between different providers of public services and optimize work processes

While planning the one-stop shop integration centre, the authorities need to ensure strong and clear cooperation between different providers of public services and optimize work processes (back office). A clear vertical (with competent government authorities) and horizontal (between different public services) coordination is needed. The staff working at such a centre (front office) needs to be educated and trained in working with this category of beneficiaries, and needs to have the support of translators and cultural mediators, as required. Civil society organisations need to be allowed to participate in the activities of the integration centre. We recommend using the experiences of the ACM and CNAIM in Portugal as good practice examples.

Local government units that do not have the administrative capacities to operate a one-stop shop integration centre can outsource the services of providing information on integration into the local community to civil society organisations, while providing financial support for the performance of these tasks.

Network and connect civil society organisations

We recommend networking and connecting civil society organisations that provide different information and services to refugees in the integration process to ensure synergy and to make sure that all beneficiaries receive the information and services they need.

Prepared by: Associate Professor Goranka Lalić Novak, PhD

25 References:

- KOPRIĆ, Ivan, 'Jedinstveno upravno mjesto (one-stop shop) u europskom i hrvatskom javnom upravljanju' (One-stop shop in European and Croatian public administration). In Koprić, Ivan, Musa, Anamarija, Giljević, Teo (ed.), 'Građani, javna uprava, lokalna samouprava: povjerenje, suradnja i potpora' (Citizens, public administration, local self-government: trust, cooperation and support). Zagreb: Institute of Public Administration, 2017.
- OECD, Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264085350-en>

Panel 2

— Using new technologies to provide information and integration services

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1. Introduction

Third country nationals often have a very hard time navigating life in the host country and overcoming the barriers that prevent them from accessing the key information and basic services. The number and the complexity of administrative procedures that are required to access services are much greater for third country nationals than for host country nationals. Irrespective of the legislative framework governing the rights and obligations of persons under international protection in Croatia, technological innovation and digitalisation can open up new avenues for accessing information on rights, obligations and services, making them available to more people at the same time.

The European Commission recognised the importance of technology in integration in its Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027⁴, published in November 2020, urging EU member states to develop digital literacy and involve third country nationals in integration programmes by making sure that the design of digital public services is inclusive, easily accessible, and adjusted to certain categories of third country nationals.

Through integration, third country nationals become active members of the society, which impacts the cohesion of the society and increases the well-being of all members of the community.

This overview of good practices in using digital technologies and challenges in designing and implementing such digital solutions seeks to raise awareness among the relevant stakeholders about the role of digital technologies as a facilitator of access to information and services. Using digital technologies to achieve integration objectives is a challenge, but also an opportunity for innovation in finding adequate solutions.

⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021–2027', 24.11.2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1632299185798&uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0758>

2. Panel: Using new technologies to provide information and integration services

The availability of public services and accurate and timely information to as many people as possible is the basis for successful integration, since exercising their right to access public services, their active participation in the society, and their contribution to sustainable and inclusive economic development is the prerequisite that needs to be fulfilled for third country nationals to live in the society as its full and equal members.

Insufficiently availability or clarity of information means that persons are not aware of their rights or are uncertain which authority to contact to exercise some of their rights, which diminishes the integration potential greatly.

In addition to the above, third country nationals face other challenges in using digital technologies, such as lack of digital infrastructure, language barrier, limitations caused by the lack of an electronic identification procedure and access to certain digital services, and especially the lack of skills required to use digital technologies.⁵

The topics discussed at the panel included new technologies as platforms for providing information and integration services to third country nationals, illustrated by the presentation of good practice examples from Germany, Croatia and Slovenia, and the principles and development standards for e-services defined by the *Standard for the Development of Public e-Services in the Republic of Croatia*.

Fritjof Knier, Head of Global Cooperation at Tür an Tür – Digitalfabrik GmbH, of Augsburg, Germany, presented the project *Integreat*.

Ana Šutalo, Head of the Department of Integration in the Service for International Protection, Sector for Foreigners and International Protection, Directorate of Immigration, Citizenship and Administrative

29 Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, presented the mobile app *ReSettle in Croatia*.

Martina Bofulin, research fellow and assistant professor at the Slovenian Migration Institute, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana, presented *Dunavski kompas* (Danube Compass), an information platform designed to aid the economic integration of migrants.

Dejan Vukelić, National Coordinator for the Single Digital Gateway in the Central State Office for the Development of the Digital Society, reflected on the principles and standards of development of e-services, defined by the Standard for the Development of Public e-Services.

Ivana Perlić Glamočak was the moderator of the panel.

2.1. Designing e-services

In Croatia, the Central State Office for the Development of the Digital Society is in charge of monitoring and advancing the development of the digital society, and aligning it with the EU guidelines and regulations on digital society and economy. The Office provides professional support to the Croatian Government in the development of safe digital infrastructure and public digital services, as well as the popularisation of the development of the digital society in all areas of life and activity of Croatian citizens, economy and the public sector. One of the objectives that the Central State Office for the Development of the Digital Society works on is to systematically advance and standardise digital public services and digital infrastructure, and popularise the development of digital skills and digital inclusion.

*The Standard for the Development of Public e-Services in the Republic of Croatia*⁶ was adopted in the field of development of public e-services to provide a set of guidelines to define policies for e-service development and management. *The Standard of Public e-Services in the Republic of Croatia for Mobile Devices and Related Graphic Guidelines*⁷ was prepared to guide the development of mobile apps for public services, so called m-services, as a sort of an upgrade to the Standard for the Development of e-Services.

6 https://rdd.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/e-Standardi/Standard%20razvoja%20javnih%20e_usluga%20u%20RH_Smjernice.pdf

7 https://rdd.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/e-Standardi/Standard%20javnih%20e_usluga_za%20mobilne%20ure%20C4%91aje.pdf

Dejan Vukelić, National Coordinator for the Single Digital Gateway in the Central State Office for the Development of the Digital Society, reflected on the principles and standards for the development of e-services defined by the Standard for the Development of Public e-Services, which all stakeholders should take into account when considering the e-services that the citizens require, including third country nationals living in Croatia.

Under these standards, a public e-service is any service provided by a public authority or institution using digital channels, which speeds up the efficiency of administrative systems, optimizes administrative business processes, and improves the quality of public administration, while providing the users of these services with a faster and more efficient way of obtaining information and resolving their life situations and problems in the comfort of their own home or office, without needing to make physical trips to government institutions. The basic features of such services are that they are provided on the internet or electronic network; that they are delivered automatically in whole or in part; that they are independent of the devices on which they are delivered and stored (available to users on electronic devices such as computers, mobile phones etc); and that they are provided remotely, not requiring both parties to be present at the same time in the same place.

It is of particular interest to examine and understand e-services in the context of an integral approach to resolving a certain situation or problem that may arise in someone's personal or professional life. In this respect, the Standards discuss the complexity of services, which is particularly relevant because resolving a situation or problem does not always require the development of complex digital solutions: sometimes providing a simple service is entirely justified (such as when obtaining a document).

The Standards distinguish between **simple services**, which are narrow in scope and usually limited to issuing a single document/certificate, and **complex (end-to-end) services**, which deal with an entire situation in someone's personal or professional life (such as the birth of a child), integrating several simple services into a single e-service addressing a situation or problem in personal or professional life.

Simple services are certainly justified in some situations. However, according to the Standard for the Development of Public e-Services, due to the lack of standards and insufficient awareness of the need for

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31 complex services, and the lack of operating structure that is needed to provide complex services covering two or more authorities, the e-Citizens (e-Građani) system includes mostly simple services for the time being.

Also, the Standard for the Development of Public e-Services lists 13 principles that should be fulfilled for the development of a high-quality e-service and a high-quality e-Citizens system, defining certain requirements for entities proposing an existing or future service whose digitalisation is sought:

- 1) Identify and understand the users' needs and limitations (examination of the user's complete context leads to the development of services shaped to fit the situations in the users' personal or professional lives, which address the problems comprehensively and bring together different stakeholders-public authorities in a meaningful and efficient way, each in their respective competence);
- 2) Address a situation in the user's personal or professional life (integrate all steps into a single unit that forms a comprehensive experience for the user towards achieving an objective);
- 3) Offer an aligned and integrated user experience;
- 4) Provide a user-friendly service (for example, provide feedback on successfully performed steps, and do not ask the user to input information that is already available in public registers, which requires the possibility of connectivity and information sharing between relevant stakeholders);
- 5) Develop a service that everyone will be able to use (make sure the user interface is accessible, make the service accessible to persons with a lower level of technical competence, and provide support in this respect, such as user manuals, telephone support, multilingual platforms);
- 6) Set up an interdisciplinary team;
- 7) Define performance parameters for the e-service and monitor user satisfaction;
- 8) Popularise the use of the e-service (ensure that an e-document is accepted by everyone in the system);
- 9) Develop and maintain a reliable service;
- 10) Use components that have already been established;
- 11) Choose appropriate tools, technologies and open standards;
- 12) Develop a safe service that protects the privacy and safety of its users;

13) Support public authorities in digital training (for example, organise trainings for government officials in the use of the e-service and in providing support).

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Croatia is increasingly investing in the development of the e-Citizens system and the development of new electronic services. The above principles and standards can be applied in the preparation of digital solutions irrespective of the platform that is used to provide any e-services.

3. Good practice examples presented at the panel

3.1. Project *Integreat*

Fritjof Knier, Head of Global Cooperation in Tür an Tür – Digitalfabrik GmbH, of Augsburg, Germany, presented the project *Integreat*. Tür an Tür has been active since 2016 as a non-profit company that seeks to improve living conditions, among other ways, by implementing projects focused on improving integration, intercultural information exchange, and cohabitation for persons of refugee or migrant background, using digital solutions.

The first ideas for the *Integreat* project date back to the migration crisis of 2015 and the arrival of migrants and refugees to Germany in large numbers. The initiators of the project recognised the challenge caused by the lack of information on the basic services in the integration context and on the way to exercise individual rights. Due to high translation costs, information on the local level, even if it existed, was not available in all the languages that were needed. Unavailability of information and inability to access information led to risks of difficulties in the integration process.

Integreat is a digital integration platform providing information on the local level in several languages to the newly arrived migrants and refugees. From the very beginning, the project was implemented in collaboration with prominent organisations and institutions and the local level. Transparency, as one of the priorities, was ensured by making the source code of the programme publicly available and open. In early 2021,

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Integreat was available in 63 cities and districts in Germany.

The platform functions as an app, website and brochure at the same time, and its content can be accessed both online and offline. *Integreat* was developed in collaboration with cities and municipalities, which input and maintain the platform content (information) on their own. The emphasis is on information, content and services on the local level. In practice, this means that users simply select a city or region to access information about child care, schools, training, studying or employment, locally available language courses, and health insurance in a given area, but also general useful information that are needed for everyday life (such as information about the activities of various associations, libraries and reading rooms). The content and structure of the information is defined by the cities or municipalities, which are also responsible for the accuracy of the content, and in some examples the platform contains links to listings of available job openings. The possibility of inputting local news was also introduced.

Editing platform content does not require special technical skills and information input has been made easy, because in practice any person

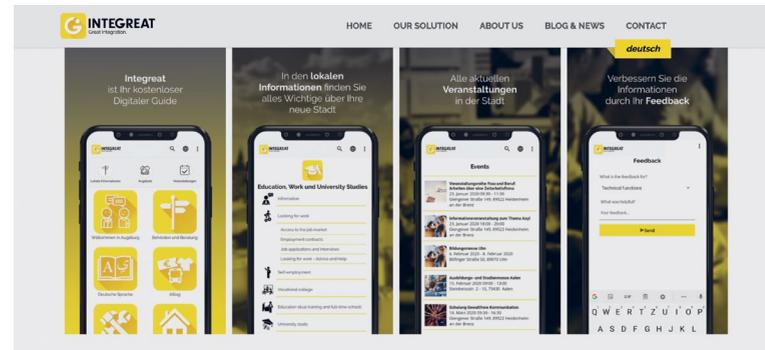


Figure 1 – *Integreat* mobile app

Source: <https://integreat-app.de/en/the-new-integreat-app-is-here/>

who can use e-mail can also create content on the platform. Content is available in different languages, as may be needed on the local level. Content translations can be shared between local levels, which is one of the added values provided by the platform.

In the 2019 Impact Analysis Report⁸, the platform was described as simple to implement, and cooperation with the local level was described as very positive, as was the simplicity of content maintenance. The creation and implementation of such comprehensive platforms is not without its challenges, but satisfactory solutions were found during its implementation. The high cost of translation of platform content is one of the challenges. Even though the number of languages the content is translated into depends on the assessment by local stakeholders and the needs of the beneficiaries, in practice it turned out that the translation costs by far exceed the amounts planned by the local level in its budgets for the use of the platform (by as much as a threefold). An attempt was made to reduce translation costs by establishing and maintaining a so-called ‘translation memory’ (essentially a large database), shared by all local stakeholders. In practice, every sentence is checked against the translation memory to see if a translation is already available, which cut translation costs by 50% over time. Automated machine translation was also used to facilitate the work of the translation agencies and lower costs. The second challenge concerns project expansion and support that is provided to local stakeholders. For example, attending frequent meetings personally and coordinating activities was not much of a problem for the local stakeholders in Augsburg and *Integreat* project team members. Since the full potential of the platform is unlocked when all stakeholders are regularly involved, it was not expedient to set up implementation support teams across the country, because the costs thus incurred would have been too high. The solution they came up with was that the local authorities took over the role of implementation coordinators, and members of the project team could provide remote support if necessary. Cooperation between local stakeholders also proved to be one of the challenges. The objective of the platform was to share good practices and solutions among the local levels, but experience showed that not all local levels followed this approach, and that a competition of sorts existed between them. Since content sharing was the crucial factor for the success of the platform, coordinators were appointed on the local level, and regular annual meetings were held in an effort to raise awareness of the importance of sharing good practices and lessons learned. Funding is always a challenge, especially for digital solutions that require

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a continuous budget for maintenance or further development. Under the financial model in use at the moment, local stakeholders pay a certain fee for using the platform, depending on the size of their budgets. Since all stakeholders share the same platform, the costs only cover platform maintenance and development, allowing focus on the functionalities that everyone shares and benefits from. This approach, under which the platform is funded from the budgets of the local self-governments, might not be possible in all countries (due to financial, legal or logistical reasons), and more efforts need to be invested in raising awareness of the need for post-implementation financial support to ensure long-term sustainability and accuracy of the published content.

