

# Guide of good practices

Exchanges and analysis of good practices of professionals fighting against the exclusion of poorly housed people and migrants



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# Introduction

The project "COCAGNE: Exchanges and analysis of good practices of professionals fighting against the exclusion of poorly housed people and migrants" has been funded by the Erasmus+ program from 2020 to 2023.

This project brings together 6 European non-profit organizations working in the fields of migration and asylum, integration, the fight against poor housing and exclusion. Most of these NGO partners offer services to asylum seekers, including assistance with the right to asylum, access to healthcare, housing, employment, and language activities.

One of the partners – Make Better – is an organization that works in informal settlements to legalize them and help improve urban planning in collaboration with various local stakeholders. While this NGO has no experience working with asylum seekers, the challenges faced by people living in these informal settlements resemble those experienced by asylum seekers who lack access to accommodation and are compelled to reside in shanty towns or squats. In this respect, we found the experience of this NGO particularly interesting in terms of the fight against inadequate housing.

Additionally, one of our partners – CISR – is an NGO that conducts research, particularly in the field of migration. Although it has limited field experience (having conducted workshops with migration and integration professionals from various countries), its insights and expertise were invaluable in understanding the underlying issues of experimental practices.



The objective of the project is to enhance the skills of participating NGOs and enable them to improve the quality of services offered to populations experiencing exclusion. To achieve this, the participants identified good practices within their own organizations or third-party organizations, analyzed them, and presented them. During transnational meetings, it was possible to visit some of the partner organizations' projects as well as innovative projects carried out by other national actors.

The good practices developed throughout the project are presented in this guide. They aim to inspire other actors in the field of migration, the fight against inadequate housing and exclusion, and also stimulate reflection on the obstacles, highlight solutions or areas for improvement, and indicate the

necessary resources or conditions for successful implementation of these actions.

In order to find one's way through all these good practices, they are classified according to 4 themes:

- Asylum and access to rights
- Housing
- Employment and language teaching
- Cross-cutting projects



The last theme, Cross-cutting projects, details good practices at the intersection of asylum, access to rights, housing and language learning.

We have chosen to publish in the guide the stories of people who have experienced migration to Europe. These stories are testimonies from asylum seekers who have applied for asylum in Europe and EU nationals who have encountered poverty and, at times, have been compelled to relocate to another EU country in search of better economic opportunities. The aim of these testimonies is to depict the numerous obstacles faced by these individuals in accessing their rights in Europe. The names of the individuals have been altered, and the illustrations are fictional to safeguard their anonymity.





# Presentation of the partners



**Habitat-Cité** is a French non-profit organization that has been working since 2003 in France, specifically in the Ile-de-France region, and internationally in the Caribbean and Central America, in the field of fighting against poor housing and exclusion. In the Ile-de-France region, its actions are aimed at migrants who have arrived in France to seek asylum or for economic reasons. Specifically, it has experience working with Russian-speaking asylum seekers from former USSR countries and Roma populations from Romania and Moldova.

Habitat-Cité operates in several areas, including access to the right to asylum and fundamental rights, professional and linguistic integration, and projects to improve living conditions for people in informal or substandard housing. The organization provides comprehensive socio-legal support for asylum seekers, statutory refugees, rejected asylum seekers, and people holding residence permits. This support encompasses the entire process, from the application for asylum or a residence permit to accessing accommodation, housing, healthcare, schooling, social benefits, and legal advice in the field of labor law for foreigners.

Habitat-Cité also offers individual follow-up for accessing employment and has been developing professional language training for foreign job seekers since 2017. Since 2020, it has been coordinating vocational language training specifically for individuals receiving international protection, with funding from the Ministry of Labor. Additionally, the organization conducts socio-linguistic workshops for unaccompanied minors.

[www.habitat-cite.org](http://www.habitat-cite.org)



**O.R.So.** is a social cooperative that was established in 1987 and operates in various areas of the Piedmont Region in northwestern Italy. Its main focus is on active labor market policies, youth policies, migrant integration policies, and training activities. O.R.So. has developed competences and tools related to the social support of migrants, skills recognition, language learning, legal assistance, and the professional integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

Since 2009, O.R.So. has been coordinating various multi-partner projects within the framework of the European Refugee Fund (now AMIF) and European Integration Fund (now AMIF), as well as refugee-led start-up business development projects funded by a banking foundation (Compagnia di San Paolo). Additionally, Orso has managed several migrant inclusion projects funded by local and regional authorities.

O.R.So. actively promotes and manages various projects such as "SAI/SPRAR/SIPROIMI and CAS" (Projects belonging to the Italian National System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees), providing reception and inclusion services for asylum seekers and refugees. These services include basic assistance, legal support, professional integration, orientation,

education and professional training, Italian language training, as well as psycho-social and health assistance.

Furthermore, O.R.So. is a member of various local, national, and European networks of organizations and actors involved in programs for asylum seekers and refugees. The organization has extensive experience in planning and managing services dedicated to migrants, particularly those with fewer opportunities and at risk of social exclusion, such as women, refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of trafficking. O.R.So. actively contributes to their social inclusion and full citizenship.

<https://www.cooperativaorso.it/>



**Asylarbeitskreis Heidelberg e.V.** was founded in 1995 during the first wave of refugees from the former Yugoslavia – after that country being bombed by NATO - to Germany. It currently operates with one employee working 30 hours per week, funded by the city of Heidelberg. All the currently 142 members of the organization are volunteers. Their dedicated mission is to support refugees in Heidelberg in various aspects of their new life: learning the language, dealing with their asylum procedures and with authorities, helping with homework, leisure activities, contacts with the neighborhood, public gardening, legal advice, integration into the labor market. The Asylarbeitskreis is initiating and executing many long-term projects, small and big, on a regular basis, as well as political events.

To enhance the skills of their volunteers, Asylarbeitskreis organizes workshops and seminars covering various topics related to migration. They invite professionals in German and European asylum law, psychologists, trauma psychologists specializing in refugees, individuals working in asylum-related networks, social workers, and more. Through the “Qualifiziert. Engagiert” program, hundreds of volunteers regularly acquire new skills and necessary knowledge over the years. Additionally, the organization fosters close relationships with institutions and communities to ensure that all stakeholders are informed about the situation of refugees.

<https://www.asyl-heidelberg.de/>



**The Rule of Law Institute (RLI)** is a non-governmental organization established in 2001 in Lublin, Poland. Its primary objective is to support initiatives that promote legal awareness in society, provide continuing professional education for lawyers, enhance knowledge of European law and the concept of European integration, initiate human rights protection measures, and advocate for legal education reform. Since its inception, the Institute has been actively involved in initiatives for free legal advice and law school clinics.

The Institute’s activities revolve around three key areas: providing free legal advice, offering training programs for lawyers, and conducting targeted legal education campaigns. Simultaneously, the Institute engages in comparative law research projects through collaborative partnerships with legal research organizations in other countries. Since 2004, the Institute has been providing legal representation and advice to asylum seekers and migrants. In 2007, the Public Interest Legal Resource Centre and the Ewelina Milczanowska Lublin Free Legal Advice Centre were established as divisions of the Institute. Additionally, in 2009, the Migration Library was founded as part of the Lublin Regional Immigrant Support Network, which is managed by the Institute.



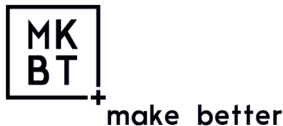
In February 2022, the RLI played a significant role as one of the three founding NGOs of the Lublin Social Committee for Aid to Ukraine, setting an example for civic engagement and fostering cooperation among local actors. The RLI staff consists of approximately 15 employees and about 20 volunteers. The Institute also collaborates with approximately 20 experts who occasionally participate in RLI's research or training projects.

<https://panstwoprawa.org/?lang=en>



**The Centre for Independent Social Research (CISR e.V. Berlin)** is a non-governmental research organization founded in Berlin in 2015 by social researchers, experts, and civil activists in cooperation with the Centre for Independent Social Research in St. Petersburg, Russia. Its main areas of focus are social research, civil society development, and education in collaboration with post-socialist states. The organization employs social researchers with extensive experience in implementing both international research projects and civil society initiatives. Its primary areas of activity include conflict transformation, migration and inclusion, and urban activism. CISR e.V. Berlin currently has five permanent employees and five volunteers.

<https://cizr-berlin.org/>



**Make Better (MKBT)** consists of an interdisciplinary team that combines professional experience in housing, facilitation of participatory planning, local development strategies, and the design of urban regeneration interventions. MKBT has primarily worked at the local level, assisting local authorities, businesses, and foundations in better serving the communities they work with. The team members have also engaged in policy reviews and national strategy assignments with governmental and international institutions such as the World Bank, UNDP, and the Council of Europe in Romania and other Eastern European countries.

In recent years, MKBT has focused on working with poor communities and neighborhoods facing complex housing problems, including informality, segregation, degradation of built stock, seismic vulnerability, and limited access to public services. Previous projects include participatory development of neighborhood and city-level urban regeneration strategies, a national advocacy and awareness-raising project that advocated for new legislation allowing integrated interventions in deprived informal settlements, and assistance to local authorities in optimizing social housing allocation criteria and maintenance.

These experiences, combined with those of other Cocagne project partners, aim to support marginalized groups, whether migrants or not, in improving their living conditions and accessing adequate housing.

<http://mkbt.ro/en>



**The  
asylum  
context  
in Europe**



## **A common European law with diverse applications in different countries**

European asylum policy establishes the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) for all EU Member States, which is based on the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 and its additional protocols. However, there are variations in practices among European countries due to differences in resources, operational methods, and the political will of each country.

Individuals who fear persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, social group, political beliefs, or conscience have the right to seek asylum. They can make their asylum application to the border guards upon arrival in the EU. Consequently, individuals from outside the EU can enter the EU without a visa after expressing their intention to seek asylum. However, some European countries do not strictly adhere to the principle of non-refoulement, and NGOs have raised concerns about cases where asylum seekers are denied entry (e.g., Poland), which violates a fundamental principle of the right to asylum.

## **Dublin Regulation, standard and fast-track procedures**

The Dublin III Regulation stipulates that the first European country where an asylum seeker arrives on EU territory is responsible for handling their application. However, there are instances where asylum seekers prefer to apply for asylum in a different country, either because they have a higher likelihood of obtaining protection there or because living conditions and job prospects are more favorable. The country of first arrival has the discretion to accept or reject processing the asylum application based on various criteria, including the applicant's family ties, legal connections to the first country of arrival, and ties to the new country. This regulation has faced criticism for placing a significant burden on a few European countries located at the EU's borders to process asylum applications. It fails to consider the background and life circumstances of the asylum seeker, as well as the disparities in asylum policy implementation among different Member States, which, in some cases, result in a significant loss of opportunity to obtain protection.

When an asylum application is submitted, the majority of European countries determine, based on criteria established at the national level, whether the application qualifies for a standard procedure or a fast-track procedure. This determination is largely based on the applicant's country of origin and whether it is deemed safe or unsafe. This distinction is crucial as fast-track procedures aim to process the asylum application within a significantly shorter timeframe (typically between 15 and 30 days) compared to the normal procedure. Additionally, the rate of rejection is typically higher in fast-track procedures.

When an asylum seeker registers their asylum application in the initial European country they arrive in but subsequently moves to another Member State for processing, they enter the "Dublin" procedure. The competent authority in the country where the asylum seeker has settled must refer the case to the first country of arrival within a specified timeframe to determine whether they will assume responsibility for the application. If this deadline is exceeded, the country where the asylum seeker has settled becomes responsible for the application. Once the first country of arrival has been

notified, if they do not respond within a certain period, their lack of response is considered implicit acceptance of the application. In certain countries, asylum seekers under the Dublin procedure must wait between 12 and 18 months before finding out which State will be responsible for processing their application.

## Reception procedures for asylum seekers

**In each European country,** the procedures for receiving asylum seekers and the authorities responsible for processing their applications differ.