3.2. Mobile app *ReSettle in Croatia*

Ana Šutalo, Head of the Department of Integration in the Service for International Protection, Sector for Foreigners and International Protection, Directorate of Immigration, Citizenship and Administrative Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, presented the mobile app *ReSettle in Croatia*.

This free mobile app was developed by the Croatian Ministry of the

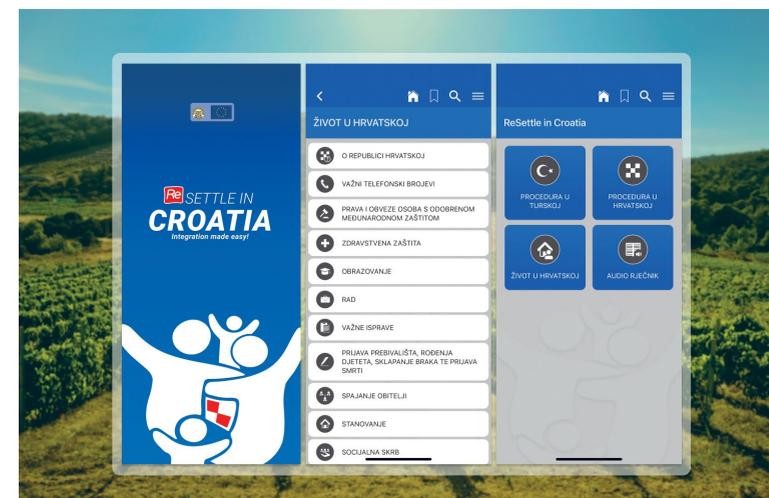


Figure 2 – Mobile app *ReSettle in Croatia*
Source: Croatian Ministry of the Interior

8 https://integreat-app.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Impact-Summary_2019.pdf

Interior in the project ‘Establishment of Resettlement Mechanisms’, funded under the AMIF. The app was designed to provide faster and simpler access to information and guidelines for persons arriving in Croatia under the resettlement programme who have been granted international protection.

The app includes useful information, including on ways to exercise the rights regulated by the Act on International and Temporary Protection (Official Gazette 70/15, 127/17), which are the same for all persons who have been granted international protection status in Croatia. The app is therefore intended for all persons granted international protection

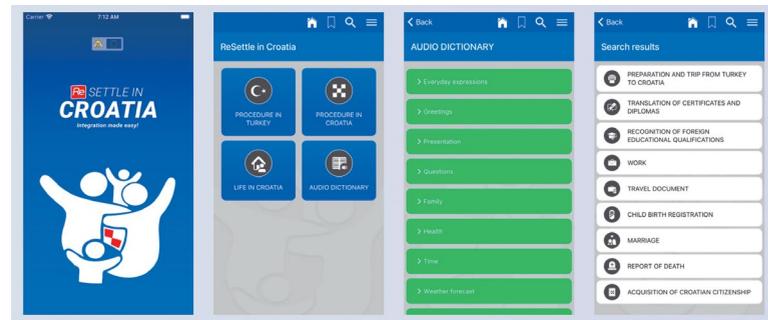


Figure 4 – Mobile app ReSettle in Croatia

Source: <https://appadvice.com/app/resettle-in-croatia/1573712941>

in Croatia. All rights regulated by the above Act are described one by one, and the procedure for exercising these rights is explained, including practical details, such as important phone numbers, what IDs look like, and contact information for healthcare institutions.

The category concerning life in Croatia includes basic information about Croatia, such as its geographic position and currency, photos of national symbols, and so on, which makes it potentially interesting for use by a wider circle of third country nationals as well. The category *Everyday life* explains behaviour patterns in situations the refugees might find themselves in while going about their daily lives, such as using public transport, driving a car, shopping for groceries, using mobile phones, sending packages and making money transfers, including information on what the banknotes look like, and a currency converter. There is also a

diagram explaining the functioning of the educational system, ways to search for a job or seek self-employment, and administrative steps such as registration of residence, birth of a child, marriage, life partnership, and so on. With the financial and housing circumstances of the refugees in mind, the procedure for exercising the right to housing and other rights from the social welfare system is explained, from financial rights to services provided within the system.

In addition to Croatian, the app is also available in English, Arabic and Kurdish. A specially designed Croatian audio dictionary, which plays an audio of the basic words and phrases in Croatian, such as greetings, simple questions, and basic vocabulary about health, weather, food and so on when the users type in words or basic sentences in Arabic, Kurdish or English, is a special feature in this app. This tool makes the app very practical and useful in everyday situations, and the dictionary offers a special feature of combining several words or phrases into sentences.

The mobile app *ReSettle in Croatia* was released and made available on 30 July 2021. Its development and implementation also highlighted certain practical challenges that must be considered while planning digital solutions.

The need for a good assessment and planning of financial and human resources was underlined. Regarding finances, it is necessary to keep in mind that each planned functionality requires a certain time and funds for implementation. Having in mind that unplanned situations happen during platform/app design in spite of all efforts to plan for all possibilities, new and innovative solutions must be considered where possible (specifically, ‘voice borrowing’ in developing the in-app audio dictionary), and the internal knowhow within the institutions needs to be put to use if possible. If provisions are made to involve other stakeholders in the development and implementation of digital solutions, the mode of operation of all stakeholders responsible for individual information or information segments needs to be arranged in advance in order to facilitate the communication of obstacles, deadlines and necessary steps for successful cooperation and problem-solving.

It is also crucial that all stakeholders understand what a particular platform/app seeks to achieve, and that the vision is presented to the entity delivering the final solution. It is therefore essential to clarify the exact requirements of the beneficiaries and the design of the final product in the communication. In this regard, if the development is

being outsourced, it is essential for the communication to include an IT expert who will be able to ‘translate’ the requirements of the beneficiaries (ideas, objectives, needs) into the programming language, and draw attention to any shortcomings in the design and implementation stage, operating as a mediator of sorts between the idea and its operationalisation. Challenges related to the translation of the content into the required languages were again underlined. In this case, the developers faced problems finding translators for some languages, and also faced issues regarding the technical aspect of fitting the text on mobile phone screens.

3.3. Danube Compass

Martina Bofulin, research fellow and assistant professor at the Slovenian Migration Institute, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana, presented *Dunavski kompas (Danube Compass)*, an information platform designed to aid the economic integration of migrants.

Danube Compass was developed under the project *Danube Region Information Platform for Economic Integration of Migrants (DRIM)*, co-funded by the EU under the Interreg programme, in response to the challenge presented by the lack of certain information directly impacting the success of the integration.

The project sought to achieve cohesion and economic development in the Danube region by building the capacities of public institutions for promoting the economic integration of migrants so that they would be able to efficiently address the information needs of newly arrived third country nationals. This platform’s innovative approach is reflected in its attempt to address the challenges through a transnational approach, rather than focusing on national systems only. The information platform is available in eight countries of the Danube region (Austria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia) and in 19 languages.

Danube Compass focuses on improving access to information for newly arrived third country nationals, but also for those who are already residing in one of the above eight countries in the Danube region. Specifically, it seeks to provide a multilingual information centre for existing and future information about employment and life in general in the Danube region; facilitate the communication of information from public institutions (information providers) to third country nationals (information

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39 recipients); provide an overview of all services available to third country nationals, and provide examples of best practices that could be adopted outside of the Danube region.

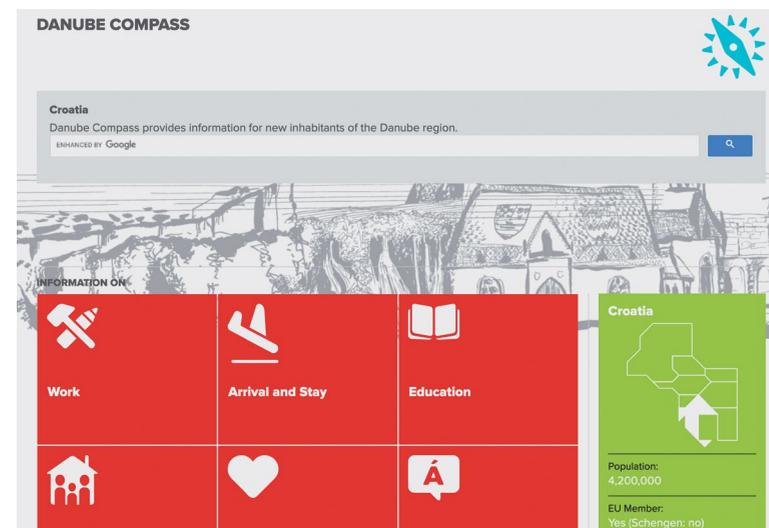


Figure 5 – Danube Compass web platform

As an online information platform, the *Danube Compass* covers all important areas of life: residence, employment, language learning, education, everyday life and health, offering an overview of all important rights and opportunities, depending on the national context of the countries participating in the project. It has been available in Croatia since 2018. The Croatian version of the *Compass* offers content in Croatian and English, along with Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

Lessons learned while developing the platform were summed up in the document *How to set up an information platform for migrants – Lessons learned from the transnational multilingual tool Danube Compass*⁹, which presents specific steps and recommendations for the development of the platform, from the need to analyse the existing situation (baseline) in

⁹ https://www.interreg-danube.eu/uploads/media/approved_project_output/0001/27/6aaceba8846ac1734072b-dd86094890297671413.pdf

order to obtain a complete and accurate picture of the existing information platforms and their interrelations, the need for careful planning of finances (expect the unexpected), and the need for financial flexibility, especially due to frequent content updates (for instance, due to changes in legislation). The focus is also on obtaining feedback from the target group of beneficiaries, or even involving them actively in the initial planning stage, to get information on how to adapt content or on translation needs (possible situations include having a large group that does not require translation into a specific language after all).

The implementation of large transnational projects has its challenges, but solutions were found during implementation. Since the process of collecting and processing relevant information is essential to the platform, a unique conceptual framework was developed for the collection of information (structure of topics and subtopics, timeframe, translation of legal and specialised lingo into simpler text that everyone will understand, and the use of common definitions). However, since the process unfolded in several countries, the idea and the principles of the conceptual framework did not fit the available information in all countries or were not suitable on the local level. The information that consisted mostly of legal terminology was difficult to translate into simple language for fear of losing their accuracy. In addition, since the information often changed, special attention had to be paid to the need to always keep them up to date.

To maintain the single conceptual framework for the collection of information in spite of all challenges, clear guidelines were developed, along with the Compass model that gave the stakeholders more information about the structure of the platform and its specific features and expectations. The possibility of using specific language terms in national languages was added to address specific national features of the information. Guidelines were also developed to help the stakeholders 'translate' legal terminology into simpler, easy-to-understand text. High costs of translating the extensive information were a challenge in some countries where the project was implemented, but the challenge was addressed by producing the final translations in the countries where translations were more affordable. Regarding the technical aspect, care had to be taken to choose an adequate platform (system) for content (website) management, given the extensive offer available in the market. The platform had to be technically simple to ensure that human

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41 capacities would be available for its implementation and maintenance in the course of the project and in the future. Individual technical problems were resolved as they surfaced during the implementation. For instance, a Google based search engine was used to search the content of the platform, which improved search results. The version of the platform that was available on mobile platforms also had to be adjusted, because the content was too extensive. The launching of the information platform and the marketing of the website required rebudgeting and development of a good campaign focusing on the target group.

Experiences of MICT, REBUILD, NADINE, MICADO, EASYRIGHTS and WELCOME projects: Specific and practical examples of ways to use digital technology in integration

Six projects under the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme – MICT, REBUILD, NADINE, MICADO, EASYRIGHTS and WELCOME – focused on the development of digital solutions for the integration of third country nationals. The solutions and recommendations developed under all six projects were published in the joint document 'Towards ICT-enabled integration of migrants'¹⁰.

Each of the six European projects in question provided specific and practical examples of ways to use digital technology in integration.

*The proposal for the **chatbot tool Digital Companion**,¹¹ facilitating efficient communication with the beneficiary of the service, was designed under the **REBUILD project**.¹² The idea was to create a modern chatbot using machine learning technology to provide migrants with support in everyday communication in life.¹³ A rules-based chatbot can answer frequently asked questions using the data extracted from the analysis module. If the chatbot is unable to continue the conversation or answer questions, the tool also includes a function that automatically redirects the conversation to human volunteers or other persons who can help provide answers on the spot.*

The system was presented as self-learning, with the adaptation of the service improving based on a self-adaptive process that is capable of learning not

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/towards-ict-enabled-integration-migrants_en

¹¹ According to the data of 2 October 2022, this app is not available in Croatia.

¹² <https://www.rebuildeuropa.eu/en/digital-companion.aspx>

¹³ <https://www.rebuildeuropa.eu/Allegati/16/CommonFiles/Progetti/Deliverables/en/21/1176/D4.4%20Designing%20the%20digital%20companion.pdf>

only from user interactions, but also from the experiences of other users, using innovative statistical methods.

Project NADINE¹⁴ is focused on labour market integration. According to available project evaluation data,¹⁵ the platform would include a set of tools facilitating labour market integration. It primarily provides information related to legal issues, healthcare and education, which have been identified as the most important areas of interest. Data is collected from open sources using a crawling tool. In addition to public sources, the platform facilitates the input of up-to-date and relevant information by relevant stakeholders (national authorities, local level, NGOs, employers). Information on the platform is searched using an algorithm-based conversation interface. A skill assessment tool, including the assessment of proficiency in European languages, is an added functionality. This tool asks sets of questions and uses the responses to develop a skills profile that can be added to a person's CV, which is created automatically by the platform. Based on the skills assessment, the platform also offers the functionality of proposing an appropriate sector for the person to seek employment in, and provides information about job openings in this sector. Furthermore, the platform would contain recommended courses and trainings (mainly in languages and other skills in demand in the labour market) that the users could take to improve their skills in order to join the labour market as quickly as possible. One of the interesting tools that has received good or very good feedback from the users is the portfolio development tool. This tool differs from the CV tool by allowing the input of information on 'informal' skills that are not substantiated by official proof. For example, users can upload photos or videos documenting their accomplishments in skills that they are unable to prove with official documents.

A chatbot function is also planned that would provide general administrative information in a user-friendly way.

The EASYRIGHTS¹⁶ project aims to develop a platform covering three areas: develop a simple version of websites containing administrative information, develop specific courses, and develop a language learning

14 <https://nadine-project.eu/>

15 Leligou, Helen C., Despina Anastasopoulos, Nicholas Vretos, Vassilis Solachidis, Eszter Kantor, Iva Plašilová, Elodie Girardet, Anita Montagna, Fotini Vlahaki, and Maria Tountopoulou. 2021. Experiences and Lessons Learnt from the Evaluation of ICT Tools for and with Migrants. *Social Sciences* 10: 344. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10090344>

16 <https://www.easyrights.eu/>

web-platform. In this way, the project would use a variety of technologies. Artificial intelligence (AI) technology would be used to de-bureaucratise language. A language course would be offered, along with a pronunciation improvement platform (the latter two would be developed ad hoc for specific services).

The Meditation Grammar¹⁷ tool, a standard that will be used to assess public services and guide the public authorities in designing and providing services to third country nationals, was also developed under the **EASYRIGHTS** project. This tool was designed as a set of minimal requirements for public services that guarantee migrants' rights with the aim of providing a common basis for the alignment of public services. The key elements of the standards address three main challenges that were identified during project implementation with regard to access to and use of the service, especially language availability (poor understanding of the local language, especially the legal lingo, which prevents persons from understanding the details of the administrative procedures that are needed to access their rights), the adequacy of information, and the exercise of rights (especially understanding of how services are connected, when one service is the prerequisite for accessing another).

The development of an interactive tool called 'Chat Agent', which would communicate about topics related to reception, integration and education, was planned under the **WELCOME**¹⁸ project. This tool would use automatic speech recognition on the speech of third country nationals and translate it into one of the languages used in the app¹⁹, taking into account the specific profile of the user it is communicating with.

The MICADO²⁰ project is more focused on user experience, looking into ways to visualise the data and the user interface to make important information visible at the first glance.

Under the **MIICT** project and the Immerse platform, Caritas Cyprus provides access to information about language courses, cultural orientation courses, and courses related to accessing the labour market in one place.

Speaking of skill (self) assessment tools, we would also like to draw attention to the contribution made by the European Commission with the publicly

17 https://www.easyrights.eu/_files/ugd/68109f_e61f21edbed54c36b47a84c000400eca.pdf

18 <https://welcome-h2020.eu/>

19 https://welcome-h2020.eu/news/2022-0-31_post.html

20 <https://www.micadoproject.eu>

available **EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals**.²¹ This is a publicly available tool that allows third country nationals to present their skills, qualifications and experience in a way that is understandable to employers, education and training providers, and organisations working with migrants across the EU.

4. Recommendations for improving the integration system in Croatia:

Successful integration tools provide third country nationals with timely, accurate, clear and accessible information about their opportunities, rights and obligations. The number and the complexity of the administrative procedures that are required for accessing services are much higher for third country nationals than for the nationals of the host country. An effort therefore needs to be made to develop as many e-services as possible that will make them available to as many people as possible, while reducing the administrative burden for all stakeholders, keeping in mind that business processes in digital form should result in more efficient delivery of services than the classic processes.

Recommendations for using new technologies to provide information and integration services include:

²¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/migrantskills/#/profile/summary>

Analyse the current state of affairs regarding the accessibility of information/services and challenges encountered in exercising rights.

The outcome of the analysis should provide a picture of the state of affairs regarding the use of digital technologies, answering questions such as possible availability of existing information platforms that provide information and services and that could be used for this purpose with minor or major adaptations; the need to develop new platforms and digital solutions for this purpose; and local or central orientation of these solutions as the optimal setting.

The end users and all their specific considerations must be in the centre of deliberations about the information and digital services that are needed.

In addition to access to housing, healthcare services and social services, another important consideration is the access to the education system and its role in the integration of migrant children and youth in order to ensure equal opportunities, but also as an investment in human capital. In addition, labour market participation is a very important aspect of integration as well, allowing people to capitalise on their professions and skills. Investments in human capital are not limited to the education system. They are complemented by forms of professional development and additional educational activities and programmes that give third country nationals access to equal opportunities to ensure their active participation in the society and economy. Since digital tools can be applied to different aspects of the integration process, it is essential to define the stage(s) of the integration process they will address, taking into account the context and the needs of the users to resolve a certain situation in their personal or professional life.

Detailed planning and understanding of all phases of development and implementation of an information platform/service and understanding that all stakeholders share a common understanding of the desired outcome.

The development of an e-service concept, detailed work plan, and functional specifications (defining clear and unambiguous functional requirements for the IT systems) require time and resources. The planning of all development stages has to include a detailed elaboration of

activities, including the definition of action promoters and timeframes. It is especially important to define and assess the necessary (financial and human) resources in the planning stage, and, if necessary, define the activities that the internal resources will not be able to cover, and ensure a supporting financial plan for them. Since unpredictable situations are always a possibility in spite of detailed planning, thought needs to be given to new and innovative approaches to tackling challenges, ultimately relying on intra-institutional knowhow, if such a solution is possible.

Co-creation of content/information/services and creation of an environment of mutual cooperation of all stakeholders, including policymakers, central government authorities, regional and local self-government units, public services, civil society organisations, academic community, research community, and migrant associations and the local community in order to build common connections and coordination, where possible, for the purpose of implementing measures to simplify red tape and adapt public services. This is necessary in particular because the stages of the integration process include a number of stakeholders on the central, and especially on the local level, who cover a variety of areas related to access to and exercise of rights and services, depending on their scope of competence.

Development of multilingual information systems and apps. The language barrier is one of the greatest barriers preventing the understanding of the person's new environment and the society they are in. It is therefore essential to work on learning the host society's language from the earliest beginnings of the integration process. However, in order to facilitate access to information as much as possible, care must be taken, and efforts must be invested from the very beginning to develop multilingual information systems and apps providing simple and quick access to information of crucial importance for exercising rights. Translation-related challenges were underlined as common to almost all projects. Project planning therefore must place a special focus on translation, especially in the context of budgeting.

Content maintenance and provision of accurate and complete information is one of the most important conditions in the period after the implementation of a digital platform.

Since future maintenance requires a substantial effort from all relevant stakeholders on the central and local levels, which, coupled with their existing workload, can overburden the individuals or collectives participating in this work, it is especially important to pay attention to human resources and capacity building, and arrange in advance the mode of operation of all stakeholders responsible for individual information or information segments in order to communicate barriers, timeframes and steps needed for successful intersectoral cooperation and for addressing challenges as clearly as possible.

Accessibility of websites and programming solutions to all users All third country nationals can hardly be expected to have the same level of access to digital platforms and the same level of proficiency in using them. It is therefore necessary to develop a service everyone will be able to use by ensuring the accessibility of the user interface, making sure that persons with a lower level of digital literacy can also use the service, and providing user support. The implementation of additional activities is also encouraged to motivate third country nationals to use digital technologies (targeted educational programmes, support). To sum up, digital technologies might not address all challenges in the integration of third country nationals, but they can improve and facilitate access to information and services, optimize administrative business processes, have a positive impact on the standard of living, speed up and facilitate integration processes, allow a more equal access to services, and provide the much-needed flexibility of access for users, and adjustability to the needs of third country nationals.

Prepared by: Ivana Perlić Glamočak

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Panel 3

— Local communities as the backbones of long-term integration

1. Introduction and purpose of the panel

A number of studies on the inclusion of persons under international protection and integration practices in a number of countries have confirmed the already well-known fact that the inclusion and governance capacity of the local government to plan and manage the integration process in the community is crucial for successful integration.

The issues of ensuring the efficiency and inclusiveness of the integration process, timely and consistent implementation of national and development of local integration policies, cooperation within and between sectors, definition of roles and responsibilities of the local self-government, and establishment of horizontal coordination mechanisms were discussed at the panel *Local communities as backbones of long-term integration*.

The Italian Reception and Integration System (SAI – Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione) and the Norwegian model of cooperation on integration issues, illustrated by the Skien Multiculturalism Committee, were presented at the panel. Examples of integration activities organised by local authorities in Croatia were presented as well. The City of Zagreb presented the process of developing the Action Plan for the Integration of Applicants for International Protection and Persons Granted International Protection for 2022 (hereinafter: Action Plan) and the document itself. The City of Karlovac presented an example of direct activities aimed at the integration of persons granted international protection. Panel participants were also informed in more detail about the role and activities of the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia (hereinafter: Office) and the support provided by the Office to local authorities in the development of integration plans and practices.

Below is the list of panel participants:

Nadan Petrović, PhD, Professor at La Sapienza University and Coordinator in the Migration and Asylum Centre at the same university, presented the Italian Reception and Integration System (SAI – Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione).

51 Peri-Ilka Tincman, PhD, Member of the Multiculturalism Committee in the City of Skien in Norway and director of LoPe – and association for microintegration, presented the Norwegian model of cooperation on integration matters, illustrated by the activities of the Skien Multiculturalism Committee.

Jana Radić, MSc, Head of the Department for the Promotion of Human Rights and Civil Society with the City Office for Culture, Intercity and International Cooperation and Civil Society in the City of Zagreb, presented the Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the Integration of Applicants for International Protection and Persons Granted International Protection.

Renata Kučan, Head of the Department of Education, Associations, Sports and Social Welfare of the City of Karlovac, presented the experience of the City of Karlovac with the reception of persons under international protection.

Danijela Gaube, Head of the Department of Human Rights at the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia, presented the role of the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia in providing integration support on the local level.

Nikoleta Poljak, Head of Democratic Culture and Civil Society Development and Programmes in Dkolektiv, an organisation for social development, was the moderator of the panel.

2. Good practice examples presented at the panel

2.1. Local integration as a prerequisite for successful integration – Italian Reception and Integration System (SAI – Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione)

Due to its geographic position on the southern border of Europe, Italy has been one of the major entry points and one of the top destinations for immigrants in Europe for decades. Italy has been recognised as an immigration destination since late 1970s, but its role has changed over the years. Based on an international treaty, Italy had the so-called ‘first

asylum' role for almost forty years, while the other countries (Germany, France, United Kingdom, but also the USA, Canada and Australia) were responsible for providing a stable and continuous protection system to the refugees. The number of refugees and migrants increased in the period between the late 1980s and early 1990s, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and especially during the war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, but there was no clearly defined active immigration policy.²² The definition of Italy's immigration policy was heavily impacted by the strengthening of the common EU immigration policy in the early 2000s and the implementation of the Schengen Agreement.

In a matter of decades, Italy reached and exceeded the EU average ratio of immigrant population to total resident population, with the number of foreign nationals rising from 500,000 in 1990 to more than 5,000,000 today. More specifically, in the past decade Italy became the industrialised country with the third highest number of asylum applications.

The average percentage of foreigners in the total population on the national level is 8.5%, but in some municipalities this percentage is already as high as 10%, 15%, 20% and 25%, and in others it has already exceeded 30%. Italian society was very open to immigrants before the migration crisis of 2015, but then Italy changed its policy regarding foreigners.

Italian Reception and Integration System - SAI (Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione)

Italian national asylum system has undergone fundamental changes, reflecting on Italy's reception and integration policy. Italy delegated an important role in the reception and integration to local and regional authorities, entrusting them with the task of continually developing good integration practices on the local level. Building on the experiences of decentralised and networked reception organised between 1999 and 2000 by associations and other non-profit organisations, a Cooperation Memorandum for the Implementation of the *National Asylum Programme* was signed in 2001 between the Ministry of the Interior - Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration, the National

²² Since Italy lacked an active immigration policy, many immigrants entered the country illegally, working in the black market and regulating their status after they had already spent some time in the country. Many of the migrants entered the country illegally and only legalised their residence later, after they had resided in the country illegally for some time and worked in the black market.

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53 Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This first public system for the reception of applicants for asylum and refugees was implemented in the entire Italian territory, with the participation and division of responsibilities between the Ministry of the Interior and the local self-governments. This system is still in use, even though it has been improved over the years and adapted to existing circumstances and needs.

The system aims to provide support to every individual in the reception system. An individual programme provides the person with means to establish independence and active participation in all segments of life, including employment, housing, access to local services and social interactions (e.g. integration of children in schools etc).

Its main characteristics are:

- 1) **Public nature** – the system is funded and managed by public authorities (Ministry of the Interior, ANCI and local authorities) under a multi-level governance model;
- 2) **Synergy** between government authorities, public institutions, non-profit organisations and the volunteer sector;
- 3) **Decentralisation** of integrated reception activities across Italy;
- 4) Promotion and development of stable, firm and interactive local networks, while including stakeholders and priority partners to ensure the success of the reception, protection and integration measures;
- 5) **Voluntary participation** of local institutions in networks and projects;
- 6) **Strengthening of local services**, designed for the well-being of the entire community, including both the migrant community and the domicile population.

Local self-governments and institutions, partnering up with the non-profit sector, implement **local reception projects**, adjusting the guidelines and standards defined in the system to specific features of the local communities. They are autonomous in choosing the services that will be implemented in the community, and define them in accordance with the objectives, capacities and expertise of the local stakeholders and the available resources (professional, structural, economic), social policy strategy, and the benefits a certain service can provide to its end recipients, whether they are asylees, refugees or the domicile population. The promotion of independence and integration as

required is the fundamental value of all services.