**In France,** asylum seekers must submit their application either at the airport or via a reception centre and then obtain an appointment at the prefecture. In Paris region, they have to call on a unique phone number to receive the appointment. Once their asylum application has been registered at the prefecture, they have 21 days - if it is their first application - to send in their asylum application, which must include a story and supporting documents. Everything must be translated in French. The Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (OFPRA - French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons) then invites asylum seekers to an interview and has around 6 months to reach a decision. In reality, the average is 8 months and 21 days.

**In Germany,** asylum seekers are directed to arrival centres where their identity is checked, a medical examination is conducted, and an asylum application is filed. The Catholic and Protestant church charities Caritas and Diakonie run legal clinics in these centres to provide advice on the legal process and asylum seekers' rights. These clinics are mandatory. After a period ranging from 3 weeks to 9 months, asylum seekers are directed to various municipalities all over the respective federal country. This distribution is based on the population catchment area and financial resources. The allocation procedure is called the "Königssteiner Schlüssel." Within 3 weeks to several months after arrival, the Bundes-Amt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF) schedules an interview with the asylum seekers and makes a decision within an unspecified period.

**In Poland,** asylum seekers must submit their application at the border, which is then transferred to the Chief of the Foreigners' Office in Warsaw for processing. Once the application is registered, asylum seekers have 2 days to go to a reception centre for foreigners. Within a month, the Foreigners' Office will call asylum seekers for an interview and make its decision within 6 months.

**In Italy,** asylum seekers submit their application at the border post or at the provincial police immigration office (Questura). There is no legal time limit for submitting an asylum application; however, the application must be made within 8 days of arriving in Italy. Once the application is registered, the applicant sends their documents to the Territorial Commission for International Protection, which will invite them to an interview within one month. The decision will be made within 3 months in the case of a normal procedure. Nevertheless, waiting times can be significantly longer (from 6 months up to 24 months) in the case of provenance from a so-called "not safe" country.

**In Romania,** asylum seekers can apply to the border police, one of the six regional reception centres, or directly to the General Inspectorate of Immigration. The latter body is responsible for processing the application and



conducting the interview.

In some countries, only identity checks, registration of the asylum application, and assistance with drafting the application are provided. In other countries, medical and psychological consultations, clothing donations, legal advice, and systematic provision of accommodation are also available. However, NGOs and human rights defenders have observed that the practical implementation of care arrangements and timeframes for processing asylum applications is challenging. The timeframes for completing asylum applications, which can evoke traumatic memories, are often too short for the quality of the application to address the complexity of the issues at hand (ranging from 2 to 21 days depending on the country). Additionally, some asylum seekers encounter difficulties in obtaining their *récépissé*, which certifies the registration of their asylum application, leading to challenges with identity checks and finding accommodation.

## **Decisions to grant or reject protection, forced and voluntary returns**

The administrative statuses granted for protection vary from country to country. Generally, there is at least one refugee status and one subsidiary protection status. Refugee status is granted based on the 1951 Geneva Convention. Subsidiary protection is granted when the person does not meet the conditions for refugee status under the Geneva Convention but has credible reasons to believe that they may face the death penalty, execution, torture, or inhuman and degrading treatment in their own country. Refugee status is often granted for several years and is renewable, while subsidiary protection is granted for 1 or 2 years and can be renewed if the fear of reprisals persists. Germany also grants a status called humanitarian protection, and Italy provides the so-called “special protection,” valid for 2 years and not renewable. These statuses are designed for individuals who do not qualify for refugee status or subsidiary protection but still require protection.

When the competent body refuses an asylum application, the asylum seeker has the option to lodge an appeal. However, the chances of obtaining protection through an appeal are often lower compared to the initial decision. The time frame for lodging an appeal is typically short, averaging around 15 days depending on the country. In France, individuals often receive their rejection decision at a different address than their place of residence, further reducing the time available for filing an appeal. In Romania, asylum seekers who have their applications rejected can appeal to two separate courts in succession. Both courts must provide a favorable opinion for the person to be granted refugee status. In certain countries, after an appeal has been rejected, the applicant may request a re-examination, but only if they can provide new information that proves they are at risk in their home country. This new information must have emerged since the date of their initial asylum application. The entire process, from the initial application to the appeal and sometimes the request for reconsideration, can take several years before a final decision is reached.

When an asylum seeker’s application is rejected, there are two possible routes for their return: forced return through administrative decision or voluntary return. Certain European countries strictly enforce forced return policies, such as Poland, while others have more lenient procedures, allowing rejected asylum seekers to settle permanently and later apply for regulariza-

tion. This disparity in approaches can be attributed to the costs associated with implementing a return policy, such as chartering planes and police accompaniment during the process of leaving the host country. These costs make it impractical for countries like France, which had 103,140 rejected asylum seekers in 2021, to consistently carry out forced return measures. In comparison, Poland had 1,457 cases in the same year (Table 1). Despite limited prospects in Europe, only a few rejected asylum seekers choose to return voluntarily. This trend suggests that most of them face significant risks to their lives in their countries of origin.

## **Access to accommodation**

Access to accommodation for all asylum seekers during the asylum procedure should be guaranteed, but in practice, it is not always straightforward. In Germany, asylum seekers are placed in guarded or non-guarded accommodation centers, sometimes referred to as camps, depending on the federal state. Poland follows a similar system but also offers the option of renting a private flat. However, the allowances provided to asylum seekers are often insufficient to cover the cost of renting a flat. In Italy, accommodation is provided through the SAI system (System for the Reception and Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees), which relies on the willingness of municipalities to create accommodation facilities. In France, various accommodation facilities are available for asylum seekers, such as Centres d'Accueil des Demandeurs d'Asile and Hébergements d'Urgences des Demandeurs d'Asile. However, there is a shortage of available spaces in both countries (especially in France for singles without children), leading asylum seekers to rely on emergency accommodation systems, squats, or even end up on the streets.

Living in squats or on the streets significantly impacts the proper monitoring of administrative procedures, hampers individuals' ability to prepare for their asylum interviews, and negatively affects their mental and physical well-being. Moreover, foreign squatters often face negative perceptions from the local population, being viewed as opportunistic and lazy, which further fuels right-wing rhetoric advocating for stricter restrictions on the right to asylum in Europe. Additionally, national legislation has become increasingly stringent in recent years, resulting in squatters facing substantial fines and prison sentences. Asylum seekers who resort to squatting do so out of lack of viable alternatives, as the streets pose particular dangers. Yet, it is these individuals who are held accountable by public authorities and bear the brunt of the consequences.

## **Access to work and language learning**

In Poland, if the Foreigners' Office processing the asylum application has not issued a decision within 6 months, the asylum seeker has the right to apply for a work permit. In Germany, asylum seekers can obtain a work permit after being in the country for 3 months and no longer residing in an initial reception center, with the exception of Bavaria where asylum seekers must wait between 6 and 9 months, depending on their personal circumstances, before being allowed to work (this waiting period is shorter for those with minor children). In Italy, asylum seekers can immediately take part in language and vocational courses, while they can start work after 60 days from the formalisation of the application for international protection. In France, if the first

procedure takes more than 6 months, asylum seekers can ask for a work permit. The required conditions are to find a work by themselves and the targeted sector of activity should be one of the shortage occupations for which it is very difficult to find a national workforce. In practice, it is very hard for them to get the work permit and asylum seekers are not permitted to work or enroll in language courses until they receive international protection. The asylum procedure, followed by an appeal against a rejection decision, can take several years. During this time, asylum seekers are unable to independently complete their administrative and social procedures or prepare for their future integration. Consequently, many individuals who have recently been granted international protection face challenges in finding immediate employment due to language barriers and difficulty accessing social housing, which often requires minimum resources. NGOs strongly criticize this system, as it hampers the swift integration of refugees, and advocate for access to work permits within a few months of arrival. Moreover, some asylum seekers are compelled to support themselves during the asylum procedure and engage in undeclared work, which can make it extremely difficult for them to extricate themselves from such situations later on.



Language courses for foreigners have been available to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection in Italy, Poland, and Germany since 2019 (previously limited to asylum seekers with long-term residence prospects in Germany). Since 2020, Germany allows and covers the cost of German classes for all asylum seekers up to level B1. In France, asylum seekers have limited access to most language courses, except for private initiatives conducted by non-profit organizations. In recent years, some experimental public programs have included asylum seekers who have been in the country for over 6 months, but this remains relatively marginal. The states offer mandatory language courses ranging from 200 to 600 hours, depending on the individual's initial proficiency level, and local authorities (such as regions and districts) often finance language courses for specific target groups. However, these provisions

are still insufficient. As a result, the voluntary sector and religious organizations often supplement these courses with training provided by volunteers. In most countries, a certified language level (A1, A2, or B1) is required to renew a residence permit. Attaining a B1 level is often a prerequisite for obtaining nationality, posing a significant barrier for individuals who are not literate. Certification of language proficiency is also necessary to enroll in vocational training courses.



## The chances of obtaining international protection vary from one country to another

**Table 1 - Applications and granting of protection status at first instance**

Country	Applicants in 2021	Pending at end 2021	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Humanitarian protection (Ger) / Special protection (Ita)	Rejection	Refugee rate	Sub. Prot. Rate / Spec. Prot. Rate	Hum. Prot. rate/ Spec. Prot. Rate	Rejection rate
France	120,685	-	21,340	12,535	-	103,140	15.5%	9.2%	-	72.3%
Germany	190,816	108,064	32,065	22,996	35,071	4,787	33.8%	24.2%	5.0 %	36.9%
Italy	56,388	32,800	8,107	8,761	6,329	29,790	15%	17%	12%	56%
Poland	7,698	3,850	1,019	1,135	-	1,457	28.22%	31.43%	-	40.35%
Romania	9,591	1,515	500	626	-	3,190	11.58%	14.50%	-	73.91%

Table 1 presents a significant disparity between Germany, which received 190,816 asylum applications in 2021 despite not being a border country, and Poland, a border country, which received 6,798 applications, and Romania, which received 9,591 applications. The higher number of asylum applications processed in Germany compared to its European neighbors can be attributed to Germany's strong political will to welcome refugees since the 2015 crisis. This is reflected in the above-average success rates for obtaining refugee status (33.8%) and subsidiary protection (24.2%), whereas France and Italy have lower rates (15.5% and 9.2% for France, and 15% and 17% for Italy). Therefore, the country where the asylum application is processed significantly impacts an individual's chances of obtaining asylum.



Moreover, the rates of obtaining international protection also vary depending on the nationality of the applicant, as some countries are regarded as safe while others are identified as countries where human rights abuses are well documented. In recent years, nationals from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq have had higher likelihoods of receiving protection due to the political situations in their respective countries.



**Table 2 - Applications and granting of protection status at first instance for applicants from Afghanistan**

Country	Applicants in 2021	Pending at end 2021	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Humanitarian protection (Ger) / Special protection (Ita)	Rejection	Refugee rate	Sub. Prot. Rate	Hum. Prot. Rate / Spec. Prot. Rate	Rejection rate
France	17,330	-	4,565	7,615	-	4,140	27.9%	46.8%	-	25.3%
Germany	31,721	27,846	1,575	461	1,516	2,272	27.0%	7.9%	39.0%	26.0%
Italy	5,544	2,986	2,407	11	-	140	54%	43%	0%	3%
Poland	1,781	308	751	3	-	7	98%	0.3%	-	0.9%
Romania	4,259	734	165	17	-	1,205	12%	1.2%	-	87.6%

However, even if individuals come from a country where the political and humanitarian situation is conducive to a high rate of granting protection, their chances of obtaining this protection can vary significantly depending on the country processing their asylum application. Table 2 illustrates that it is more favorable for Afghans to apply in Poland or Italy, where the rejection rates are 0.9% and 3% respectively, compared to France and Germany, where the rates are around 25%. Conversely, it is highly disadvantageous for Afghans to seek asylum in Romania, where the rejection rate is 87.6%, exceeding the national average.

**Table 3 - Gender/age breakdown of the total number of applicants**

Country	Men in %	Women in %	Children in %	Unaccompanied children in %
France*	68%	32%	23,7%	N/A
Germany	32,5%	18%	49,4%	N/A
Italy*	81,7%	18,3%	14,7%	0,6%
Poland*	60,5%	39,5%	32,5%	2,5%
Romania*	90,4%	9,6%	28,7%	16,2%

\*In France, Italy, Poland, and Romania, the number of children is included in the total numbers of men and women.