The Ministry of the Interior's Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration set up the *Central Department for Information, Promotion, Counselling, Monitoring and Technical Support to Local Authorities* as a system coordination structure, which is an authority that coordinates and monitors the reception and integration system.

The Central Department is responsible for:

- Providing technical support to local authorities in the preparation of integrated reception services;
- Monitoring reception services and the presence of applicants for international protection and persons granted international protection;
- Creating, maintaining and constantly updating the database of interventions made on the local level;
- Disseminating information about the interventions made.

The Department pays particular attention to the reception and integration of persons in the most vulnerable categories, such as unaccompanied minors, persons with disability, persons who need home care or healthcare, seniors and victims of torture and violence. The Central Department is also responsible for the education and training of operating services and the vertical and horizontal information sharing channels feeding into a database of good practice examples that will be available to everyone to ensure the quality standards of the services provided. Under a decision enacted by the Ministry of the Interior, the Central Department is run by the **National Association of Italian Municipalities – ANCI** (Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani), whose members include more than 7000 municipalities, covering around 90% of Italy's population. The ANCI promotes cooperation and networking, and participates in discussions on the national level about issues of territorial interest, such as citizenship, integration, access to services, collection of information, etc. The ANCI uses operating support provided by the **Cittalia Foundation**, established in 2008, in the implementation of its activities. The Foundation strengthens the role of cities in the development and implementation of social inclusion policies through innovation in social welfare and inclusion, research and development of new projects focusing on issues such as asylum, human rights, citizen participation, and social and health policies. The Foundation also

provides information about funding opportunities available under EU programmes and funds, and provides support to local self-governments in project preparation in three areas: nationality/citizenship, reception, integration.

The role of local self-governments

Local authorities that form the network are dispersed in the entire territory of Italy, guaranteeing *integrated reception and integration interventions*. Reception at the System's reception centres, depending on available capacities, is ordered by the Central Department upon receiving the applications of individual territorial projects or third authorities (prefectures, police directorates, associations). All territorial projects in the reception and integration system, within the integrated reception measures, provide food and accommodation, but also provide for the implementation of social support activities focused on learning about the Italian society and local community, and efficient access to local services, including social welfare and healthcare. Other planned activities include Italian language learning, adult learning, enrolment of minors into schools, provision of information and legal counselling on the procedure of recognition of international protection, and rights and obligation of the beneficiaries relative to their status. Special attention is paid to the development of training and reskilling programmes, employment, and housing measures. To keep track of each received person on their path toward (re)gaining their independence, all projects and programmes implemented by local self-governments are based on the principles of comprehensive and integral services focused on the socioeconomic integration of every individual arriving in Italy.

2.2. Multiculturalism Committee, Skien, Norway

Skien is the capital of the Telemark region in southeast Norway. This multicultural city has a population of 55,000, 14% of whom are members of minorities. Since 2014, Skien has been working systematically on increasing the sense of inclusion among its citizens, promoting multiculturalism, and working on the prevention of radicalisation and extremism in the society.

Norway develops national and local integration strategies aimed at integrating third country nationals. Each local community is free to develop its own strategy, adapted to the needs and specificities of the community,

and the number and the needs of people arriving to this community.

The Skien Multiculturalism Committee is a political body established to strengthen the impact on addressing the problems of migrants and refugees in the local community, and is a specific model used in Norway. The idea to establish the committee came from a local politician, but it took more than ten years to materialise it. The Committee, which was finally established several years ago, is made up of the representatives of the major political parties, non-profit organisations, and migrant associations (it has a total of 12 members). The Committee's role is to collect and share information about good practice examples regarding reception and integration, and problems and challenges migrants and refugees are facing in the community, and to inform the local self-government about the accomplishments, problems and trends in the community. The Committee also serves as a bridge between the local and national level, also performing its role by proposing legislative changes to support the success of integration. For instance, last year the Committee proposed changes to the procedures of registration for work, which is now fully anonymous in Skien. Also, the Multiculturalism Committee supervises the activities of the other local self-government committees, for instance, those responsible for healthcare or education. In addition to attending to administrative matters, the Committee organises a variety of awareness-raising activities in the community, promotes solidarity and interculturality, and draws attention to discriminatory practices against migrants and refugees. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee organised the translation of all documents regarding the protective and preventive measures to make them available to all refugees and migrants, and organised transport to vaccination centres for them. The running of the Committee is divided into leadership and operating tasks, and the Committee has both a political and an administrative leader.

The refugee and migrant reception and integration system in Norway is set up so as to ensure the protection of the rights and the safety of any foreigner settling in the country, but there is a big difference in the availability of services to persons arriving as refugees and persons arriving as economic migrants.

After persons are granted refugee status in Norway, the first step is to settle them in the local community. The three-year 'introduction programme' provided by the government is launched soon after that.

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57 The purpose of the 'introduction programme' is to introduce migrants to the Norwegian society and the rules and demands that the Norwegian society puts to every individual, and to teach them Norwegian language. The programme is also designed to introduce beneficiaries to the Norwegian labour market, potential employers and employment opportunities. A paid internship is provided, whether they want to learn Norwegian language or try their hand at a job. Employment presents the greatest challenge for refugees when they arrive in Norway.

The pandemic has had an enormous impact on the labour market, considerably narrowing down employment opportunities, even for highly educated and qualified refugees. The employment problem slows down the integration process. Making these people visible in the labour market is one of the biggest challenges today.

Cooperation between the local self-government, civil society organisations and the volunteer sector is focused on solving the employment problem and raising awareness in the community. Like in many other societies, the citizens' views of refugees and migrants differ here as well. Intercultural evenings, cooking workshops, outdoor walks and other activities, mainly in the domain of individual leisure time, are organised to bring citizens, refugees, migrants and their different cultures closer together and build connections between them. All activities are planned and implemented in cooperation with the local self-government in an effort to design and implement an integral and comprehensive integration programme and approach. Since the integration process is very personal and intimate for every individual, they consider an individual approach, including integral services and programmes, crucial for successful integration. This might seem difficult in the beginning because it requires a great deal of time and effort, but an individual holistic approach to every person, working with them one-on-one, results in much quicker and much more successful integration.

2.3. Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the Integration of Applicants for International Protection and Persons Granted International Protection for 2022

In early 2022, Zagreb City Assembly adopted the first document dealing with integration, titled the **Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the Integration of Applicants for International Protection and Persons Granted International Protection for 2022**. By adopting this

document, Zagreb joined other cities in Europe that have recognised the importance of local integration policies for their long-term response to the needs caused by the increasing inflow of third country nationals (asylees, refugees, economic migrants). The City of Zagreb is also the first local and regional self-government unit in the Republic of Croatia that has a local action plan as a part of an institutional framework for comprehensive activities aimed at the integration of applicants for and persons granted international protection, who are staying in the City of Zagreb.²³

Even though the City of Zagreb joined the CLIP (European network of cities for local integration policies for migrants) back in 2006, integration efforts came into stronger focus during the migration crisis of 2015. Like in other European countries, most third country nationals who come to Croatia tend to settle in the capital. This means that Zagreb has the longest experience with integration among all Croatian cities. The cooperation and exchange with other European cities was further strengthened after the EURO CITIES²⁴ transnational network invited Zagreb to participate in the project ‘CONNECTION – CONNECTING Cities Towards Integration action’ (hereinafter: CONNECTION).²⁵ This project, funded under the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), kicked off in 2020, aiming for better and more successful integration of third country nationals and stronger networking of 14 major European cities participating in the project. As one of the project partners, the City of Zagreb prepared the Action Plan document, developed in cooperation with other relevant local stakeholders, as a part of the project.

The first step in preparing the Action Plan was to form the Committee for the Preparation of and Follow-up to the Action Plan, which had nine members: eight representatives of city offices (Office for Intercity and International Cooperation and Promotion of Human Rights, City Office for Education, City Office for Healthcare, City Office for Social Welfare and Persons with Disability), and one representative of a civil society organisation (Jesuit Refugee Service).

The administrative and technical running of the committee was

²³ The Action Plan of the City of Zagreb is aligned with key integration documents: EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027, Croatian Constitution, and Action Plan for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection for the Period 2017–2019, Republic of Croatia;

²⁴ <https://eurocities.eu/>

²⁵ <https://integratingcities.eu/projects/connection/>

taken over by the Office for the Promotion of Human Rights and Civil Society of the City of Zagreb, which prepared the draft Action Plan, completed the consultations with the interested public, and prepared the final document. The Framework for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection on the Local Level, developed by the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia as one of the tools to support the local and regional self-government units in developing their own integration plans and strategies, was used in the preparation of this document.

As the document states, ‘the goal of the Action Plan is to promote and implement the integration of persons granted international protection in the society in the City of Zagreb, and contribute to the development of the migration policy in general in the Republic of Croatia’²⁶. The plan includes targets, measures, activities, promoters and co-promoters of measures, budgets, timeframes, and indicators in six areas: 1) social welfare; 2) healthcare; 3) language learning and education; 4) labour and employment; 5) local integration capacity building; 6) intercity and international cooperation. Civil society organisations were recognised as a particularly important stakeholder in the development and implementation of the Action Plan, given their extensive and long experience with applicants for asylum, persons granted international protection and third country nationals.

The Committee for the Preparation of and Follow-up to the Action Plan is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan. The City Office for Culture, Intercity and International Cooperation and Civil Society in the City of Zagreb prepares an annual report on the implementation of measures and activities from the Action Plan and submits it to the Mayor of the City of Zagreb (by April 2023), and the Mayor presents it to the City Assembly. The findings of the evaluation of the Action Plan for 2022 will also serve as the basis for the preparation of plans and programmes for the future period, and for budget planning for the implementation of integration measures and activities.

2.4. City of Karlovac – an example of good integration practices

City of Karlovac is one of the few Croatian cities that received refu-

²⁶ [http://web.zagreb.hr/sjednice/2021/sjednice_skupstine_2021.nsf/0/C12586DF003A998EC12587C00048F0A9/\\$FILE/02%20Prijedlog%20akcijskog%20plana.pdf](http://web.zagreb.hr/sjednice/2021/sjednice_skupstine_2021.nsf/0/C12586DF003A998EC12587C00048F0A9/$FILE/02%20Prijedlog%20akcijskog%20plana.pdf) (p. 8)

gees who arrived from the camps in Turkey under the Resettlement Programme.²⁷ The first group, comprising nine families from Syria (twelve men, ten women and 21 minors) arrived in December 2019. Even though the time to prepare was short, the local self-government managed to quickly bring together all institutions and organisations relevant for the integration of these people into the community. The Social Programme of the City of Karlovac was amended by virtue of the City Council's decision to ensure the right to use subsidies from the City Social Programme. One of the first steps was to provide the newcomers with assistance in obtaining residence permits, in access to healthcare and social welfare services, and in registration with the Croatian Employment Service as an important step toward finding employment.²⁸ The staff of a number of city administration departments was involved in solving the problems related to housing, access to healthcare services and social rights, enrolment of children in nursery schools and schools, and employment. Since the knowledge of the Croatian language is an important factor in integration, language courses were organised for the people who settled in Karlovac. Civil society organisations got involved in the delivery of Croatian language courses through volunteers who provided additional language learning support. Families with small children received special assistance. Peer support was provided to primary school children, with 15 secondary school students from the Karlovac Grammar School providing learning assistance to children enrolled into primary school to help them master their school subjects and learn the Croatian language. Parents, teachers and students at the schools self-organised and launched their own initiatives to raise donations of clothes and shoes, hygiene supplies, school supplies, books etc. The first days following the arrival of these people in Karlovac were challenging not only for the newcomers, but also for the community in general. There was some fear among the locals in the first days, and some negative comments were posted on social media, but this was fortunately short-lived. Aware of the situation, the city authorities

27 Croatia committed to receive and integrate 400 persons under the Resettlement Programme. The Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted three Decisions on the resettlement of third country nationals or stateless persons eligible for international protection (in 2015, 2017 and 2019). The first two decisions were implemented, and 250 persons were relocated from the refugee camps in Turkey so far, including the families that were settled in Karlovac.

28 Nine male members of the families that were settled in the City of Karlovac took advantage of the training opportunities offered by the Croatian Employment Service.

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61 accepted the initiative launched by the Mejlis of the Karlovac Islamic Community, and joined the Mejlis in organising get-togethers where the newly arrived families and the locals had the opportunity to get to know each other and form connections. Other organisations played a major role in these efforts too, including the Islamic humanitarian organisation Zirat, the Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Dialogue Culture Centre. The media had an important role to play as well, covering all events in a positive tone, and promoting the City of Karlovac as a city open to people of different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Karlovac indeed proved to be an excellent host, an open city, and a pleasant place for the Syrian refugees to start a new life. Six families (a total of 33 persons) reside in Karlovac and its surroundings at present.²⁹ All male family members are employed in local companies. Most women are not employed and are staying home to care for the children. Eleven children are successfully attending primary school, three are attending secondary school, two are in nursery school, and two were born in Karlovac. The City of Karlovac provides continual services to these families under the City Social Programme, keeping in touch with schools and other institutions to keep track of how they are doing.

The housing of these families after the expiry of the two years during which the Croatian Government provides housing under the Resettlement Programme is the biggest problem in their integration.³⁰ The City of Karlovac is actively working with the Karlovac Social Welfare Centre, the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Provision of Housing, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Family and Social Policy on finding a more long-term solution for the housing needs of the families arriving in Croatia.

These families have fit into the local community well, and their closest neighbours have become their good friends. The key to the success of this process lies in the fact that it was a two-way effort, with all sides eager to establish contact and communication. With the arrival of these people, the community gained new knowledge, experience, customs, and a new energy that could result in some new development initiatives in the community.

29 Out of the total of nine families who arrived in Karlovac in 2019, four have left Croatia in the meantime.

30 Under the Act on International and Temporary Protection (Official Gazette 127/17) and the Framework for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection on the Local Level, the right to housing expires after two years.

2.5. The role of the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia in supporting integration on the local level

2.5.1. Support framework for local authorities in the development of integration plans and practices

Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia (hereinafter: Office) coordinates the activities of all ministries, civil society organisations and other bodies participating in the process of inclusion of asylees or foreigners under subsidiary protection in the society. Under the Act on International and Temporary Protection, the Standing Committee for the Implementation of the Integration of Foreigners into the Croatian Society operates as a part of the Office, appointing the members of the task forces that prepare draft national strategic documents in this area.³¹

One of the Office's important roles is to collect information in the field to ensure that the integration policies and programmes are based on the actual needs of local communities and aligned with the needs of the persons who have applied for or have been granted international protection in Croatia. For instance, the Office conducted a survey in 2019 to identify the reception and integration capacities of the local and regional self-governments, assess the needs and challenges that the refugees face upon their arrival in Croatia, and determine the citizens' views and their preparedness for reception and integration. The findings of the survey were summed up in the publication: 'Challenges of Integration of Refugees into the Croatian Society: Citizens' Views and Preparedness of Local Communities'. The survey itself was produced by a group of authors: Dean Ajduković, Dinka Čorkalo Biruški, Margareta Gregurović, Jelena Matić Bojić and Drago Župarić-Ilijić.³² Key recommendations for better coordination of the national and local levels and for

31 The Standing Committee for the Implementation of the Integration of Foreigners into the Croatian Society is made up of representatives of government authorities responsible for sectors relevant for integration (education, healthcare, social welfare, employment, housing etc), while the Standing Committee's Task Force includes representative of civil society organisations in addition to the representatives of sectoral authorities. As of 2019, the Standing Committee also includes a representative of the Association of Cities in the Republic of Croatia and a representative of the City of Zagreb.

32 'Izazovi integracije izbjeglica u hrvatsko društvo – stavovi građana i pripremljenost lokalnih zajednica' (Challenges of Integration of Refugees into the Croatian Society: Citizens' Views and Preparedness of Local Communities) <https://pravnanajina.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/izazovi%20integracije%20izbjeglica%20u%20hrvatsko%20društvo.pdf>

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63 integration capacity building in local government units were developed based on the findings of the survey and the evaluation of the Action Plan for Integration for the Period 2017–2019:

- 1) Ensure the development of a national integration policy and actively involve local communities to ensure practical implementation;
- 2) Raise awareness of the role of local communities in the integration process and build their capacities so they can take over responsibilities in integration;
- 3) Encourage the development of local integration plans and programmes;
- 4) Prevent the possibility of discriminatory actions by local officials and staff by developing their competences through trainings and other public events;
- 5) Clearly define the order of steps and actions that need to be taken by relevant stakeholders in integration.

The survey showed that local self-government units are aware of the need for more systematic communication and information sharing with stakeholders on the national level, for professional support in the implementation of integration efforts, and for clearer interpretation of the regulated rules and procedures.

The **Framework for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection on the Local Level** (hereinafter: Framework) was developed as one of the outputs of this survey and the consultation meetings³³ held with representatives of local and regional self-governments and public institutions in Zadar, Sisak, Slavonski Brod, Karlovac, Varaždin, Rijeka, Požega, Osijek and Zagreb. Experts of different backgrounds spent several years working on this document, whose purpose is to support the local authorities in the development of local strategies and action plans for the integration of persons granted international protection. The intention of the Framework is to help develop a number of local strategies and plans, and better recognise the integration capacities of the local self-governments. The Framework includes specific measures falling within the scope of competence of the local self-government units

33 The consultation meetings were held with the local and regional self-governments and institutions to: a) disseminate information about integration policies (present the applicable Action Plan for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection), b) explore the avenues for cooperation between local and national authorities; c) collect more information about the situation in the local communities that is relevant for the development of future integration programmes and plans.

in the key strategic integration areas, as defined in the European and national action plans: labour and employment, promotion of inclusion and social cohesion, accommodation and housing, social welfare and social services, and local capacity building and cooperation. Some of the key measures in this document concern the coordination of local integration networks, cooperation with associations and religious communities, use of local public spaces and institutions to establish dialogue, awareness raising and building of connections in the society, and the role of the media in integration.

The **Protocol of Actions for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection** was developed in addition to the Integration Framework on the Local Level. The former is an advisory document defining the responsibilities of different authorities in the integration process, and the order of steps and actions to be taken to facilitate the access of persons granted international protection to their rights.

The above opinion survey among Croatian citizens showed that the citizens' views regarding persons granted international protection are neutral on average, but they feel a mild sense of threat regarding the lack of opportunities in the labour market and the potential threat to Croatian identity and culture. In addition, citizens feel that they do not have enough information about the causes of the migratory movements and the reasons why third country nationals who need international protection were forced to leave their countries. Since the media play a key role in disseminating objective information to the public, in 2022 the Office launched a **study about the role of media in integration**³⁴, which included an analysis of (national and local) media coverage of migrants, with a focus on persons granted international protection. The **Recommendations for media coverage of migrant- and refugee-related topics**³⁵ are one of the outputs of this study. Below are some of the key recommendations presented to the media:

- 1) Take into account the credibility of sources and facts while avoiding imprecise, biased and tendentious information;

34 'Medijske reprezentacije migracija: Diskurzivne konstrukcije migranata, izbjeglica i tražitelja azila u hrvatskim medijima' (How migration is presented in the media: Discursive construction of migrants, refugees and applicants for asylum in the Croatian media); <https://ljudskoprava.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Medijske%20reprezentacije%20migracija%20-%20diskurzivne%20konstrukcije%20migranata,%20izbjeglica%20i%20tra%C5%BEtelja%20azila%20u%20hrvatskim%20medijima%20.pdf>

35 <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti//Preporuke%20za%20medijsko%20izvje%C5%A1tavanje%20o%20migrantima%20i%20izbjeglicama.pdf>

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- 2) Avoid sensationalism and use of stereotypes when covering topics related to migrants and refugees;
- 3) Instead of focusing on mutual differences and possible conflicts, also present possibilities for cooperation between different stakeholders in the society;
- 4) Avoid non-critical reporting of inappropriate language and hate speech in the media space;
- 5) Include opportunities that migration creates for both sides, the migrants and the receiving society;
- 6) Avoid stereotypical presentation of gender roles;
- 7) Use first-hand information obtained from protagonists themselves, especially migrants and experts.

It is advisable to let the refugees speak for themselves, because they are otherwise implicitly marginalized and/or portrayed as passive victims. The Office also runs media campaigns to raise awareness in local communities about the specific cultural and traditional aspects of third country nationals, but also about the common aspects that they share with the locals, and the advantages of building a welcoming society. The Office also implements projects co-funded under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, which facilitated the organisation of a number of trainings for experts, teachers, and local and regional self-governments. In addition to regular awareness-raising activities, educational activities, and networking support, the Office largely contributes to building the capacities of local stakeholders for the development of local policies and practices, to intersectoral cooperation, and to the implementation of the antidiscrimination principle when working with refugees and migrants.

3. Recommendations for improving the integration system in Croatia:

National level

- Adopt integration strategies, programmes and plans on the national level in a timely manner, and adjust them to requirements to provide a clear institutional framework for the development of local integration programmes and plans.
- Strengthen the coordination in the implementation of integration policies between national, regional and local authorities;
- Ensure horizontal communication channels and regular exchange between the national and local authorities, and create opportunities for them to learn together and develop good practice models in Croatia that will contribute to efficient implementation of integration plans and measures, and to better planning of future integration strategies and interventions;
- Provide stronger support to local authorities in the development of local action plans related to integration by creating a support structure (professional and financial);
- Establish a national fund to finance local integration projects and programmes;
- In cooperation with national authorities, research and promote the application of efficient and humane solutions to housing issues (such as public or subsidised housing buildings) and issues concerning the recognition of foreign qualifications and employment on the local level, and disseminate best practices;
- Promote and apply a holistic approach to the development of services and activities aimed at integration;
- Promote the values of intercultural dialogue and interculturality in the public space, along with the benefits that the integration of third country nationals will bring to the Croatian society.

Local level

- Regularly collect information about the needs of third country nationals (applicants for asylum and persons granted international protection) by conducting research and needs assessments, evaluating action plans, and holding consultation meetings with relevant stakeholders on the local level;
- Develop and implement local action plans related to integration in cooperation with local stakeholders;
- Establish a systematic and structured delivery of Croatian language courses (children, youth, adults);
- Strengthen the networks of local stakeholders and cooperation with civil society organisations on the implementation of services and activities aimed at integration;
- Build the capacities of local stakeholders in education, social welfare and healthcare, and the capacities of public servants through awareness-raising and education;
- Develop projects aimed at improving the quality of life of the applicants for and persons granted international protection, with a special focus on vulnerable groups (e.g. women, children, persons with disabilities etc);
- Encourage solidarity by raising awareness in the public about the problems and issues related to migrants and refugees, and holding intercultural exchanges;
- Involve citizens in volunteering programmes related to integration, and involve migrants in volunteering programmes related to community development;
- Educate the media about good practices in the coverage of migrant- and refugee-related topics.

Prepared by: Nikoleta Poljak

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Panel 4

— Implementing apprenticeships and mentorship programmes in the private sector – employers' perspective

1. Introduction and purpose of the panel

The concept of corporate social responsibility is defined as the employers' ambition to contribute to the socioeconomic development of the communities they are operating in and the well-being of the society in general, in addition to positioning their own products in the free market and making a profit through the companies under their management. The materialisation of this idea needs to start from the collective and from the creation of an inclusive and enabling work environment that will result in professional unity of employees of different professional and often of different social backgrounds. The objective of the panel was to introduce the professional community to examples of corporate social responsibility and the role of employers in the socioeconomic inclusion of third country nationals, with a focus on persons granted international protection. The emphasis was placed on the role of employers in creating an enabling environment for professional development and the contribution of third country nationals to the development of the collective, the vision of the company, and the positioning of the end product/service; creating an enabling environment for the development of high-quality intrapersonal relationships in the collective in order to achieve the final result – professional and personal success and development of all employees; and creating specialised training and/or mentorship programmes, adjusted to the specific needs and ambitions of third country nationals, with the support and participation of the collective. Panel participants included the representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Croatia, the company IKEA, and the Croatian Employment Service (HZZ).

Anna Rich on behalf of UNHCR in Croatia

The UNHCR is a global organisation that works to save the lives, protect the rights, and build a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced persons and stateless persons. The UNHCR aims to ensure that everyone in need of protection has the right to apply for asylum and find shelter in another country. The organisation also promotes long-term solutions that help refugees rebuild their lives in dignity and safety. With regard to the integration of refugees, the UNHCR in Croatia cooperates with the

government, civil society organisations, local authorities and the private sector, and also cooperates with the refugees to promote sustainable solutions, including employment solutions.

Nikola Simonović, IKEA SEE Sustainability Business Partner

Mirta Padjen Lee, IKEA SEE People & Culture Delivery Manager

Layal Hosh, IKEA Croatia Goods Flow Co-Worker

The IKEA Zagreb store was opened on 21 August 2014, with a range comprising more than 9,500 functional and affordable products, whose mission is to ensure that as many people as possible can afford a beautiful and comfortable home. The company IKEA Croatia is a part of the organisation IKEA Southeast Europe (IKEA SEE), which also includes the markets of Serbia, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine. In addition to its own development, IKEA strives to contribute to the development of the countries it operates in. This includes cooperation with different partners on promoting the values nurtured by IKEA, such as sustainable resource management, empowerment of women's entrepreneurship and equality in the society.

Elizabeta Filipaj, Head of the EURES Department

The Croatian Employment Service is responsible for tasks related to employment, career guidance, education aimed at increasing the employability of the workforce, employment insurance, active employment policy measures, and other activities aimed at promoting the spatial and professional mobility of the workforce, new employment and self-employment, and other tasks within its scope of competence.

Jan Kapić was the moderator of the panel.

2. Good practice examples

2.1. UNHCR

Presentation of the role of the government, private sector and support organisations in promoting the employment of refugees, including promoting the concept of corporate social responsibility. Working with refugees on a daily basis, the UNHCR noted that employment, including training and professional development, is one of the greatest challenges for refugees. Housing is their other major concern. When refugees are asked what makes them feel integrated, employment is the first response that comes

to most of their minds. Many refugees have identified information about the various processes leading up to employment as the most important help they could receive in their job search. When it comes to the integration of refugees, employment is equally important for governments. Employment is also closely related to other areas of integration such as access to housing, family reunification, language learning, healthcare, issuance of driver's licences, networking, child care, social contacts, and the asylum application process itself.

Under the corporate social responsibility concept, the involvement of employers in ensuring equal professional participation of all employees and ensuring their personal and professional development is inseparable from their cooperation with the community that the business entity operates in.

Under the corporate social responsibility concept, companies integrate social and environmental concerns into their business operations and their interactions with stakeholders.

A properly implemented corporate social responsibility concept can result in a number of competitive advantages, including improved access to capital and markets, higher sales and profit, lower operating costs, improved productivity and quality, efficient human resources base, improved brand image and reputation, increased customer loyalty, and better decision-making and risk management processes.

Recognising refugees as an integral part of the community and understanding their unique skills, experiences, talents and ideas should not be reserved for humanitarian workers only. Seeing them as colleagues, customers, business partners and reflections of a constantly evolving society is a sound business decision. Integration measures must be implemented and tested in the community, and employers and the companies they are running are a component part of the community, contributing not only to the generation of profit, but to the development of the community in general. Productive and diverse collectives contribute to the revitalisation of the society.

Empowering refugees to make a decent living and participate in the local economy requires efforts invested by a broad array of stakeholders.

The UNHCR's role is to advocate, bring different stakeholders together, and promote their cooperation.