The majority of asylum seekers are men, regardless of the country where the application is made. This can be attributed to several factors, including the greater opportunities for men to leave their country (as women often face restrictions on mobility, such as in Afghanistan). Additionally, women are more vulnerable to human trafficking both during their journey to Europe and within Europe, making them prime targets for trafficking networks.

**Table 4 - Comparison between first instance and appeal decision rates**

Country	First instance		Appeal	
	Positive decisions	Negative decisions	Positive decisions	Negative decisions
France	25,5%	74,5%	22,1%	77,9%
Germany	64,4%	36,9%	34,9%	65,1%
Italy	-	-	-	-
Poland	59,5%	49,5%	1,1%	98,9%
Romania	26,1%	73,9%	-	-

In general, applicants are more likely to obtain protection at the first instance rather than on appeal. This is particularly evident in Poland, where only 1.1% of applicants who appeal are granted protection. While Poland and Germany grant protection to over 50% of applicants at the first instance (59.5% and 64.4% respectively), Romania and France have relatively low rates of protection at the first instance (26.1% and 25.5% respectively). The rate of obtaining protection on appeal is not higher in France. It is evident that the chances of obtaining protection vary depending on the European country in which the applicant applies, regardless of the evidence presented regarding the risk in their country.

### Welcoming refugees from Ukraine: an enlightening experience

In 2022, the European Union witnessed one of the largest migratory waves in its history triggered by the war between Russia and Ukraine. Approximately 8 million Ukrainians sought refuge in the EU, leading some countries that were not previously preferred destinations for asylum seekers to receive between 3 and 25 times more refugees. This was notably the case for Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary. The European states demonstrated remarkable solidarity with the Ukrainians and granted them a special status known as temporary protection. This status allows them to benefit from protection without undergoing the regular asylum process and is aimed at facilitating their integration in Europe with the expectation that the majority will eventually return to their country after the war. Temporary protection is valid for one year and can be extended for a maximum of two years. It grants the right to work, access to language training, and vocational education. Emergency centers were established to accommodate Ukrainians, and many were able to rely on their existing network of family and friends already settled in Europe. Ukrainian children were swiftly integrated into regular classes, typically within a few weeks to two months, without necessarily going through language-focused classes intended for non-native speakers. This stands in contrast to the experience of non-Ukrainian allophone pupils, who sometimes have to wait up to six months before being enrolled.

The integration of Ukrainians in Europe demonstrates that with a strong political will, the necessary resources can be allocated to facilitate the integration of refugees and ensure their full access to rights. NGOs working in the field of asylum commend this initiative by European states, but express concern over its limited implementation for asylum seekers from other

regions. This has resulted in a two-tiered system that asylum seekers often perceive as dismissive towards them. Activist organizations are advocating for similar measures to streamline the processing of asylum applications, provide access to language training, employment, and housing for all asylum seekers, regardless of their country of origin. Such measures would benefit both governments and individuals, as the funds currently spent on treating asylum seekers or undocumented migrants, addressing health issues in camps or squats (such as tuberculosis), and providing financial support to refugees who cannot immediately secure employment are greater than the costs of integration. Moreover, individuals who are employed will be able to contribute and pay taxes like any other citizens, thereby bolstering state budgets. Achieving this goal entails launching information and awareness campaigns among European citizens to challenge the sometimes negative perceptions they hold towards asylum seekers.





**Good  
practices  
– asylum  
and access  
to rights**



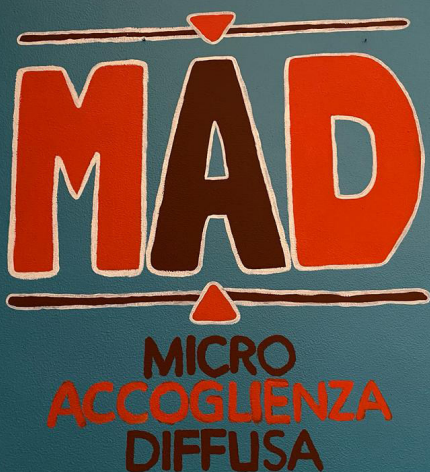
Italy

# SAI project in Avigliana

The Cooperativa O.R.So. has been operating in the Susa Valley since 2003, initially focusing on youth policies and later expanding to inclusion and reception policies since 2011.

Currently, they are responsible for managing the SAI (Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione) project, owned by the Municipality of Avigliana, in collaboration with other local welfare institutions. The project provides accommodation for 32 individuals across 8 residences, with capacities ranging from 2 to 6 beds, located in Avigliana and two nearby municipalities. The project caters to asylum seekers, individuals with international protection status, those with a residence permit for special protection, as well as young adults involved in administrative proceedings.

The underlying principle of the project is to take individual responsibility for each person and support them towards achieving full autonomy and integration. The process focuses on enhancing personal, professional, and cultural skills while facilitating the individual's familiarity and connection with the local community. The intervention method revolves around developing an individualized project, aiming to empower individuals and restore their personal accountability for their own life goals. The approach recognizes the necessary time and steps required to realize these objectives, fostering shared aspirations.



## Services offered to beneficiaries

The SAI Project operates through two intervention levels: the first level focuses on providing assistance to asylum seekers and encompasses material support, legal aid, healthcare services, and language assistance. The second level is specifically designed for individuals with protection status or other valid residence permits, focusing on vocational training, job orientation, and integration initiatives.

### ► Legal protection

Guidance and support throughout international protection procedures; legal advice and information regarding Italian and European asylum laws; information regarding Italian legislation concerning family reunification, along with support and assistance throughout the procedure; guidance and support for bureaucratic and administrative procedures.

### ► Psycho-social health protection

Activation of specialized health support when necessary; activation of psycho-social support tailored to the specific needs of beneficiaries; provision of psychological support and empowerment interviews in formal or informal settings; organization of group activities, orientation sessions, and accompaniment to specialized services offered by the National Health Service; monthly supervision sessions for case discussions.

### ► Socio-linguistic intermediation

The beneficiaries received in the SAI Project often have been in the country for several years and therefore possess a good command of the Italian language. The mediation service is activated as needed, typically during significant interviews (such as conflict resolution, project updates, and revisions) and when a beneficiary joins the project during the presentation of project details, services, and agreements.

### ► Language training

The language trainer of the SAI project offers Italian courses within the project to complement the courses at public schools or cater to the specific needs of the beneficiaries (e.g., Italian for obtaining a driving license). Furthermore, the operator maintains regular communication with teachers, tutors, and coordinators from CPIAs (Centres for Adult Education) and language training agencies to monitor attendance, provide study support, and offer personalized tutoring.

### ► Orientation and accompaniment for job placement

Conducting interviews with all recipients to provide an overview of the Italian job market and potential job opportunities; creating and updating CVs; identifying a collaborative pathway based on the individual's skills, future goals, proficiency in the Italian language, and actual employability/work availability; initiating work integration and reintegration internships to enhance existing skills and acquire new ones.

Website : <https://www.cooperativaorso.it/prodotti/progetti-siproimi-ex-sprar/>

## Keys to success

- **Access for asylum seekers:** The SAI projects are also open to individuals with provisional residence permits, promoting an inclusive approach to overcome the emergency-focused reception management.
- **Monitoring and evaluation of projects** by the national central service ensures the maintenance of high standards and quality levels of the services provided.
- **Culturally welcoming territory:** The cooperation and support from local authorities and non-profit organizations have fostered a climate of sensitivity and solidarity in the management of reception and support for the beneficiaries. This collaboration network includes key stakeholders such as CPIA5 of Turin, vocational training centers, Susa Employment Centre, CONISA, sports and voluntary organizations, companies, and social cooperatives.
- **Distributed micro-reception accommodation:** The organization of the project and the location of housing facilities contribute to strengthening ties with the local community, fostering relationships, and facilitating the socio-economic integration of beneficiaries.
- **Individual projects:** An integrated approach that starts with the individual's needs to build personalized pathways.
- **The possibility of arranging work experience placements** and providing work grants allows for the creation of numerous work integration opportunities and the establishment of a network of companies willing to collaborate with the project.

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **Different levels of reception:** The vocational training and job placement pathways are tied to the legal status of beneficiaries, which excludes some from starting integration pathways or delays their initiation.
- **Complexity of the management and reporting system:** Significant difficulties arise from the intricate management architecture, extending to operational and detailed aspects, involving both central and local levels. The managing body and the local authority involved face a bureaucratic burden.
- **Rigid system** in defining when and how to exit the project, leaving little autonomy for the implementing bodies in relation to the guests. Currently, some beneficiaries leave reception solely due to the expiration of the maximum allowed time, rather than achieving effective integration and societal integration.

## Feasibility conditions

• **Territorial network:** Territorial rootedness is of fundamental importance, as it enables interaction with the community and facilitates the creation of interconnections between different services, fostering collective responsibility towards individuals.

• **Multidisciplinary team:** The presence of specialized operators with diverse expertise is crucial in order to effectively address the multiple needs of beneficiaries.

• **Housing facilities:** Adequate accommodation, provided either by local authorities or private individuals, is essential for hosting the beneficiaries of the project.



# Research project on access to healthcare in Georgia

The Migration Program of the Sciences Po Paris Law School Clinic offers students the opportunity to participate in activities conducted by NGOs supporting migrants in the areas of asylum and access to rights. The program provides students with intensive theoretical training in migration law and involves fieldwork conducted within an NGO. Students work in teams of 2 or 3 under the supervision of a tutor. Habitat-Cité has been a partner organization of the program since 2018.



In 2020, Habitat-Cité proposed a research project to Sciences Po Paris on residence permits for Georgian nationals. The organization had observed an increase in asylum seekers from Georgia seeking treatment for serious health problems since 2019. These individuals initially apply for asylum in France to immediately benefit from State Medical Aid and subsequently apply for a residence permit for treatment. Such permits are granted to individuals whose disease treatment is not available or accessible in their country of origin. Many Georgians with serious illnesses, accompanied by Habitat-Cité, have received negative decisions with orders to leave the country, despite their claims of inadequate healthcare and treatment in Georgia.

The project began in 2020 with the aim of understanding the disparity between the statements made by French authorities, the experiences of

individuals regarding the availability of care, and the actual situation in the country. A volunteer doctor specializing in medical issues joined the team, providing essential expertise in understanding public health priorities, the complexities of various pathologies, and comparing the treatments offered in Georgia and France.

A preliminary report was published in 2020, but the team of students and Habitat-Cité employees were unable to travel to Georgia due to the pandemic. Consequently, Habitat-Cité decided to continue the project, and the team conducted a mission to Georgia in February 2022. They engaged with various stakeholders, including national and local NGOs, international organizations, state representatives, journalists, and doctors. The second report was published in September 2022 and distributed to lawyers and organizations advocating for migrants suffering from serious pathologies, but whose applications for residence permits for treatment have been denied. The work conducted by the students allows for the development of arguments regarding the unavailability and inaccessibility of care for certain pathologies. The findings in the reports also provide a basis for advocacy with French institutions, particularly the Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (French Office of Immigration and Integration - OFII), which is responsible for studying the availability and accessibility of care in the applicants' countries of origin.

### Keys to success

- **The students actively participate in the NGO's activities**, including engaging with the migrant population during meetings. They are involved in assisting migrants with the process of applying for a residence permit for treatment and conduct interviews with the individuals themselves.
- **Habitat-Cité provides in-house training to students**, ensuring they are well-informed about socio-legal procedures and immigration law.
- **An employee of the organization**, who is both a former student of the clinic and a project tutor, facilitates communication and coordination between the university and the NGO.
- **A volunteer doctor is integrated into the project team**, and their role involves analyzing the suitability, quality, and cost difference of treatments offered in Georgia for specific pathologies compared to equivalent treatments in France.
- **The students took the initiative to prepare for the mission in Georgia** with the coordination of the Habitat-Cité team.
- **Proposing a research field abroad is a valuable asset** for the Sciences Po migration clinic, providing real added value for the students.
- **The research project's practical focus** enables professionals in the field to utilize the results for establishing legal actions.

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **The research objective**, timetable, and work stages of the students should be clearly defined in advance.
- **During the meetings with the individuals they accompany**, it is important for the students to actively participate, especially if they lack specific legal knowledge.
- **The organization's needs should be communicated to the university**, particularly regarding the organization of theoretical courses or sharing the costs of a mission.
- **It is crucial to anticipate situations** where certain geographical areas may be considered too dangerous for conducting a mission.
- **Despite the comprehensive work** presented in the two reports, the Council of State upheld the rejection of several applications for residence permits for health care for Georgian nationals.

## Feasibility conditions

- **Ensure a strong understanding** of the relevant legal field, such as foreign law and the healthcare system in the host country, for conducting the research.
- **Allocate sufficient time** to properly welcome and supervise the students involved in the project.
- **Seek out specialists**, such as doctors in this case, who can provide support and expertise to the research team.
- **Form a team**, whether paid or volunteer, that is proficient in the language spoken by the individuals being supported.
- **Build trust** with the individuals being assisted, ensuring their consent for interviews and respecting the confidentiality of the information exchanged.
- **Secure additional funding** to carry out the mission in the migrants' country of origin and to publish the reports.
- **Allocate time** for disseminating the reports within different networks and communicate the findings, enabling other organizations to benefit from the lessons learned and utilize the reports for legal purposes.

# The Social Project

## “District mothers”

The “Stadtteilmütter” project has been a long-standing initiative, operating under different names since 2007. It was established within the Diakonie Network in Berlin, one of Germany’s oldest nonprofit social welfare organizations associated with the Protestant churches. Three organizations, namely Diakoniewerk Simeon GmbH, Diakoniegemeinschaft Bethania, and Diakonisches Werk Berlin Stadtmitte e.V, have been collaborating closely for over ten years to run the “District Mothers” projects in the Berlin districts of Neukölln, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, and Mitte. They also work in close partnership with other NGOs and state institutions.



The project was inspired by the “rucksack principle” from the Netherlands. It involves mothers visiting other mothers, carrying backpacks filled with textbooks, children’s books, games, and informational materials. Over the years of working together, the project’s design and concept have evolved. It is now implemented on various dimensions and levels, encompassing socio-educational and integration activities within local communities, neighborhoods, city districts, and across Berlin as a whole.

The project’s main objective is to provide support and assistance to women and families facing challenging life situations. This support is offered by women with migration experience who possess sufficient social and language skills. The target group includes asylum seekers, individuals with a “Duldung” (toleration certificate issued to asylum seekers who are required to leave Germany), and those lacking the necessary competencies to address their social problems independently.

It is crucial to establish contact with families and individuals in need of help, offering support in their native language and within their local or cultural community. The topics addressed during conversations and consultations are diverse, covering areas such as family, education, childcare, interactions with various social services, healthcare, and more.

To carry out effective counseling, proficiency in languages or long-term residency in Germany is not sufficient. Women undergo training and qualifi-



cation to become “District Mothers.” This specialized educational program typically lasts 6 to 8 months and includes intensive courses on migration, language, education, employment, health, law, childcare, and other relevant topics. Upon completion of the program, the women receive a certificate and a special kit containing a bag and a red shawl, serving as identifying external markers of the District Mothers.

Trainee Mothers not only provide advice and assistance to newcomer families and those facing difficult situations but also act as mediators between individuals with limited social competence and public authorities at the state and municipal levels. They facilitate communication and enhance the efficiency of interactions between these individuals and social service providers. Following a successful evaluation, the State Program for District Mothers was launched in Berlin on January 1, 2020. It is funded by the Senate Department for Education, Youth, and Family Affairs.

Website: <https://www.stadtteilmuetter.de/>

## Key to success

• **Contact and communication** between District Mothers and women or families in need of support occur in a peer-to-peer format, often within close proximity to their place of residence or neighborhood.

• **District Mothers have proficiency in a wide range of languages**, including Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, Russian, Ukrainian, and many others. They often share similar ethnic or cultural backgrounds with the individuals they support.

• **Once contact has been established** and upon the invitation of the mentees, District Mothers visit them in their homes. This approach helps build a trusting relationship and allows for a better understanding of the home situation, enabling more effective assistance with domestic and family issues. Special attention is given to education and language courses, both for the children (such as additional school lessons and addressing learning difficulties) and for the women themselves.

• **The educational program and certification system boost the self-confidence** of District

Mothers and motivate them to pursue further qualifications, such as becoming social assistants. Since 2020, with the official recognition and launch of the state program (at least until the end of 2024), social security and employment opportunities for District Mothers have improved.

• **During their interactions**, there is a mutual cultural exchange and sharing of experiences, which helps overcome stereotypes and enriches knowledge about one another and the host country.

• **The migration or refugee backgrounds** of the leaders, staff, and District Mothers themselves at Stadtteilmütter enable them to better comprehend the problems and challenges faced by families in similar life situations. This understanding allows for more effective support in overcoming difficulties and improving educational and participation opportunities.

• **The success of the project** has also been influenced by its recognition and support at the state level.

## Difficulties -Lessons learned

- **Building trust with parents and children** is the primary responsibility of the District Mothers. Without trust, it is challenging to persuade most of them to accept additional assistance, such as tutoring, speech therapy, support from the youth welfare office, psychological counseling, or participation in sports activities.
- **Gaining access to families** can sometimes be difficult, especially in traditional households where women primarily maintain a home-based lifestyle.
- **Obtaining home visits** poses an even greater challenge. In such cases, neighborhood social organizations or family centers offer locations or parent cafés where District Mothers can provide counseling services.
- **Families in stressful life situations often underutilize support services**, and many are unaware of the available possibilities. In some instances, various social services inform or refer them to District Mothers for assistance.
- **Establishing contact with male members of these families** can be difficult for District Mothers due to gender and cultural stereotypes. To encourage the participation of all family members in social life, events and celebrations are organized where men can also be involved.

## Feasibility conditions

- **It is crucial to comprehend the specificities of urban communities**, including the unique needs and concerns of the people residing there, the languages commonly used, and the locations where women and families tend to gather or frequent (such as mosques, shops, kindergartens, etc.).
- **Securing adequate funding** is essential from the outset.
- **Providing dedicated space** for trainings, counseling, and meetings, such as parent cafés.
- **Establishing collaboration with local public youth and family centers**, state institutions, local NGOs, and benefiting from their informational support.
- **Receiving support from the state**, particularly in terms of integrating newcomers, including welcome/support classes, adult education courses, integration programs, and other social services.
- **Forming a team of like-minded individuals** who can provide mutual support and encouragement.

# Labor Law Desk for foreigners

The labor law desk for foreigners was launched in September 2017, following internal training of employees and volunteers who were likely to participate. It takes place once every two weeks, from 5pm to 8pm. This desk was established in response to several observations:

A significant prevalence of undeclared work in the lives of most foreigners supported by the NGO.

The situation of undeclared work keeps individuals in a precarious position, making it difficult for them to access housing due to a lack of proof of regular income. It also has consequences for their health, as they are not covered by regulatory safety conditions or social security. Long working hours and a higher risk of work-related accidents are common challenges.

Frequent cases of work exploitation and violations of workers' rights, regardless of whether the work is declared or undeclared.

The unpredictability of undeclared work makes it challenging for individuals to dedicate themselves fully to their job search.

Foreigners face greater difficulties accessing institutions that protect workers' rights.



The most common issues encountered by people seeking assistance at the Labor Law Desk include flawed dismissal procedures, incorrect or undocumented recording of working hours, non-payment of overtime, partial wage non-payment, failure to comply with rest periods and mandatory visits to occupational health services, failure to issue end-of-contract documents or issuance of erroneous documents (which can impact an individual's eligibility for unemployment benefits), incorrect calculation of paid leave or end-of-contract and dismissal benefits, and instances of workplace harassment.

## Keys to success

- **Long-term support** is provided to individuals who seek assistance at the Labor Law Desk.
- **A volunteer specializing in labor law** is paired with an employee responsible for integration.
- **A network of lawyers** specializing in labor law and trade union advocates is established to prepare cases and provide ongoing support.
- **The initial focus is on resolving conflicts with employers through amicable means**, such as sending emails, letters, and making phone calls to remind them of the applicable laws, as well as utilizing mediation.
- **Individuals are encouraged to assert their rights** and are reassured that they have the right to do so. They are informed that they can receive support in terms of legal expertise and financial assistance through legal aid applications.
- **If attempts at mediation are unsuccessful**, individuals are accompanied in litigation at the Labor Court. They are informed well in advance about the nature and duration of the legal proceedings.
- **Individuals are encouraged to build solidarity with their colleagues** and consider taking collective legal action if they are facing similar situations.
- **A thorough filing system is maintained**, and situation summaries are regularly updated to ensure that no steps or deadlines are overlooked during the case follow-up process.



## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **Workers, regardless of their legal status, often hesitate to take legal action to defend their rights** due to fear of job loss, potential reprisals from their employer, or the risk of deportation by the State, especially for undocumented workers.
- **In some cases, communication during appointments becomes challenging** when the individuals have a strong accent and limited language proficiency, highlighting the importance of the pairing system.
- **For undeclared workers, the lack of documentation makes it more challenging to gather evidence** of the employment relationship and, consequently, the existence of undeclared work.
- **Referrals to the Labor Inspectorate, which could provide valuable evidence for legal action, rarely lead to concrete results** due to the significant reduction in staffing within the institution and instances where hierarchy discourages and penalizes labor inspectors who conduct inspections on certain companies.
- **In certain areas such as civil service law or regularization of undocumented migrants**, the Labor Law Desk lacks specialization and may need to make referrals to other institutions.
- **The extensive delays in legal proceedings**, sometimes lasting several years in labor court cases, discourage individuals from pursuing their rights through the legal system.
- **These lengthy and sometimes convoluted delays make it challenging** to provide ongoing support and follow-up for certain cases in the long term.

## Feasibility conditions

- **Knowledge of labor law** and familiarity with administrative and legal procedures pertaining to the protection of foreign workers' rights are essential.
- **Understanding of relevant institutions**, such as the Labor Inspectorate, as well as organizations (trade unions, organizations for undocumented migrants) and professionals (lawyers, trade union advocates, legal representatives) involved in labor law enforcement is crucial.
- **Comprehension of immigration laws**, including regulations concerning residency rights and work permits, as well as procedures for regularization through employment, is necessary.
- **Adequate human resources** should be allocated to the project to ensure regular and consistent monitoring.
- **Providing evening consultations** enables workers to seek advice and assistance after their workday has ended.



MIGRANTS' TRAJECTORIES:

**Anzor  
from  
Chechnya**

The first time I attempted to come to France was in 2007 when I was eighteen years old. I was accompanied by another young Chechen. We entered Slovakia from Ukraine through the forest with no provisions, no food, no compass, only a small amount of money. Our intention was to continue our journey westwards, towards Austria. We waited for the bus to Bratislava, and when it arrived, we attempted to board. However, the driver refused to accept dollars. Consequently, we disembarked, and soon after, a car carrying border guards arrived. They apprehended us, took us away, and collected our fingerprints.

We mentioned "asylum," but they responded with "asylum? - No. The camp - yes!" and subsequently returned us to Ukraine. There, we were interrogated and subjected to physical abuse. Ukrainian prisons resemble those in Russia. The guards consumed vodka and made threats against us. We paid 500 rubles to a guard twice in exchange for food. This occurred in Tchop, a small prison for refugees arrested at the border. The conditions were extremely poor. Fifteen of us shared a single room with bunk beds for sleeping. We were never presented before a judge. The Red Cross visited to distribute food packets, but we were unable to communicate with anyone. We were incarcerated for two months for illegal border crossing. We offered money to two guards, who accepted 200 dollars each, but they did not release us. Subsequently, we were deported to Russia via train. The journey lasted two days during which we were continuously handcuffed, both day and night.