The involvement of employers is a key strategy in the promotion of self-confidence in refugees and their access to dignified work. In

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73 addition to controlling employment, employers strongly influence the workplace conditions and culture, and in some industries can even be in a position to provide refugees with language learning, childcare, mentorship, skill recognition and professional development, housing and transport opportunities. The internship programme in IKEA Croatia, known as *Skills for Employment (Vještine za zapošljavanje)* and developed in partnership with the UNHCR, has been broadly recognised as a best practice in the employment of refugees. The selection process that takes into account the vulnerability of the refugees, providing them with support from the very beginning, including the preparation of their workplace, peer support programmes, psychosocial support, and equal treatment of refugee interns and other interns, are the pillars of this successful model, which was developed with the aim of meeting the needs of the local labour market. The model has been tested in practice and can be easily adapted to a variety of work environments. The UNCHR encourages potential employers to consider this successful model as an integral part of their business processes, and offers support in its application³⁶. Some of the challenges that have been noticed in connection with the employment of refugees in Croatia are:

- 1) Refugees often lack social networks and have limited access to information about employment opportunities in situations when job openings are not formally advertised, which impedes their equal access to the labour market.

The recommendation is to advertise job openings in an easily accessible way and contact the UNHCR and other organisations promoting the employment of refugees to help the information reach the refugee population more easily.

- 2) Refugees face a long-lasting foreign qualifications recognition process. There are no efficient procedures to assess the pre-existing skills of refugees who have no formal qualifications, and the lack of such procedures prevents these refugees from accessing the labour market and finding opportunities that would be a good fit for their qualifications and skills.

The recommendation is to establish efficient procedures for timely

³⁶ https://www.ingka.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Skills-for-employment-toolkit_A-how-to-guide-for-opening-pathways-to-decent-work-for-refugees_Ingka-Group-an-IKEA-Retailer.pdf

recognition of skills and foreign qualifications, and consider the introduction of informal skill recognition procedures in companies for non-regulated professions.

- 3) Refugees often have limited access to vocational training programmes that would make them more competitive in the local labour market.

The recommendation is to ensure the availability of tailor-made programmes for the development of professional skills (such as training and professional development programmes, in combination with technical language learning and development of soft skills, and provision of childcare and financial support).

- 4) In some cases, refugee support programmes do not take their perspectives into account and are not based on a comprehensive needs assessment in which their experiences would be considered.

The recommendation is to promote participatory approaches in the development of employment policies on all levels to maximize impact and develop more targeted policies³⁷.

- 5) To additionally empower refugees to join the local labour market, it is important to ensure more efficient communication with communities and their better engagement. The UNHCR works in partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and other partners to support the activities of the first non-governmental association in Croatia established by refugees, the association *Svoja* (True to Myself), which works to promote the employment and self-employment of refugees.

The recommendation is to acknowledge the perspective of refugees, who are best suited to help define the needs and challenges they face, as well as the possible solutions. It is therefore important to identify, involve, support and build the capacities of organisations established by refugees to promote and advocate their own rights.

- 6) The local labour market suffers from significant workforce shortages. At the same time, forced displacement has reached an all-time high across the world, resulting in an unprecedented number of ref-

³⁷ <https://www.unhcr.org/effective-inclusion-of-refugees.html>

ugees in need of solutions. It is important to acknowledge the commitment of the Republic of Croatia to the resettlement process and the establishment of complementary routes for the arrival of third country nationals, which the Croatian Government committed to at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum. So far, Croatia has received 250 Syrian refugees from Turkey, and committed to receive 60 applicants for asylum from MED5 countries by the end of 2023. Croatia has also received 81 applicants for asylum who came from Greece and Italy under the resettlement programme within the EU, and 41 Afghan nationals who were evacuated in 2021.

The recommendation to the Croatian Government is to make new pledges at the upcoming 2023 Global Refugee Forum in order to introduce a standing resettlement quota, and promote the use of existing and establishment of new complementary routes, including workforce mobility programmes. Private sector stakeholders are encouraged to make pledges to hire refugees.³⁸

2.2. IKEA

Presentation of the internship programme and employment practice at IKEA stores in Serbia and Croatia

IKEA's vision is to create a better everyday life for the many people. IKEA's global culture and value system are reflected in all regional initiatives aimed at inclusion and creation of an enabling working environment.

IKEA's global culture and values are based on two basic postulates: 1) respecting and promoting equality as a basic human right in all segments of the company's business; 2) respecting and promoting the concept of diversity in order to create an inclusive work environment. An inclusive work environment drives better business results and is good for business.

IKEA is aware that the work environment that the company is building, based on respecting diversity and inclusion and aiming to provide everyone with equal opportunities, is reflected in its cooperation and its relationships with its partners, customers and the society in general.

To make sure everyone has access to equal opportunities, IKEA respects the principle of availability of information in advertising its job openings,

³⁸ <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/pledges-contributions/pledge-concrete-actions-refugees-and-host-communities>

and adapts its selection procedure. Employment is based on values, which means the company will only hire the candidates who appear to be aligned with its own values.

Skills for Employment is an initiative run by IKEA with the support of the UNHCR and other partners to improve the lives of people who have been forced to leave their homes.

The objective of the initiative is to help refugees develop new skills and gain work experience, which will improve their chances of finding a job, whether at IKEA's stores and IKEA's business units or other companies. This improves their opportunities for integration into their new communities. IKEA aims to provide short- and long-term support to the participants of this initiative by providing job training and language courses. The participants receive three months of paid internship, supported by a variety of workshops, training, and psychological support. To help IKEA employees better understand the future refugee interns, IKEA organised workshops to raise awareness of the needs and contributions of the new co-workers. Specially adjusted trainings were developed (inter-cultural training, preparation of CVs and preparation for job interviews, etc) for the new refugee interns to prepare them to integrate into the labour market as easily as possible. In the past two years, IKEA had 25 refugee interns who successfully completed the *Skills for Employment* programme, and 15 of them continued their careers at IKEA Croatia. The company's objective is to accept 15 new refugee interns in the future. How does the *Skills for Employment* programme for refugees work? IKEA SEE supports refugees in improving their skills to help them secure employment in Croatia, Romania, Slovenia and Serbia. The focus is on training and on improving the refugees' qualifications to help them find jobs at IKEA or other companies. After the training phase, the interns are invited to apply to the existing job openings. Why does IKEA support the implementation of the *Skills for Employment* programme? Equality is integrated into IKEA's business approach in the form of a firm belief that everyone is a talent. IKEA expands its customer base by reflecting the diversity of the local communities. Different employees help the company better understand and support its customers' needs. When they arrive at their new job, refugees bring different skills and experiences with them. Companies play an important role in integration, helping the refugees build new lives and fully contribute to the community and the local economy. IKEA wants to use this good example to inspire

and encourage the private sector to create better employment opportunities for refugees, and change the ungrounded negative narrative that is often aimed at refugees.

As a former refugee intern, now an employee of IKEA Croatia, Ms Loyal Hosh shared her experiences, including the selection process and the support provided to her during the employment process, as well as her current work experience.

She welcomed the refugee-centred process that was used in the selection process, including the tailor-made selection procedure, job interviews in English, and employment of recruitment procedure managers who have been made aware of the sensitive status of refugees, and who are well-informed about the situation of refugees in the country.

She reminded about the support received from the UNHCR and its partner non-governmental organisations in providing information about the internship and during the entire application process.

Ms Hosh underlined the professional courtesy and support she received from her co-workers, as well as her involvement in all work processes on a basis equal to all her other co-workers.

In addition, she stressed the fact that interns receive a full salary and enjoy all rights provided by the Croatian labour legislation from the first day of their internship.

The enabling workplace atmosphere and good and courteous relations with her management and co-workers made her identify strongly with her professional environment.

Opportunities for professional development based on work engagement provide a special incentive to all employees, including the refugees, who are a part of the team.

2.3. Croatian Employment Service

Under the Labour Market Act, asylees and foreigners under subsidiary or temporary protection in the Republic of Croatia, as well as their family members, can register with the Croatian Employment Service, and enjoy the same rights and have the same duties as Croatian nationals. Applicants for international protection and members for their families can also register if the competent ministry has not issued the decision on their application for international protection within the timeframe of nine months, as provided by law, provided that the actions of the applicant for asylum have had no impact on the reasons why this decision was

not made. Other third country nationals can work on the basis of a residence and work permit or work registration certificate, as regulated by the Foreigners Act.

When registering with the Croatian Employment Service, the unemployed person is assigned an employment counsellor, who helps them define a job search plan, recommends activities that will help them successfully find employment in the labour market, defines the occupations for labour market placement, and provides information about the situation in the labour market, available education and training programme opportunities, and other activities. The importance of adequate preparation for participation in the labour market, including the development of so-called soft skills, such as the preparation of a CV and motivation letter, and preparation for selection interviews, is underlined in particular. Croatian Employment Service commends its cooperation with employers in the implementation of so-called matching, where a potential job candidate is matched with an employer depending on the requirements in the labour market and the professional skills of the candidate, and in the implementation of active employment policy measures.

These measures provide education support to unemployed persons and other job seekers, along with support for professional development, on-the-job training and training at adult learning institutions, development of basic personal and professional development skills, public work and so on. Asylees most often take advantage of on-the-job training opportunities. The objective is to help the participants develop practical knowhow and skills that are needed to complete particular job tasks, or renew skills that they have lost over time. Training is organised on the employer's premises, with the support of a mentor and with theoretical and practical classes provided. At the end of the training, the employer is required to issue an appropriate certificate to the attendants, listing the training outcomes (competences developed).

3. Recommendations for improving the integration system in Croatia:

- Raise awareness among employers about their role in the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and the potential afforded by workforce mobility for the empowerment and diversification of the workforce in the host country.
- Continually inform employers about available incentives and support mechanisms for the employment of third-country nationals, with an emphasis on persons granted international protection, and opportunities for cooperation with other stakeholders, including the civil sector.
- Continually work with employer associations and provide support to their members in creating employment and internship opportunities for refugees, which play an important role in establishing the conditions for sustainable employment. Successful integration of refugees into the labour market can only be achieved through a joint effort invested by all relevant stakeholders, including employers and their associations, trade unions, relevant civil society organisations, and the refugees themselves. Chambers of economy and employer associations can help navigate the legal framework and advocate for policy improvement.³⁹
- Strengthen the professional capacities of employers for job preparation and implementation of mentorship programmes and on-the-job trainings, especially those designed for vulnerable groups in the society.
- Provide short-term internships so that refugees can get recommendations and references that will make them more competitive in the labour market.
- Promote a professional and enabling work environment for

³⁹ <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/livelihoods/5adde9904/engaging-employers-hiring-refugees-10-point-multi-stakeholder-action-plan.html>

everyone, and adopt diversity strategies that make it easier for persons of different cultural and religious backgrounds to work together.

- Raise awareness among employers about the specific needs of third country nationals, with a special focus on persons granted international protection and their living circumstances. Adapt the selection process accordingly, from advertising job openings in languages that the third-country nationals most often speak, to adapting the vacancy announcement conditions and selection interview.
- Provide the prerequisites for the delivery of professional development and on-the-job training programmes, combined with technical language courses, soft skill development, and cultural training. Ensure the sustainability of such tailor-made programmes through cooperation with civil society organisations and international organisations, as well as funding available under national and EU funds.
- Facilitate the coordination of activities implemented by all stakeholders, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees⁴⁰, to strengthen efficient inclusion from the very beginning, allowing refugees to make their contribution to the host society, and allowing companies to fill their workforce gaps.
- Build business justification for the employment of refugees, including strengthening the business brand/reputation and corporate social responsibility, increasing productivity by implementing new ideas, creating diverse and motivated teams, reducing workforce outflow, and increasing the potential for innovation.
- Develop and follow-up on own policies by collecting and analysing data on the socioeconomic profiles of refugees and the process of inclusion in the labour market, including on barriers and promising practices.
- Adjust the regulations governing the employment of public servants and government officials to allow persons granted international protection to apply for jobs in government administration bodies and public institutions, since these persons enjoy the same labour rights as Croatian nationals.

40 <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

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Panel 5

— Protection and promotion of mental health in the context of forced migration

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1. Introduction and purpose of the panel

The psychological science and practice have for some time been aware that forced migration due to armed conflict, persecution or natural disaster is a serious challenge for the mental health and well-being of affected individuals, families and the whole community, and has documented this with research. The objective of this panel was to inform the professional community about the importance of protecting mental health in the context of human rights and integration of refugees and migrants, and about good practice examples in making mental health protection services available to applicants for international protection and persons granted international protection.

The participants of the panel are presented below:

Dean Ajduković, PhD, Professor, Emeritus, founder of the Psychological Assistance Society, who discussed the importance and distinctive challenges of protecting mental health of persons on the move, as well as key scientific findings and evidence-based recommendations, in the introduction of the panel.

Boris Budošan, PhD, the WHO's consultant for mental health and psychosocial support – Emergency Ukraine Conflict, who talked about the role of the World Health Organisation in protecting the mental health of persons on the move, with a focus on the organisation of mental health programmes for Ukrainian refugees in Czechia.

Irena Stojadinović, programme coordinator and psychologist in the Psychosocial Innovation Network (PIN), Belgrade, Serbia; **Ognjen Radivojević**, BSc, history professor, officer for integration and socio-cultural orientation programmes in Slovene Philanthropy, Ljubljana, Slovenia; and **Ante Župić**, psychologist with the Médecins du Monde, Zagreb, Croatia, presented their organisations' practices in protecting and promoting the mental health of refugees and migrants, and discussed successful strategies and mechanisms, and opportunities to improve policies and practices in this area.

Dragana Knezić was the moderator of the panel.

2. Protection and promotion of mental health in the context of forced migration

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The research and practice in the field of mental health and integration have highlighted the importance of mental health and psychological well-being for the integration of persons who have been forced to migrate. The relationship between mental health and integration is complex and interconnected: poor mental health has a negative impact on integration capacities, and, on the other hand, difficulties and failures in integration contribute to and/or aggravate mental health difficulties. Keeping these indicators in mind, the protection and the promotion of mental health of refugees and migrants has an important place in integration policies and practices.