At the Russian-Ukrainian border in Belgorod, we were handed over to the Russian authorities, and it was the FSB<sup>1</sup> that assumed control over us. We were transported to an FSB facility and subjected to questioning: "Where are you from?" We didn't possess internal passports<sup>2</sup> because they were confiscated in Ukraine before crossing the border. We were instructed to provide our full names and addresses using block letters. Subsequently, we were interrogated with inquiries such as: "You don't support Soviet power (sic)?", "Have you visited the

Pankisi valley?"<sup>3</sup>, "Are you acquainted with any boeviki?"<sup>4</sup> Where are they hiding?" These questions were accompanied by threats like: "We'll send you to a camp!"<sup>5</sup> During the interrogation, three FSB agents were involved. They made a call to Chechnya to gather information about me and verify if I had any warrants. Fortunately, I was not wanted. However, while the others were released, I was detained and threatened to be "placed in a cage." But twenty minutes later, they also released me.

When I returned home, I discovered that I was now listed as a wanted individual, and a police officer was handling my case. Consequently, I made the decision to leave the country once again. In February 2008, I departed for Poland via Belarus, using an international passport. However, my ultimate destination was France. Upon arriving in Poland at Terespol, I was directed to an asylum seekers' center located in Dębak, which was approximately 250 km away. The Polish police confiscated my passport and issued me a document resembling a pass. I had to take a taxi to Dębak, where I resided for about two months. Due to limited space, I slept in a glass room resembling a dining area, alongside ten other individuals. Subsequently, I continued my journey towards France, as that was my primary goal.

While on the road in Germany, traveling in a vehicle with other asylum seekers, we were halted and taken to the police station. I was arrested and detained alongside criminals. I spent a month in prison for illegally crossing the border. Despite expressing my intention to seek asylum, I was informed that we would be sent back. Consequently, I was returned to Poland. Upon arrival, the Polish police instructed me to return to Dębak. I stayed there for an additional two months before embarking on my journey back to France with an individual who had come from that country.

So, in 2008, I arrived in Paris, which was the purpose of my journey. However, I only stayed there for three months before leaving for London. Finding work there was relatively easy,

1 FSB: Federal Security Service, successor to the KGB in Russia.

2 Compulsory identity document for citizens of the Russian Federation with stamps showing registration of place of usual or temporary residence.

3 Pankisi Valley, Georgia, inhabited by the Chechen minority in Georgia, a region known to be a rear base for Islamist fighters.

4 Literally: fighter. During the first and second Chechen wars, this word designed Chechen resistance fighters, today it refers to members of the Islamist maquis in the North Caucasus.

5 Penal colony in Russia.

and I began working in the construction industry as an assistant to a site manager. Unfortunately, while attempting to regularize my immigration status, I was arrested at the Home Office. I was accused of illegally crossing the border and subsequently detained for three months in a detention center. Although my fingerprints had been recorded in Poland, I was reluctant to return there. Despite my attempts to appeal, I was unsuccessful. I was transported back in handcuffs and incarcerated for two months in a foreigner's prison located near Warsaw, specifically in Biała Podlaska. After a trial, I was ultimately released.

I relocated to Warsaw, where I resided in an apartment for six months. However, my asylum application was ultimately rejected. I proceeded to file an appeal with the assistance of a pro bono lawyer. Subsequently, I promptly returned to France via Austria. Unfortunately, while in Austria, I was subjected to street checks, arrested, and subsequently deported to Poland. During the court proceedings this time, the prosecutor requested a one-year imprisonment term. I defended myself to the best of my abilities, but the judge did not adhere to the prosecutor's request and sentenced me to spend two months in a detention center.

This last detention in Poland was the most severe out of all the previous ones I had experienced. It was a facility for foreign detainees located near Warsaw airport, functioning similarly to a prison. The conditions were extremely challenging. Firstly, we were confined to a small room with four beds day and night, spending most of our time there. In order to use the toilet or take a shower, we had to request permission by knocking on the door. Showers were only allowed at specific times. The outdoor walks were conducted in an incredibly small courtyard that hardly felt like walking at all. It was an overwhelming experience, and at times, I felt as if I were losing my sanity. I took the initiative to approach the director and expressed my inability to endure this place any longer, emphasizing that I was willing to do anything to be released. I requested to meet with him every day. Finally, after two months, I was granted my release. The director personally informed me of my freedom and bid me farewell.

I left for France as soon as I could, passing through Austria and Italy. However, upon my arrival in France, I was apprehended and

detained for two days before being sent back to Italy. In Italy, I was advised to go to Austria instead. While two individuals who were with me chose to return to Austria, I traveled from Milan to Nice and then took a train to Paris. In 2010, I visited the Créteil prefecture, where I was placed under the "Dublin" procedure due to my fingerprints being recorded in Poland and other countries. Consequently, I had to wait for 18 months before being eligible to apply for asylum in France. After numerous appointments and discussions, my case was abruptly closed. During a random identity check on the street, I was arrested and transported to the Bobigny detention center for a period of fifteen days. Subsequently, I received a decision ordering my readmission to Poland. The authorities attempted to put me on a plane, but I refused and was eventually released at the airport.

When the 18-month waiting period concluded, I visited the Bobigny prefecture to initiate the asylum application process. However, I was placed on the priority procedure and received a swift rejection from OFPRA (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons). I lodged an appeal with CNDA (National Court of Asylum), but in the interim, I was once again apprehended and brought before the Versailles court. This time, there were attempts to deport me to Russia. Following two hearings, I emerged victorious and was subsequently released. Finally, in 2013, I attended a hearing at CNDA alongside my lawyer, where I was granted refugee status.







**Good  
practices  
– housing**

# Tackling housing informality

Câlnic is a neighborhood in the western Romanian town of Reșița. Its residents live in self-built homes without property rights or planning permits. The community, mostly consisting of ethnic Roma, has grown over several decades and currently has 162 people, half of whom are children, living in 44 houses. The area is poorly accessible, situated between the railway and the river, with some houses built too close to the riverbank, putting them at risk of flooding. Since the houses lack legal recognition, basic utilities are absent, including drinking water and sewage infrastructure. The residents have only two wells that they built themselves. Out of the 44 homes, only 14 have legal contracts for electricity, while 19 are informally connected through improvised networks to their neighbors' electricity lines, and 11 homes have no electricity access at all. Additionally, only a portion of the residents possess permanent identity cards, which are registered at addresses other than their actual place of residence.

The absence of documents, such as land ownership and identity papers, prevents the settlement inhabitants from accessing various public and private services and support, such as social benefits, loans, and employment contracts. Furthermore, the lack of formal documentation for the houses hinders public investments in infrastructure and amenities. Romania has over 390 informal settlements, comprising nearly 100,000 people, according to the first official data collection conducted in 2021.

MKBT has launched a project to formalize the informal settlement of Câlnic, aiming to provide the residents with tenure rights to their land, obtain identity cards, access public and private services, and benefit from public investments in the area. This project marks the first attempt to regulate an informal settlement in Romania and is the result of a two-year research and advocacy project by MKBT in collaboration with local and national NGOs. These organizations successfully advocated for the necessary legal framework to enable such initiatives.

The participatory planning process involved conducting a detailed household-by-household community analysis, clarifying the cadastral status of the land, identifying environmental risks and planning limitations, facilitating on-site community consultations and negotiations to establish land boundaries, drafting



and approving a Zonal Urban Plan (assisted by an urban planning firm), and clarifying the legal procedures for the Municipality (which owns the land) to grant tenure rights to the families residing in the area. The project, titled “I don’t have documents, I don’t exist: Innovative model of participatory intervention in informal settlements,” is led by the NGO Make Better and is supported by the Reșița Municipality and the Humanitas Pro Deo Foundation, a local NGO with extensive experience working with impoverished families in Câlnic.

The project, which is still ongoing at the time of this report, will also facilitate public investments in the area. These investments will include expanding utilities, upgrading roads, building a bridge to improve connectivity with the rest of the city, and constructing flood mitigation dikes. This exemplary practice has garnered significant interest from other local authorities and national government entities seeking to replicate the process in other communities throughout the country.

Website: <https://locuireinformala.ro/> and [www.mkbt.ro](http://www.mkbt.ro)

## Keys to success

- **Working closely with the entire local community**, including households, through individual interactions and facilitated negotiations at the street and community levels, to develop and agree upon a land lot delineation plan.
- **Ensuring the active participation of the local authority in this process** and formally assigning them the responsibility of completing all the necessary procedural requirements.
- **Encouraging active involvement** and fostering good collaboration among representatives from various departments and services within the Municipality, such as the Urban Planning Department, Social Assistance Department, Taxation Department, Local Police, and other relevant entities, throughout the entire process.
- **Engaging a team of lawyers** specialized in planning and construction, as well as postgraduate students in urban law from Bucharest University, to provide legal expertise and prospect for appropriate legal procedures, limitations, and solutions that would enable the families residing in the area to obtain tenure on their land lots.



## Difficulties encountered – lessons learned

- **Informal neighborhoods often present complex situations and proximity challenges**, as they can be located in areas prone to natural hazards or with complicated proximities, such as protection perimeters of hazardous infrastructures. As a result, the process of planning regulation becomes highly bureaucratic, requiring numerous permits and lengthy timelines. Consequently, these projects require extended schedules that often exceed the typical duration allowed by funding bodies and are susceptible to administrative obstacles.
- **Reversed urban planning processes of this nature are less appealing to urban planning firms**, as they demand a particular openness, non-discrimination, and patience when working in marginalized communities. Additionally, they necessitate much longer periods for public consultations.
- **It is important to note that not all households within a community occupy land lots** that can be legally granted to families in various forms of tenure. For example, homes situated too close to the riverbank or railway line may pose safety risks, and families residing in those areas may not receive formal land rights, which can lead to tensions within the community and fear of eviction.

## Feasibility conditions

- **A comprehensive understanding of legal frameworks** regarding property rights and urban planning is crucial in addressing the situation effectively.
- **Active involvement and engagement of the local authority** are imperative for the success of the project.
- **Solutions and administrative procedures** should be tailored and adapted to the unique circumstances of each individual or household within the community.



## Germany

# The Share House “Refugio”

The concept of the Refugio project in Berlin originated from the experiences of Sven Lager and Elke Naters, a German writer and activist couple who worked in South Africa in 2010. Their vision was to establish a living environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds, including migrants, could coexist with German and other EU citizens facing unstable housing conditions. The Refugio aims to foster not only shared living arrangements but also communication, collaboration, and sustainability within the community.

The Berliner Stadtmission initiated the Refugio project in 2015, utilizing a building constructed by the Stadtmission in 1913.



Located in the vibrant Neukölln district of Berlin, the six-story Refugio building accommodates residents on three floors. Each floor comprises eight to eleven rooms with private bathrooms and shared kitchen and laundry facilities as well. Approximately forty individuals reside in the house, and each member actively contributes to the community's support and development. Volunteer work, such as serving in the café, and daily tasks like cleaning shared spaces, are integral parts of communal life. The guidelines for living together are outlined in a contract, which primarily entails a minimum commitment of four hours of community volunteer work per week. While residents pay rental fees, the rates are lower than the prevailing market prices.

Admission to the Refugio community is based on broad criteria. The primary considerations include the candidate's need for refuge (including asylum seekers, locals, or Europeans in precarious situations) and their social engagement. The representatives from each floor conduct interviews with candidates and make decisions through a collective vote regarding their acceptance into the community. Additionally, the building's premises on the first two floors house NGOs and self-migrant organizations, such as "Give Something Back To Berlin" (including the "Open Music School"), "Querstadtein," "Stadtteil Mütter in Kreuzberg," "Bikeygees e.V.," "Rückenwind," and "Kreuzbergprojekt." Some of these initiatives were developed with active involvement from Refugio residents or are currently collaborated upon by them.

Website: <https://refugio.berlin/>

## Keys to success

• **The initiators of the Share House Refugio had previously resided in the community** for several months, which led to the development of this grassroots initiative. The absence of a formal hierarchy attracted donors, volunteers, and subsequent residents to participate in living together and working on the project. From the project’s inception, a small team engaged in constant and intensive brainstorming, adopting a learning-by-doing approach within the new context.

• **The ratio of newcomers to locals in the Refugio community is approximately 50:50**, although this figure may vary, and there are no specific criteria or bureaucratic restrictions in place. This diverse environment fosters a two-way cultural exchange and facilitates the integration of newcomers into the host community. Shared spaces, particularly the kitchens, play a pivotal role in realizing the project’s vision of integrating “new Berliners” into Refugio and the broader community.

• **Local German residents living in Refugio**, along with the Stadtmission team, serve as informal social workers, providing assistance to other housemates with consultations, translations, social service paperwork, phone calls, and

more. The division of labor and voluntary work within Refugio contribute to the rapid labor and educational integration of community members, distinguishing it from accommodation centers for asylum seekers where individuals often enter the labor market or pursue studies at a later stage.

• **The selection of housemates within Refugio** takes into account their backgrounds, life situations, and levels of social engagement, resulting in a diverse community in terms of gender, migration, and housing backgrounds. This approach aims to reduce conflicts among community members. Furthermore, the ground floor public Cafe Refugio serves as a meeting place, fostering socialization and cultural exchange between residents and the neighborhood, extending the idea of cultural and social interaction beyond the Share House itself.

• **The primary distinction between Refugio and other projects involving migrants** and asylum seekers lies in its intensive daily integration practices and close communication on various levels, including the community, local/communal interactions, and engagement with the host community.

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **Initially, the length of stay in Refugio was limited to 18 months**, as it was deemed necessary for integration, language learning, building social competence, and establishing networks. However, this policy was later changed due to the challenging housing situation in Berlin. Currently, community members can stay for as long as they need, typically until they find a new permanent residence.
- **In order to ensure financial stability and support** the project, the Refugio team actively sought sources of income since 2017. They established a professional event management team to rent out rooms for various events such as conferences, seminars, workshops, weddings, and political meetings.
- **With the departure of the project initiators from Refugio**, new incentives were required to keep the residents motivated. It became important to maintain the residents' engagement in the project. However, the Refugio team does not enforce social contributions from the residents.
- **Despite residents having the freedom to choose their own housemates**, there can sometimes be challenges arising from differing perceptions of community rules and individual communication styles. These issues are not necessarily related to cultural or other backgrounds but are rather unique to each individual.
- **To promote project sustainability and facilitate cultural exchange**, Refugio created an opportunity for volunteers from around the world to participate. These volunteers can contribute by working at Cafe Refugio or assisting during public events.

## Feasibility conditions

- **Firstly, human and financial resources are needed:** a group of motivated individuals who believe in the project's idea and outside support, including donors, to keep the project running.
- **Residential and communal premises are required** for the project, ideally a complete house or premises with the necessary conditions for private and public life and activities.
- **The collaborative and volunteer work of the Refugio residents** contributes to the financial stability and sustainability of the project.
- **Support from other non-governmental organizations** that rent premises in the house (financially, in terms of human resources, etc.) is also important.

France

# Socio-legal support for occupants of a squat

Migrants have been occupying a disused factory in Pantin without rights or titles since 2011. Their administrative situation is diverse: asylum seekers, statutory refugees, rejected asylum seekers, and those in the process of regularization. Initially, there were approximately 25 people living in the squat, primarily single men with one couple.



Habitat-Cité has undertaken various actions with the squat occupants, including consultations to improve safety and living conditions, carrying out necessary work (some done by the occupants themselves), providing individual support for asylum applications, housing, access to healthcare, and job search procedures, as well as contacting a lawyer to request eviction delays. In 2016, the municipality of Pantin purchased the plot and tolerated the occupants by offering assistance in rehousing projects and gradually closing off rooms as people left, with the intention of reducing the number of inhabitants. However, several difficulties arose: some occupants couldn't be rehoused due to their administrative status, and although the occupants willingly accepted room closures, solidarity prevailed during winter when comrades were homeless and new arrivals were welcomed. Habitat-Cité



requested a land exchange so that the occupants could live elsewhere without interference from the city hall, but this request was refused.

Observing the presence of new occupants in the squat, the municipality of Pantin took steps to evict it in 2018. However, the occupants successfully defended their position four times. In 2018, the administrative court declared its lack of jurisdiction for this type of procedure. In 2019, the occupants were granted a 6-month delay. In 2020 and 2021, their lawyer submitted requests to the enforcement judge, seeking additional 6-month delays. These deadlines provided the occupants with a stable place to live and greatly facilitated their socio-legal support. In recent years, seven people have obtained refugee status, one person has obtained a residence permit, three people have secured social housing, and several others have found rental accommodation in the private sector after finding employment.

Short film « Une porte à Pantin » (17'): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmSRIGcoJ9A>

### Keys to success

- **The Habitat-Cité team translates and interprets the meeting minutes** into the language understood by the occupants.
- **Meetings with the occupants are conducted in the squat** to facilitate their participation.
- **Efforts in improving safety measures and updating procedures** for finding accommodation have resulted in obtaining eviction delays from the court.
- **The stabilization within the squat** has prevented the loss of occupants' administrative documents and facilitated the completion of legal procedures, leading to obtaining legal status and rehousing opportunities.
- **The implementation of various activities in the squat**, such as legal support, administrative procedures, language courses, and screenings, enables engagement with all occupants and contributes to their re-engagement.
- **The occupants actively defended their rights** by visiting the lawyer's office and attending court hearings.

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **Only a portion of the occupants participate in the meetings** with Habitat-Cité, resulting in limited information circulation.
- **Efforts to improve living conditions can serve as a means to re-engage occupants**, but their interest in participating in such efforts must be ensured. It is important to note that certain tasks, such as electrical work, pose risks and should be carried out by a qualified electrician.
- **The City Council refused to include occupants' representatives in meetings with the NGO**, preventing a direct relationship between the City Council and the occupants and leading to misunderstandings.
- **The City Council aimed to have control over the number and identity of the squat occupants.** However, since they were unable to provide alternative housing, this requirement could not be imposed.
- **As occupants leave the squat after finding accommodation or employment elsewhere**, new individuals arrive, creating a sense of never-ending work. Establishing the same dynamics with the new occupants is not always easy, as they are unaware of the history between the organization and the former occupants.
- **The formation of an occupants' organization should originate from the occupants themselves** rather than being imposed externally.

## Feasibility conditions

- **A legislative framework is crucial to prevent eviction** without providing alternative housing. Prior to 2018, no one in France could be evicted without a court decision. However, with the ASAP law enacted on 8th December 2020, eviction can now be ordered by the prefect without a court decision. Nonetheless, NGOs still have a range of legal tools at their disposal.
- **Establishing effective communication with the occupants**, especially when they have limited knowledge of the local language.
- **Familiarity with foreigner laws** and administrative/legal procedures.
- **Allocating significant human resources to the project** to ensure consistent monitoring of the occupants and to build a foundation of trust.

Italy

# Transitional Collective Residence La Salette

The project, known as “Residenza Collettiva Transitoria La Salette”, is a collaborative effort between civil society and the church community. It is situated in a building located at via Madonna della Salette 12, which is owned by the Italian Province of the Missionaries of Nostra Signora de La Salette. Originally designed as a boarding school, it later served as a residence for the elderly before being decommissioned in 2008. In 2014, approximately 90 refugees,



most of whom had participated in reception and inclusion programs during the 2011 migration wave, squatted the building.

In 2014, the Turin Diocese, the Pastoral Office for Migrants (Pastorale Migranti), the Diocesan Caritas (Caritas Diocesana), along with the building owners, the squatters themselves, volunteers from the Refugee and Migrant Solidarity Committee, the Cooperativa Orso, and experts from “Luoghi Possibili,” launched a complex and comprehensive intervention program. The objective was to transform the informal and illegal occupation of the building into an integrated social solution. The program aimed to achieve the following goals:

- Implement a gradual process of regularizing living arrangements through shared decision-making.
- Support self-determined pathways for the residents, ensuring a stable and affordable living space without predetermined time limits.
- Enhance housing conditions through property redevelopment.

- Establish a new transitional and co-managed housing solution specifically for individuals in vulnerable situations.
- Since the second half of 2015, the intervention has progressed through three main areas of work, focusing on facilitating the transition from an informal and illegal settlement to a formal and legal housing solution:
  - Retrofitting the building to meet new requirements and standards.
  - Providing social support to the residents, including assistance with employment, legal matters, administrative tasks, healthcare, and more.
  - Establishing participatory and responsible forms of co-living.

Initially, the collaborative aspect of living was fostered through three “rituals”: meetings on each floor, inter-floor coordination meetings, and general assemblies. These practices ensured inclusivity, promoted the exchange of ideas, and facilitated collective decision-making. Subsequently, some modifications were made, and the “co-management committee” was formed. The committee comprises representatives from each floor, social workers, experts in participatory processes, and one volunteer from the Refugee and Migrant Solidarity Committee.

A set of rules was developed through a participatory process involving the residents themselves. Both new and existing occupants are required to abide by these rules, which they agree to by signing “the housing pact.” The pact is based on three pillars: rules for harmonious coexistence, shared responsibility for private and communal spaces, and a symbolic monthly contribution from each resident to partially cover housing expenses.

## Description of objectives and fields of action

Support for independent living: This involves assisting residents in finding new housing solutions, providing support and guidance to those leaving the collective residence, and ensuring the sustainability of their new accommodations.

Shared and collaborative living: The aim is to foster a responsible and solidarity-based living model within a collective context. This includes promoting cohabitation among individuals with different vulnerabilities.

Social well-being in preparation for autonomy: Creating an environment that nurtures positive relationships and social conditions, empowering residents to achieve the necessary skills and resources for independent living while preventing legal, health, and psychological complications.

Website : <https://www.cooperativaorso.it/prodotti/la-salette/>

Article written by Laura Ferrero : <https://radicalhousingjournal.org/2020/gaining-regaining-housing-stability-through-collective-action/>



## Keys to success

• **The Collective Residence La Salette not only meets housing needs** but also provides a dignified and affordable solution for marginalized individuals affected by challenging working and economic conditions in society (such as seasonal labor, informal work, grey employment, intermittent jobs, etc.). It offers a legal and secure tem-

porary residence, providing stability for residents to pursue their life goals, whether in education, work, or family.

• **The possibility of being granted the status of residence there.**

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

• **Fundraising is not always easy to carry out**

• **Governance of the residence can be challenging** and requires a significant amount of work to be organized and approved

• **Identification of the legal form for managing the residence** and its collective dwelling

• **Liability of the inhabitants** can be an obstacle in many aspects

## Feasibility conditions

• **Having the initial economic availability** for renovation and energy upgrading of the property.

• **Creating a multidisciplinary team** to pave the way for a new housing solution.

• **Collaborating with professionals**, architects, who, by navigating the regulatory complexities of municipal, regional, and national legislation, managed to formalize the residence.

• **Relying on funding provided by an NGO** or another organization for utilities, maintenance, and personnel on an annual basis.

• **The owner of the buildings** should agree to a residential project.

# Odesa Temporary Night Shelter

Homeless individuals face complex needs, and their voice is often unheard. Their lack of a home is correlated with physical insecurity, absence of identity documents, health problems, limited education, and inability to access the labor market. The number of beds in Bucharest shelters does not meet the existing needs. Furthermore, during winter, the homeless population increases in the capital city as additional individuals temporarily migrate here due to the lack of specialized services and essential resources for survival in neighboring areas. The quality of services in public shelters is very low, with beneficiaries complaining about uncleanliness, violence, theft, and overcrowding.



With the start of the war in Ukraine and the influx of refugees at the Eastern Romanian borders, Carusel, the Bucharest Municipality, and the Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance of Bucharest University agreed to collaborate in transforming the shelter into a reception center for refugees. Since March 2022, refugees have been accommodated here. Those hosted have access to medical assistance, activities for children, and recreational sessions for women's groups. They receive support in finding employment, obtaining temporary identity documents, visas, legal papers, and legalized translations, among other services.

Initially, the people were in a transitional process and did not stay more than a few nights, but later it became a residential space. As a result, since its operation as a refugee center, the place has been adapted to the needs of the residents, including the addition of a children's play area and a green space for relaxation, the establishment of medical and psychological offices, and the provision of a fully equipped kitchen, terrace, and a private space dedicated to women.