Professor Ajduković drew attention to two factors that play a key role in protecting mental health: a safe environment and a future perspective. He presented two approaches to protecting mental health that have developed over the years. The traditional approach focuses on the vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants, especially in connection with the traumatic events they have experienced and the post-migration stress, and on the long-term impacts of those events and circumstances on mental health and psychological well-being, which can cause mental health disorders. This approach focuses on the treatment of mental health difficulties by qualified professionals. The second approach, which developed later, was influenced by the knowledge base concerning the social determinants of mental health, and the resilience of persons experiencing traumatic and other adverse events in life. This approach is usually called mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). This approach shifts the focus of the support and interventions from the dominant perspective of mental health professionals and the treatment of disorders toward a multi-layered and multidimensional approach involving a number of stakeholders. In this approach, the focus is also on the fact that mental health and psychological well-being of refugees and members of the domicile community require equal attention and a coordinated approach to ensure a successful integration.

Integration of persons granted international protection — Dissemination of good practices on European and international level

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The framework for providing mental health protection and psychosocial support, as proposed in the Implementation Guide to Dynamic Integration under the project FOKUS⁴¹, which Professor Ajduković had worked on, includes an array of activities and support services, varying from the basic wide-scope services that require basic support competences to specialised mental health services provided to a small number of persons who are experiencing visible mental health disorders, provided by professionals with specific competences in mental health protection. The first level of basic psychosocial support includes initial psychological assistance, and activities and services promoting cultural adaptation and social inclusion, with an emphasis on resilience, prevention, and early recognition of mental health needs.

The second level includes moderate psychosocial support for individuals, families and risk groups.

The third level includes psychological support services provided to individuals and families experiencing strong psychological distress, who are at risk of developing mental health disorders.

The fourth level includes specialised treatment services provided to individuals suffering from chronic mental health disorders and conditions, including those caused by the traumatic experiences and/or other circumstances and events related to forced migration.

This approach to mental health and psychosocial support underlines that services and activities at all levels need to be trauma-informed instead of trauma-oriented, and include awareness of different cultural backgrounds, views, values and expectations of the newly arrived community members as well as the members of the host community.

To achieve successful and efficient integration, which is defined in EU documents as a two-way process of mutual adaptation between newly arrived and domicile members of the community, it is important to focus attention and activities on providing psychosocial support to the members of receiving communities as well. This includes, among other things, notifying domicile communities about the arrival of migrants in a timely manner, preparing them for the arrival of refugees and migrants, and building and strengthening local capacities and competences for mental health and psychosocial support that all members of the community will benefit from.

41 FOCUS Implementation Guide to Dynamic Integration, IFRC PS Centre, 2022

Empowering and strengthening the capacities of all stakeholders in systems dealing with reception, protection, education, healthcare and social welfare, employment, leisure time, and informal community support is the basis for mental health protection and psychosocial support that aims for successful and efficient integration. Mental health protection and psychosocial support should be integrated in all above systems instead of developing it in a silo, as a segregated set of activities focused on refugees and migrants.

Protection and promotion of mental health of refugees and migrants is most efficient when it is a part of the mental health protection and promotion system that caters to the entire population. International organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) provide help and support in this regard. Boris Budošan, PhD, talked about the WHO's role in protecting mental health of persons on the move, with special focus on the organisation of mental health programmes for Ukrainian refugees in Czechia.

The WHO is the world's leading organisation that provides technical and advisory assistance related to general health as well as the protection and promotion of mental health. In its activities, the WHO pays special attention to the protection of health in disasters and crisis situations. The WHO works closely with other international organisations, relevant authorities in member states, and other local stakeholders in pursuing its mission, providing technical assistance and support as well as capacity building. In connection with the protection and promotion of mental health of refugees and migrants, the WHO works closely with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and other partners on national and local levels. The organisation issues a number of guidelines, including guidelines for policymaking, intervention handbooks, and other useful tools for the design, preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the mental health protection and psychosocial support activities and programmes in emergencies.

The WHO prepared the Comprehensive mental health action plan⁴², in which it addresses the protection of mental health in humanitarian emergencies, such as war, violence, and natural and manmade disasters.

42 Comprehensive mental health action plan 2013–2030. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240031029>

In this context, the WHO advocates and works with national and local actors to make the MHPSS an integral part of national and local policies, plans and procedures in preparing responses to emergencies and crises. The WHO believes that the measures, programmes and activities aimed at the protection and promotion of mental health in crises and emergencies can and should be an opportunity to upgrade and increase the sustainability of mental health protection and psychosocial support system and services in the community even after the crisis is over.

The arrival of refugees from Ukraine to the neighbouring countries, specifically Czechia, is an example of such an emergency, in which the WHO helped the national and local stakeholders organise and provide the MHPSS. The Technical Task Force for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, co-chaired by the WHO and the Czech ministry of healthcare, was established in May 2022. The Task Force includes representatives of the national Mental Health Institute, community mental health centres, other international organisations (UNCHR and UNICEF), and local civil society organisations. The Task Force is responsible for ensuring a coordinated approach to needs assessment, mapping of existing programmes and services, planning and implementation of mental health protection and psychosocial support activities provided to Ukrainian refugees, and ensuring the quality of the services and activities provided by aligning them with good practice principles and standards and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings.⁴³

The activities of the Task Force include:

- Sharing information on needs related to mental health and psychosocial support, undertaken activities and gaps in services in a fast-changing context;
- Building connections between stakeholders to ensure efficient beneficiary referral paths, avoid the duplication of activities and services, and bridge gaps in services;
- Providing technical support in monitoring and evaluating mental health protection and psychosocial support activities and programmes;

43 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2007). IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. Geneva: IASC. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-force-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/iasc-guidelines-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings-2007>

- Advocating the integration of mental health protection and psychosocial support in the emergency response in all relevant sectors;
 - Supporting the use of evidence-based interventions and knowhow and tools to advance the improve care systems in a sustainable way.
- This example provides a very good illustration of how an efficient and effective approach to the protection and promotion of mental health of refugees is based on services already developed for the domicile population, upgrading and advancing them, and has the potential to make them more resilient by integrating an appropriate approach and mode of operation for crisis situations. Also, this example illustrates the importance of coordination and cooperation between different contributors to the protection and promotion of mental health, including national decisionmakers and public service providers, international organisations with experience and technical capacities, and local civil society organisations and other informal stakeholders who operate in the communities and ensure a flexible and swift approach to refugees and members of domicile communities alike.

2.1. Protection and promotion of mental health in the context of forced migration – good practice examples

Other participants of the panel presented the activities and the specific contribution of civil society organisations to mental health protection and psychosocial support.

2.1.1. Médecins du Monde

Psychologist Ante Župić presented the activities of the Médecins du Monde⁴⁴ (MdM) in Croatia. The MdM is a crucial organisation in Croatia that deals with the protection of health and mental health of applicants for asylum, providing an initial medical examination to newly arrived applicants for asylum in the reception centres for applicants for asylum in Zagreb and Kutina, continually providing medical consultations and information about the prevention of diseases and access to healthcare services, and providing access to healthcare by organising and accompanying beneficiaries to public health institutions. In the field of mental health protection and psychosocial support, the MdM provides initial psychological assistance and crisis interventions, psychosocial support

44 <https://medecinsdumonde.be/?fbclid=IwAR18PpqxQDJUcP780DRgPoNkVdlLVQTy-cda3EVNUi2-DwtZmGLLXtZwSE>

and psychological counselling, and specialist psychiatric examinations. The MdM works with the Ministry of the Interior in its activities, since organisation of reception centres for applicants for international protection falls under the Ministry's competences. This organisation works daily to establish cooperation with healthcare service providers in the public sector, including providers of mental health protection and mental health disorder treatment services, as well as with other civil society organisations providing psychosocial and/or integration support to applicants for international protection.

The advantage of the MdM's activities and the good practices that they illustrate consist in continual presence and availability of mental health protection and psychosocial support services in the place where the applicants for international protection reside. By applying an active approach through group psychological education and psychosocial activities, the MdM's professionals work to raise awareness and destigmatize mental health issues, and promote healthy lifestyles and positive coping mechanisms. The MdM is uniquely positioned to be able to analyse needs and identify the risks calling for focused and more intensive interventions in mental health protection through initial contact and medical examination, prevention and psychosocial support activities.

2.1.2. Psychosocial Innovation Network (PIN)

Psychologist Irena Stojadinović presented the activities of the Psychosocial Innovation Network (PIN). The PIN is a Belgrade-based civil society organisation working in the field of protection and promotion of mental health in the context of forced migration, providing psychological and psychosocial support to persons on the move in Serbia, conducting research, and advocating the rights of these persons and improvement of relevant policies. In addition to providing direct mental health protection and psychosocial support services to persons on the move in a number of locations in Serbia, the PIN conducts annual research about mental health and well-being of refugees and migrants in Serbia, and is the initiator and coordinator of the international Consortium on Refugees' and Migrants' Mental Health (CoReMH).⁴⁵ The Consortium is a network comprising 23 organisations that provide mental health protection and psychosocial support services to persons on the move

45 <https://coremh.net/>

in a transit context. By conducting research, exchanging experiences on evidence-based practices, building capacities together with other stakeholders, and advocating, the CoReMH works to provide answers to specific issues related to the protection and promotion of mental health of persons on the move in a transit context, meaning in conditions when persons stay in transit countries for a short time, and have no plans to reside there permanently.

One of PIN's important achievements is the initiation, formation and coordination of the intersectoral Task Force for the Protection of Mental Health of Refugees, Applicants for Asylum and Migrants. The formation of this Task Force was driven by the need to coordinate service providers so as to avoid overlapping and ensure the continuity of services, as well as their equal availability in the entire territory of the country where the services of mental health protection and psychosocial support for persons on the move are needed. The Task Force was established as a joint initiative of the Commission for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia, the World Health Organisation, and the PIN, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, and the relevant international agencies and non-governmental organisations. The Task Force addressed the current challenges related to providing mental health services and psychosocial support in locations where refugees, applicants for asylum and migrants are staying, monitoring the application of standards in the provision of mental health and psychosocial support services, improving the systematic response related to mental health protection and psychosocial support in emergencies and crises, empowering multisectoral and multidisciplinary cooperation, and creating long-term sustainable solutions in this field. After the initial 2019–2020 period, when the PIN was the coordinator of the Task Force, the coordination was taken over by the relevant ministry. This is a good practice example of intersectoral cooperation and coordination, knowledge sharing, and ensuring the sustainability of initiatives launched in the civil sector by integrating them into the public system.

2.1.3. Slovene Philanthropy

Ognjen Radivojević, Integration and Sociocultural Orientation Programme Officer, presented the mental health protection and psychosocial support activities implemented by Slovene Philanthropy.

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91 Within its programme department responsible for migration, Slovene Philanthropy provides information and services of legal consultation and psychosocial and psychological support, as well as services and activities facilitating and promoting the integration of persons granted international protection. Slovene Philanthropy organises day centres for refugees and migrants, where it offers integration support through language learning, in two locations, Ljubljana and Maribor. The organisation teaches migrants about the cultural and social environment, and provides practical assistance and support in accessing an array of public systems and services, such as healthcare and social welfare, housing, education and employment. Day centres and other activities implemented by Slovene Philanthropy with the purpose of providing psychosocial support and integration activities are focused on creating opportunities and incentives for the establishment of social connections and networks with other refugees and migrants, and members of domicile communities. In addition to direct psychological counselling and psychosocial support services, Slovene Philanthropy also contributes to the protection and promotion of mental health of refugees and migrants through its social orientation and integration activities.

3. Recommendations for improving the integration system in Croatia:

The following recommendations for improving mental health protection and psychosocial support for refugees and migrants can be identified based on the presentations and discussions of the participants in this panel in order to create the prerequisites for successful integration in the receiving community:

- Eliminate barriers preventing access to mental health protection and psychosocial support services in a systematic and coordinated manner. This primarily refers to eliminating and/or overcoming the language barrier by making Croatian language courses available.

In addition, it is necessary to ensure the support of competent translators and cultural mediators, whose services need to be financed systematically, and they need to be provided with training and continuous professional translation support in the context of providing mental health protection services, especially psychological counselling and psychotherapy.

- Build capacities and strengthen the competences of mental health service providers catering to the domicile population, including public and private non-profit ones, so that they can provide their services to refugees and migrants under equal terms, instead of developing a separate system of services for refugees and migrants. The following will be achieved by this approach:
- Increased availability and sustainability of mental health services for refugees and migrants,
- Increased capacities and competences of mental health service providers, and their preparedness to provide an adequate response in crises,
- Better integration of newly arrived members and domicile members of the community by using common services.
- Include mental health protection and promotion in integration policies as a priority on all levels, and integrate mental health protection and psychosocial support activities in all systems that come into contact with refugees and migrants: from reception and protection through social and healthcare protection, children and adult education, employment and housing, to leisure time and entertainment. Professionals and volunteers need to be systematically and continuously educated in the implementation of evidence-based approaches and programmes.
- Continually raise awareness and strengthen the competences of professionals and volunteers in all systems who come into contact with refugees and migrants about culturally sensitive practices and approaches and the integration of a trauma-informed approach in their daily work. A trauma-informed approach considers persons who have experienced a trauma affected, but not defined by the experience, and assumes that they have their own methods and capacities for recovery, which need to be recognised, evaluated and encouraged.⁴⁶

- Encourage and create prerequisites for continuous and systematic coordination and cooperation, information, knowledge and resource sharing, and mutual capacity building of all stakeholders in mental health protection and psychosocial support provided to refugees and migrants, both public and private non-profit ones. A stakeholder from the public system, who is directly involved in providing mental health protection and promotion services, such as the Institute of Public Health, should be the promoter of this coordination to ensure the sustainability and continuity of cooperation.

Prepared by: Dragana Knezić

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⁴⁶ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14–4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, available at: <https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/handle/10713/18559>

Panel 6

— Social participation and inclusive role of local communities

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1. Introduction

The importance of implementing local level activities in the integration context has been recognised in strategic documents, including the European Commission's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027,⁴⁷ presented by the European Commission on 24 November 2020, and the Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021–2025).⁴⁸

This European integration framework strives to ensure equal participation of refugees and migrants in the socioeconomic life of their new communities, and their participation in the policies regulating their rights and obligations in receiving countries. Integration is possible if the reception and integration structures, with a special emphasis on the role played by local communities, ensure the prerequisites for the social, economic, cultural and political participation of migrants, and if the migrants in turn decide to actively participate in the socioeconomic development of the community.

The involvement of refugee- and migrant-led organisations in public policy making processes is important, because everyone has an equal right to be heard in an inclusive democracy. Their inclusion helps ensure that the policies reflect the needs and realities of the communities, making policies more efficient.

Recent studies have shown that this engagement is still low, inconsistent and often superficial.⁴⁹ The European Migrant Advisory Board arrived at a similar conclusion, recognising not only low engagement, but also a widespread practice of symbolism, which means that only symbolic efforts are invested to include migrants and refugees.⁵⁰

47 EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027 <https://op.europa.eu/hr/publication-detail/-/publication/bb47d489-a2b1-11eb-9585-01aa75ed71a1>

48 Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021–2025) <https://edoc.coe.int/en/refugees/10241-council-of-europe-action-plan-on-protecting-vulnerable-persons-in-the-context-of-migration-and-asylum-in-europe-2021-2025.html>

49 Source: European Website on Integration (2021): Mapping key migrant-led organizations across the EU. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/feature/mapping-key-migrant-led-organizations-across-the-eu>

50 Source: European Migrant Advisory Board (2019): Ask the people – A Consultation of migrants and refugees. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/ask-people-consultation-migrants-and-refugees_en

Policymakers on the local, national and European level play a key role in making these improvements possible. Also, given their resources, experience and impact on the local, national and international level, stakeholders such as nongovernmental associations, international organisations, religious organisations, activists of migrant background, and refugee- and migrant-led organisations can be a significant contributing factor in these important changes.

Refugees and migrants have unique and diverse identities, interests and skills, and many of them are experts in their respective areas, which would make their input useful. The COVID-19 pandemic has given us an important illustration of the need to cooperate with healthcare experts from minority groups to ensure everyone's well-being and safety. Also, new arrivals will have different identities and deserve a measure of representation in the public sphere. Refugees and migrants should be involved in the processes that shape their lives, and they should be welcomed in the discussions that concern us all.

*'They are missing the point here, because they are bringing a lot of concepts and policies that do not work. If you don't include me, you give me something that will never work!'*⁵¹

2. Panel 'Social participation and inclusive role of local communities'

2.1. Current challenges

Many barriers and challenges impede the involvement of refugees and migrants and of refugee- and migrant-led organisations in public policymaking processes, including:

- There is a lack of a legal obligation and binding regulations requiring refugees and migrants to be involved. Instead, we have nonbinding

51 Badran, M. and Stoker, T. (2019): Migrant-led Advocacy Across Europe: Challenges and Opportunities. European Programme for Migration and Integration, p. 15. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library/doc/migrant-led-advocacy-across-europe?lang=fr>

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international legal instruments recognising the importance of their engagement.

- The lack of knowledge of and trust in public policymaking processes and scarcity of role-models such as prominent politicians of migrant or refugee background also negatively affect the engagement in public policymaking processes.
- The negative tone of the public discourse on refugees and migrants and the dominant narrative that regards refugees as passive victims discourage and limit the potential of migrants and refugees to act as agents for change.
- The dominant emergency approach to migrants and refugees, focusing on their immediate and basic needs and making their stay temporary, also impedes their engagement in long-term political and democratic processes.
- It is difficult to ensure the representation of the wide and diverse array of needs and interests that are present among migrants and refugees. This is the result of the tendency of some migrant- and refugee-led organisations to focus on the interests and needs of a certain religious or ethnic group.
- The impact of power struggles with other organisations on policymaking processes and its effect on the engagement of migrant- and refugee-led organisations in these processes. Barriers include situations when the interests of migrants and refugees come into conflict with the interests of other stakeholders, which are given precedence, or situations when the issues of greatest importance for migrants and refugees are not on the political agenda.⁵²

Overcoming these challenges requires a joint effort invested by many different stakeholders. This process is already under way, and the panel discussion 'Social Participation and Inclusive Role of Local Communities', held at the international conference 'Integration of persons granted international protection – Dissemination of good practices on European and international level', organised by the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia, is a good example. Intercultural and interreligious

52 Source: The Network for Dialogue: Engaging Migrant and Refugee-led Organizations in Policymaking in Europe. Available at: https://network4dialogue.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Network-for-Dialogue_Policy-Brief-5-Policymaking.pdf

dialogue is one of the important tools that can help in this process: it can help stakeholders understand each other's needs, interests and ideas, and thus contribute to the development of more inclusive and more efficient public policymaking processes.

Below is the list of panel participants:

Mirjana Vergaš, UNHCR,

Mirela Šavrljuga, Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia,

Semih Adıgüzel, law student and advocate for the rights of persons under international protection,

Anila Noor, association New Women Connectors – for inclusion and social justice,

Jurica Jurjević and Nika Bahtijarević, Croatian Football Federation,

Mazen Al Ahmed, Dialogue Culture Centre, and

Oladayo Hamidat Hassan, PADUH – Pan-African Association in Croatia.

Nejra Kadić Meškić was the moderator of the panel.

2.2. Promising practice example – Effective Inclusion of Refugees handbook (UNHCR)

The handbook *Effective Inclusion of Refugees: participatory approaches for practitioners at the local level* was developed in cooperation with the Migration Policy Group to provide practical guidelines to local actors and promote the inclusion of refugees. It was developed in cooperation with local authorities, service providers, civil society and refugee-led organisations across Europe.

Under the successful and comprehensive integration model, six key areas for the success of services provided to refugees were identified:

- 1) Clearly identify the type of support that the refugees need.
- 2) Ensure support caters to the needs of all.
- 3) Create services for the long run.
- 4) Work not only for people, but with them.
- 5) Involve local communities and support volunteerism.
- 6) Strive for comprehensive integration support.

Involving refugees in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the services provided to them is a key step toward a holistic integration approach. This ensures that the interests, perspectives, needs

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and competences of refugees as the primary stakeholders are systematically reflected, making them more accepted and encouraging them to assume responsibility. Furthermore, their relationship with the authorities is reinforced, and the stakeholders' trust in refugees is increased, while refugees are in turn encouraged to be active participants in decision-making rather than passive beneficiaries of services. This consultation and participation process needs to be expanded beyond projects, to the political level, to ensure that the refugees' needs are met. With this purpose in mind, different methods and procedures need to be provided to efficiently address the situations of persons with different lengths of stay, social capital, and residence status, who are in different phases of language learning and acquisition of citizenship.⁵³

2.3. The importance of involving refugee- and migrant-led organisations in public policymaking processes

The involvement of migrants, applicants for asylum, and refugees is increasingly considered a prerequisite for meaningful policymaking. From the viewpoint of human rights, one could argue that human beings, regardless of their nationality, should have an equal right to have their voice heard and considered. From the viewpoint of democracy, it has also been argued that the 'normative legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree of involvement of those affected by the decision in the decision-making processes, and their opportunity to influence the outcomes'.⁵⁴

The involvement of such organisations in public policymaking processes in meaningful and impactful ways results in policies that better reflect the needs and the realities in the communities, making their design and implementation very effective.⁵⁵

53 UNHCR and Migration Policy Group (2022): Handbook 'Effective Inclusion of Refugees: participatory approaches for practitioners at the local level', p. 40. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/62b320714.pdf>

54 Young, I. (2006): *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 5–6.

55 Source: European Commission (2020): *EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/the-ec-presents-its-eu-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027>

*We are experts of our lives!... I think it's actually unique and authentic when you get to hear from the community itself.*⁵⁶

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2.3.1. Promising practice example – Advisory group of third-country nationals and persons of migrant background (Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia)

The Advisory group of third-country nationals and persons of migrant background, which consists of 15 members, was established by the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia under the project INCLUDE – *Intersectoral Cooperation in the Empowerment of Third-Country Nationals*. The Advisory Group works to empower third-country nationals by educating them on universal human rights and their own rights and obligations, and strengthening their perspective in the political discussion and their contribution to improving integration policies through recommendations provided to decisionmakers on all relevant levels, and, finally, by involving them in the development, implementation and evaluation of integration policies and strategies. The ultimate purpose is to create an inclusive society by building equal access to political and social participation for all members of the society so they can contribute equally to the establishment of the asylum, reception and integration system. Members meet two times a year. The intention of the Advisory Group is to have its members participate in the evaluation and development of strategic documents through recommendations.

2.4. Promising practice example – New neighbours – integration through football (Croatian Football Federation and the Dialogue Culture Centre)

Croatian Football Federation and the Dialogue Culture Centre have joined forces in a partnership promoting and reinforcing the integration of refugees in Croatia through football. They have recognised football as a unique opportunity to influence social changes in their environment in the context of anti-discrimination, natural acceptance of anything other and different, mutual respect, and development of the

56 Badran, M. and Stoker, T. (2019): Migrant-led Advocacy Across Europe: Challenges and Opportunities. European Programme for Migration and Integration, p. 14. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library/doc/migrant-led-advocacy-across-europe?lang=fr>

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spirit of togetherness, which are typical football values. Football is a universal language known to everyone, and the usual communication barriers and challenges do not exist in the football field. Instead, teamwork is required, along with knowledge of the rules of the game, which are the same everywhere. Teamwork and cooperation spill over to life outside the football field, making language learning and completion of school tasks (which was also supported through this collaboration of the Dialogue Culture Centre and the Croatian Football Federation) more successful, and enriching the participants' social life by expanding their social network. The project also strives for the registration of the informal football group New Neighbours, composed of refugees and migrants, as a football club.

2.5. Promising practice example – Advocate who works to ensure the implementation of the right of persons granted international protection to higher education in practice (Semih Adıgüzel)

Semih Adıgüzel started his studies at the University of Zagreb after he was granted international protection. His right to education, including higher education, is guaranteed under Article 70 of the Act on International and Temporary Protection (Official Gazette 70/15, 127/17). Under this Article, persons granted international protection, i.e. asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection, are entitled to attend higher education under the same conditions as Croatian nationals. However, Semih's experience has shown that these persons run into substantial challenges when trying to exercise their rights provided by the above regulation. Due to the unsuitability of the student registration and record-keeping system, Semih was not enrolled under the same conditions as Croatian nationals, and was instead enrolled as a foreigner. For this reason, he was unable to exercise his right to housing in a student dormitory, his right to subsidised student meals, and his right to scholarship under the conditions that regulate these rights for Croatian nationals. His work as an activist included research, analysis, a number of applications sent, and advocacy of problem solving in contacts with a variety of instances and institutions, including the Rectorate, the Faculty, the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Science and Education, and others. As a result of his battle for his rights, he was recognised the right to student housing and subsidised meals, but this was granted to him

by virtue of a special Decision amending the Ordinance regulating the conditions and manner for exercising the right to subsidised student meals and the Ordinance regulating the conditions and manner for exercising the right of full-time students to subsidised housing. These decisions solved the problem only for the duration of the current academic year and only for this specific student, and there is still no systematic solution for all students who will follow in his steps. Semih himself will also have to apply for new decisions to regulate his right to housing and meals in the next academic year. As a result of Semih's initiative and advocacy, the Ordinance regulating the conditions and manner for exercising the right to a government scholarship based on socioeconomic status (Official Gazette 106/2021) was adopted in September 2021. The Ordinance includes provisions that place persons granted international and temporary protection in a fair position when competing for scholarships. With his dedicated engagement and advocacy, Semih has already made a big difference toward improving the position of persons under international protection who are looking to continue their education in Croatia.

2.6. Promising practice example – New Women Connectors

New Women Connectors (NWC) was established in March 2019 as a non-profit organisation led by women migrants and refugees. This platform provides the diaspora, refugees, migrants, undocumented persons and stateless persons with means to map their challenges, recommend solutions, and become drivers for change. Their mission is to achieve inclusive and fair policies for new women. The focus is on topics such as integration, racism, domestic violence, transphobia, and the position of LGBTIQ+ women and girls. The organisation advocates new and more inclusive EU policies from the viewpoint of women refugees and migrants, and building on their experiences.

2.7. Promising practice example – PADUH

Pan-African Association in Croatia – PADUH is an association operating in Croatia that has been established by new members of the Croatian society to improve the position and the rights of people who have resettled in Croatia from a variety of African countries. The association organises a number of activities to promote the African culture and art and thus encourage intercultural dialogue and introduce the new

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neighbours from African countries to the domicile Croatian population. On the International Day of Peace, the association organised the programme *PADUH for Peace*, a part of the Inclusion Week, which included African music, dancing, food, crafts, and knowledge sharing as their contribution to the intercultural dialogue and to building an inclusive society that is open to all its members, old and new!

3. Recommendations for improving the integration system in Croatia:

- Map refugee- and migrant-led organisations, and organisations working on minority rights, and promote their visibility, engagement, inclusion and cooperation.
- Develop strategies, structures and action plans to ensure a continuous, meaningful and impactful engagement with different migrant- and refugee-led organisations or organisations working with this target group, and make them policy co-creators.
- Make funds and project and activity financing available to migrant- and refugee-led organisations or other organisations working with migrants.
- Support capacity building for refugee- and migrant-led organisations, empowering them by providing them with the skills, knowhow, trust and confidence that they need.
- Facilitate information sharing among these organisations while promoting their involvement in policymaking and decision-making processes.

Prepared by: Nejra Kadić Meškić

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