In 2016, the NGO Carusel launched a temporary winter shelter model in Bucharest designed to address the specific needs of this vulnerable population. Initially, the shelter operated in a hostel acquired by the NGO Carusel. Later, through a partnership with the General Directorate of Social Assistance of the Municipality of Bucharest (GDSAMB), the shelter continued to operate in a space constructed from modular containers. The Carusel methodology prioritizes the safety of beneficiaries, particularly women, and with the inclusion of other components such as cleanliness, food, social assis-

tance, and medical care, positions this shelter as a model of good practice. The infrastructure is provided by GDSAMB, and the organization finances the services through fundraising and volunteering campaigns.

The modular shelter was purposefully built to provide the necessary spaces for managing a relatively large influx of people. Individuals accessing this service are guided and accompanied step by step to ensure a safe experience throughout all stages, including admission, registration, storage of belongings, sanitation, meal service, room and bed assignment, and more. This is made possible thanks to the involvement of numerous volunteers and students from the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, who undertake internships within Carusel.

The working methodology follows the principle of “first come, first served” for admitting beneficiaries. Admission is not conditional on providing identity documents, referrals, or proof of previous residence in Bucharest. The shelter is inclusive of subgroups of beneficiaries such as the Roma community, LGBTQ+ individuals, people living with HIV, and those with mild disabilities. Special spaces are also provided for the pets of beneficiaries. The shelter has strict rules, and a system of progressive sanctions is in place, which can ultimately lead to a ban on access in extreme cases.

In addition to operating this shelter, Carusel also offers support services through a mobile team known as the “social ambulance,” which specifically targets extreme cases of people who are unwilling to go to the shelter. The field team provides beds, sleeping bags, warm clothing, hot tea, soup, and necessary medicine to these individuals.

Carusel is actively engaged in raising public awareness about the plight of homeless individuals and encourages companies and individuals to contribute donations to support the functioning of the shelter.

Website: <https://carusel.org/>

## Keys to success

- **People-Centered Approach:** The Carusel team considers the specific needs of individuals, whether they are psychological (such as the need for tranquility, safety, independence, being heard, and respected) or physical (providing requested donated items and basic medicine for colds, viruses, cuts, as well as essential medical care like wound dressing). Specialized barber services are also offered to ensure the mental and physical well-being of individuals who may feel neglected or disrespected by society.

- **Effective communication is highly emphasized,** with the shelter team regularly reminding beneficiaries of the operational rules and providing explanations for each rule.

- **Menus are constantly adjusted to accommodate various dietary requirements,** including options for fasting/vegetarian food and tailored menus for individuals with dental issues.

## Difficulties encountered – lessons learned

- **When the shelter primarily functioned as a night shelter**, socializing activities were intentionally limited to ensure ample time for rest.
- **Due to its temporary nature, in the morning, beneficiaries were required to vacate the premises** to facilitate daily sanitation of the space. Additionally, the shelter closed during the spring season, resulting in a temporary suspension of the service (before it operated as a reception center for refugees).
- **The shelter operates with the help of volunteers**, who are coordinated by Carousel employees that typically work within other programs of the organization.

## Feasibility conditions

- **A strong motivation** to run such a service.
- **Clear and strict working procedures.**
- **Careful selection of volunteers** to mitigate the risk of negative attitudes towards the beneficiaries.



# Municipality support to a community of squatters

In the summer of 2011, approximately 200 people residing in a squat within a vacant factory in Montreuil were evicted. These individuals are undocumented migrants, including those whose asylum applications were rejected or who have never obtained a residence permit despite residing in France for over 10 years. Many of them work illegally in the construction and restaurant industries. Following months of living on the streets or in a stadium, they relocated to a new squat, which was a former locksmith's workshop spanning 1307 m<sup>2</sup> in Montreuil. The city of Montreuil provides social support to the occupants and enters into a precarious occupation agreement with them, renewable every four years. Subsequently, the city designates the location as a migrant hostel, similar to other hostels in the area.

Upon entering the building, an assessment of unsanitary conditions was conducted, leading to safety improvements, insulation, and renovation of the sanitary facilities. In 2015, additional significant work was carried out to furnish and insulate the rooms and dormitories, with regular maintenance undertaken to prevent rapid deterioration of the building. The 2015 renovation was partly

funded by a foundation and donations from the supporters of the occupants and local residents. In 2011, the occupants established an NGO comprising both squat inhabitants and external supporters. They implemented internal regulations governing community life and actively participated in neighborhood events, such as garage sales, while also organizing open events at the squat for the wider community.

The city of Montreuil supports the occupants in their efforts to regularize their status, recognizing that some have been in France for over 20 years. In 2019, the city wrote a letter to the prefecture, followed by an appointment. The prefecture's approach is to handle regularization cases individually rather than regularizing all occupants. In May 2020, the city of Montreuil sent a second letter to the prefecture, which remained unanswered. Starting from August 2020, the city began compiling an annual official list of occupants to demonstrate their presence on the territory, a crucial element in the regularization process.



## Keys to success

- **The occupants have fostered an open relationship with their neighborhood**, garnering support from sympathizers and neighbors. The swift support from the citizens' mobilization prompted the municipality of Montreuil to stand behind the occupants.
- **The municipality of Montreuil made a commitment to the occupants**, providing not only a place to live but also financial contributions towards repairs, as well as social and administrative support.
- **The occupants established an NGO and actively mobilized to manage it**. This organization grants them legal recognition and representation before institutions such as the municipality and prefecture. It enables them to collect memberships, donations, and engage with networks.
- **Collective life within the squat is governed by internal rules** that all occupants respect. Violations of these rules result in fines payable to the occupants' organization.
- **Through funds collected by their organization, the squat has been made safe and renovated**, with project management handled by two specialized organizations: Habitats Solidaires and the Foundation of Emergency Architects.
- **To assist occupants without financial resources, a solidarity system has been implemented**, whereby they contribute a portion of the charges.
- **An NGO comprised of migrant women has entered into an agreement with the occupants**, providing daily cooking services at the squat for less than 2 euros. This arrangement allows occupants to have affordable meals, while the women earn income from their work. Additionally, individuals from outside the squat are welcome to dine there.

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **Regular renovations are conducted using reused parts**, which have a limited lifespan due to their quality and the intensive use of the premises, given the large number of occupants.
- **The occupants' inability to secure regularization from the prefecture** results in their inability to access legal employment or rent private accommodations. As a result, the squat persists.
- **To support the eventual regularization of the occupants, the municipality has taken the decision to create an official annual list of occupants**, serving as proof of their presence on the territory and providing the necessary evidence.

## Feasibility conditions

- **The strong political will of a city** that agrees to offer a disused space, sign a precarious occupation agreement, and commit itself in the long term to the administrative procedures of the occupants.

- **The occupants' ability to internally organize** and ensure community life, particularly through the management of an occupants' organization.

- **The presence of a supportive ecosystem** consisting of sympathizers, neighbors, and organizations specialized in social support and renovation.





MIGRANTS' TRAJECTORIES:

# **Maria from Romania**



I have five children, and we live in this house here in Călnic, which originally belonged to my husband's parents. Well, technically, we're not married, but he is the man I live with. I moved here 19 years ago to be with him. However, he has been in prison during this time...

Unfortunately, we don't have electricity in this house. We rely on a cable connected to my neighbor's network, but the account is not in my name. The reason for this is that I don't have my ID registered at this house address. I lack the necessary paperwork for this house.

All five of my children attend school, except for the youngest who is only 2 years old. There's a bus that takes them to school from the other side of the river. Often, they have to walk through mud when it rains, and it gets very messy here. The children's pants get dirty, and it's not pleasant for them to go to school in such a state. Unfortunately, nothing is being done here. There are no proper roads or even access to clean water.

My wish is to be able to build a bathroom for my children, so they have a place to wash themselves. You see, they go to school in this condition, and I believe no one would like to receive a call from their child's teacher stating that their child smells at school. It's not a pleasant situation. Our children should also have the opportunity to go to school clean, as they should be.

We don't have access to a water supply here. When I approach the water authority, they inform me that I can't have a water pipe connected to my house because I am not the owner and lack the necessary paperwork. Without an ID, there is very little I can do. Currently, we rely on a dilapidated well, but the water is contaminated with sand. We have to use buckets and plastic bottles to collect water and bring it to our house. During periods of high water levels in the river, our houses get flooded. It's a terrible situation when that happens. Last time, the water reached the first room, where I have the kitchen.


Initially, there was only one room here, which was insufficient for our family. Thankfully, we received some assistance and managed to build a second room, where I now have the kitchen. The room is partially covered with tiles, plastic tablecloth, and some metal sheets. However, it still leaks when it rains. In fact, the entire roof once collapsed, and we had to purchase materials to fix it as best we could.

I solely rely on the children's allowance as my source of income. I'm unable to apply for social assistance in this area because my ID is registered in my native village, which is far away, and I am unable to travel there. Additionally, individuals who have proper documentation for their houses demand 200 EUR to register my ID at their address. This is a significant amount of money for me, considering I need to provide for myself, my husband, and my older children.

Some people from our community choose to go abroad. They live with relatives or anyone they know in those countries. Some stay for a short period of 2-3 months and then return, while others stay for a longer duration. I have also traveled abroad with a relative of my husband. My intention was to apply for social assistance there, but unfortunately, I wasn't able to accomplish anything. We didn't have a house there, so we lived in a caravan along with approximately 25-30 other families, all of whom were Romani. The living space was extremely cramped, it was cold, and we had very little money. I stayed there with my children for about two months, and then we decided to come back.

During our time there, I encountered someone who had more knowledge about paperwork and language skills. They offered to assist me in obtaining the necessary documents for a fee of 500 EUR, enabling me to apply for social assistance. However, I couldn't afford that amount of money. As a result, I returned to my hometown, and I have no desire to go back there. Currently, my husband is incarcerated somewhere nearby, but the children are safe, attending school, and overall, I find it better to remain here.





**Good  
practices –  
employ-  
ment and  
language  
teaching**

## Germany

# Café Talk

Language courses for asylum seekers in Germany are provided either by the BAMF (Bundes-Amt für Migration und Flüchtlinge) or by local communities, depending on the asylum seeker's status. If they have the prospect of being recognized as refugees, the BAMF will cover the cost of 300 hours of classes, equivalent to 6 courses up to level B1. For those without a perspective to stay, the municipalities have taken over in the last three years, acknowledging the absurdity of having tens of thousands of people waiting for a decision without speaking German. However, these courses are challenging, too fast, and too complicated, leading to frustration for many enthusiastic students

with a refugee background. Originally designed for foreigners with a high school degree or similar qualifications, they do not meet the needs of most refugees. The major shortcoming is the lack of time dedicated to practicing speaking the new language.

Café Talk was founded approximately 8 years ago by volunteer organizations Asylarbeitskreis and Weststadt sagt JA, with the support of a Protestant church in Heidelberg. It was intended as a meeting place for foreigners who wanted to learn German and local

Germans. The idea was to find a free room, recruit volunteers, provide coffee, tea, and some sweets to create a pleasant atmosphere, and have paper, pens, and board games available, while advertising the opening hours in the camps where asylum seekers are accommodated.

People started coming in, mostly from the registration camp near Heidelberg and the three accommodation centers in the city. Over time, it also attracted long-term residents from different countries who, for various reasons, hadn't had the opportunity to learn proper German over the years, particularly elderly women. Volunteers were plentiful, and to this day, they continue to arrive, ranging from retired school teachers to young students, nurses, actors, artists, and migrants with excellent German skills. People from all walks of life, young and old, participate. Each session of Café Talk welcomes between 60 and 180 migrants and involves 10 to 20 volunteers.

As the demand grew, the organizers had to find a larger venue for Café Talk. They discovered a church with spacious community rooms, including a large kitchen, where the volunteers still gather twice a week. Café Talk offers



German learning “classes” organized spontaneously based on the attendees of the day, including asylum seekers and teachers, covering a range from absolute beginners to advanced learners. Plain-language brochures in eight different languages, along with pencils, paper, and a children’s area with toys and activities, have been provided. Drinks and sweets contribute greatly to the informal and welcoming atmosphere.

Website: [www.café-talk.com](http://www.café-talk.com)

## Keys to success

- **A space open to everyone**, irrespective of their administrative status.
- **Dedicated volunteers** with diverse backgrounds and a strong sense of commitment.
- **The long-standing engagement of volunteers**, which fosters project stability.
- **A welcoming atmosphere** that cultivates trust and fosters meaningful connections.



## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **The exiles demonstrated a strong desire to learn** and exhibited high levels of motivation.
- **Individuals are capable and willing to overcome their fears and obstacles** when given the opportunity to learn together.
- **In addition to language acquisition, the program also promotes cultural understanding and social integration**, fostering a sense of community. Café Talk serves as a meeting place for both exiles and local residents.
- **Being the only initiative of its kind** in Heidelberg, Café Talk sometimes faces a demand that surpasses the available volunteer capacity. By December 2022, attendance had increased by 200%.

## Feasibility conditions

- **Availability of free rooms.**
- **Abundance of volunteers** to accommodate numerous groups.
- **A committed and dependable group of organizers.**
- **Effective fundraising** and public relations efforts.
- **Collaboration among various organizations**, such as NGOs, churches, community centers, and others.

# Socio-linguistic workshops for young unaccompanied minors

Habitat-Cité offers young people awaiting schooling the opportunity to participate in socio-linguistic workshops twice a week in libraries throughout the year. These young people are predominantly boys aged 14 to 18, primarily from West Africa, Pakistan, or Bangladesh. While some arrived in France with their parents, the majority came alone. Often, they lack stable accommodation and find themselves sleeping in emergency shelters or on the streets. Referrals to the workshops come from the NGO's partner organizations: The Information and Orientation Centre (CIO) and the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). These structures, in conjunction with the work carried out by Aide Sociale à l'Enfance (Social Assistance for Minors), support them in their administrative and social procedures.

The socio-linguistic workshops have three main objectives: to address the high demand for French language learning among young people during the considerable period between their arrival in France and their enrollment in the education system; to equip them with tools that facilitate their daily lives, including spatial, temporal, social, and cultural references; and to establish the library as a refuge and resource hub, enabling them to forge social connections and access information. The workshops welcome both literate and non-literate young people, regardless of their proficiency in French, offering a diverse range of content accessible to learners at all language levels.



Habitat-Cité employees and volunteers take turns running the socio-linguistic workshops, with the participation of a librarian in each session. Working in pairs enables them to actively listen and identify the specific needs or difficulties of teenagers, particularly in writing or participating in certain activities.

The workshops focus on practical objectives, covering various themes such as self-introduction, discussing health, hobbies, and professional aspirations, navigating the city, shopping, and using public transportation. These themes, developed over two to three one-and-a-half-hour lessons, provide opportunities for young people to practice phonetics, learn vocabulary relevant to their daily lives, and engage in grammar and conjugation exercises in an enjoyable manner. Drawings, photos, and games, such as mimes and memory games, are frequently used to encourage participation among young people who have diverse language proficiency levels. Additionally, facilitators utilize library resources, including books, atlases, dictionaries, magazines, and DVDs, to familiarize young people with these materials.

These workshops differ from traditional language courses as their primary focus is on promoting autonomy in everyday situations. Language learning occurs through immersion in the environment and the exploration of French socio-cultural codes. The courses serve an important social function, aiming to alleviate the isolation experienced by young people. They encourage interaction among participants, engagement in other activities offered by Habitat-Cité (such as visits to cultural sites, cinema or theater outings), and the development of a special connection with the city's libraries. These libraries serve as intermediate spaces where young people can go outside of the workshops to rest, seek consultation, or borrow books.

### Keys to success

- **The partnership with key structures in the city** facilitates the easy identification of the workshops by young people in the area.

- **The workshops taking place in libraries**, with the consistent presence of a librarian for support, fosters the development of a lasting connection between the young participants and the institution.

- **The workshops are structured around themes** that are both practical for everyday life and engaging, which encourages the active participation of young people regardless of their previous level of education.

- **Arranging the tables in a circle** instead of rows promotes active listening and the exchange of ideas among the young participants. This setup is essential for building their confidence and estab-

lishing an equal footing between the teachers' input and the contributions of the young people themselves.

- **In cases where the group is large or the proficiency levels are highly diverse**, Habitat-Cité seeks the assistance of volunteers to co-facilitate the workshops, promoting personalized guidance during the exercises.

- **Furthermore, the young participants are given the opportunity to take on pedagogical responsibilities.** Those who are more proficient and literate assist their peers who may find the exercises challenging. They also support the teachers and librarians in understanding the non-French-speaking young people by utilizing their native languages.

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **Mobilizing all young people in the territory** to participate in the workshops poses a challenge, especially for those who are most isolated and lack access to their accommodations.
- **Young people facing significant administrative difficulties**, such as the denial of minority status, refusal of schooling, or prolonged waiting periods to enter school, are particularly challenging to engage.
- **Sensitive topics such as family issues**, migration conditions, and references to the country of origin require careful handling. While many young people are willing to share their backgrounds, socio-cultural heritage, and experiences, it is essential to approach these topics with prior preparation to ensure their comfort and well-being.
- **The constant change in the group composition** and the varying language levels present difficulties in preparing the courses. The workshops must be designed to address the pedagogical needs of both communicative and non-communicative, literate and non-literate young people, taking into account their heterogeneous language abilities.

## Feasibility conditions

- **Having knowledge of pedagogical techniques** for facilitating socio-linguistic workshops is essential, as it differs from traditional foreign language courses.
- **It is important to encourage the participation of every young person** while being mindful not to rush those who may be at a lower proficiency level. Participants come from diverse backgrounds and possess varying levels of oral fluency and familiarity with school culture.
- **Sufficient human resources** should be available to provide individualized support to young people during reading and writing exercises.
- **Building a network of partners** is crucial to offer social and administrative support to young people alongside their involvement in the workshops.



Italy

# Language training and Italian language education

Cooperativa Orso offers training activities aimed at promoting the learning of Italian as a second language for foreigners. The cooperative operates through various projects, including those within the SAI projects, which provide support for refugees and asylum seekers, and the Fami projects, which benefit citizens from third countries. Additionally, they offer individual and private training courses for all foreign citizens.



Cooperativa Orso's language training follows modern methodologies and approaches used in language teaching. They employ a global and communicative approach, as well as a humanistic-affective method, with a focus on the individual training needs of each learner. The language trainers at Cooperativa Orso work autonomously to facilitate language learning through structured Italian courses (such as A1, A2, B1 levels), small workshops on specific topics, individual teaching support, tutoring, and more. The teaching method primarily involves frontal instruction but

is enriched with informal moments and, if possible, field trips to personally experience places, spaces, services, and vocabulary.

Some of the courses offered by Cooperativa Orso are part of the Piedmont Region's Civic Linguistic Training Plan, which is financed with AMIF funds from the Home Affairs Ministry. These courses represent the main Italian L2 training opportunity for foreign citizens. Italian language courses are available to asylum seekers, as well as individuals with other statuses and refugees, through reception projects, the local public system (CPIA), NGOs, and other training agencies. Within the SAI projects, it is mandatory to provide asylum seekers and individuals with protection with a minimum of 15 hours per week of language training.

Website :

<https://www.cooperativaorso.it/aree/per-la-formazione/alfabetizzazione-linguistica-per-stranieri/>

## Keys to success

- **Cooperativa Orso offers training activities** that are part of a complex and articulated system of language training in Italy. This includes Italian language courses and Licence to Learn courses organized by the CPIA, training courses organized by Vocational Training Centres, and FAMI courses through European projects.
- **The students participating in these courses are highly motivated** as they are learning a language that they need to live, move around the territory, and work.
- **The training provided by Cooperativa Orso** allows for the complete immersion of foreign individuals in the Italian socio-cultural and linguistic context.

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **Insufficient teacher training.**
- **Overly bureaucratic nature** of some language training projects.

## Feasibility conditions

- **Having a project framework** (such as the SAI projects, the FAMI projects, etc.) to foster a more complete and systemic inclusion approach
- **Leveraging the desire to communicate** and get involved
- **Counting on a physical or virtual space** to facilitate this.

## Germany

# “Language Bridges” inside accommodation centres



A significant portion of the roughly 1.25 million refugees who entered Germany's borders in 2015-16 were unable to meet the requirements of the asylum law. This was either due to their personal circumstances or because they had entered another European country before Germany, making them a “Dublin case.” The German administrations labeled them as “refugees without a stay perspective,” which had several consequences for their living conditions, including the inability to apply for language courses.

Despite being wealthy and well-equipped, the city of Heidelberg had only three accommodation centers (ACs) to house a total of 500 refugees. This was because the city provided free public transportation for a large registration camp on the outskirts, which accommodated 5,000 people. One of the three ACs was exclusively for men, housing 130 individuals.

Recognizing that these individuals needed occupation and should start planning their personal and professional projects, Asylarbeitskreis decided to initiate a new project called “building language bridges.” With financial support from the federal government of Baden-Württemberg, Asylarbeitskreis was able to employ a part-time German language teacher who organized courses within one AC and another primarily for families. The teacher recruited and coordinated approximately 25 volunteers, most of whom were young teacher students, as well as members of Asylarbeitskreis of all ages.

Participation in the language courses exceeded all expectations. In the AC for single men, more than half of the residents (around 60) attended the courses, necessitating the use of space in two corridors in addition to the two study rooms. In the AC for families, the classes were mainly attended by single women and mothers. The project lasted for four years and continued in the form of small courses.

Website : [www.asyl-heidelberg.de/unsere-angebote/bildung/](http://www.asyl-heidelberg.de/unsere-angebote/bildung/)

## Keys to success

- **No prerequisites are required** to take part in language courses.
- **The approach to language learning differs from that of official courses**, focusing on the everyday interests and needs of learners, particularly conversation skills.
- **There is the involvement of many highly committed volunteers.**
- **Small groups of learners are created** to provide a supportive learning environment, and teacher tandems are often organized.
- **Regular training is provided for teachers** in language teaching for foreigners. Additionally, regular workshops cover asylum law, administrative procedures, discussions on cultural differences, and learners’ countries of origin.
- **Time is invested in giving all teachers a sense of belonging together**, even if they do not work with the same groups of learners.
- **Time is made available for other social activities**, such as gardening around the AC, cookery workshops, and excursions to different parts of Heidelberg.

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **More than half of the individuals living in the ACs expressed a desire to learn** and made continuous efforts to attend the courses.
- **Offering language learning where the refugees are located** is an encouraging experience for both parties.
- **Integration occurs effortlessly**, starting with the close contact between teachers and learners.
- **7-8 years later, more than half of the “men with no prospect of stay” have developed long-term settlement opportunities**, including employment, successful vocational training, and access to individual accommodation.
- **People who have fled their country have often experienced numerous traumatic events**, and these experiences manifest in concentration issues and various hardships.
- **The same applies to their precarious living conditions**, which contribute to stress, learning difficulties, and unreliability. It is therefore crucial for teachers to be aware of these underlying problems in order to better support learners and demonstrate patience.
- **Instances of racism among different cultural groups were frequently observed**, necessitating extensive discussions among the teachers to agree on a collective approach to address the issue.



## Feasibility conditions

- **Rooms equipped with basic facilities** within the accommodation centers
- **Budget allocation** for an organizer of the volunteer network
- **A satisfactory number of volunteers**

# Language trainings with the aim of access to employment

The language trainings with the aim of accessing employment enable individuals who are distant from employment - long-term unemployed individuals, asylum seekers of more than six months, and political refugees - to improve their level of French while preparing for their professional integration. Organized twice a year and lasting an average of five months, these courses have expanded over time and since 2020 have included:

- 135 hours of French as a Foreign Language or literacy courses
- 8 employment workshops on the world of work in France
- 3 company visits
- 12 hours of arts and crafts workshops (audiovisual, theatre, carpentry)
- 50 hours of introductory computer workshops for beginners
- Individual socio-professional follow-up
- Cultural visits to theaters, cinemas, and museums

At the end of the training session, the trainees have the opportunity to obtain a nationally recognized French diploma, with examination costs partially or fully covered by the NGO depending on the trainee's resources.

The trainees attending the training have a wide range of skill levels. Some have previous schooling while others do not. There are individuals with various work experiences as well as those who have never had a declared job. Some have taken French courses before, while others have never done so. These modules are designed to address the main difficulties encountered by foreigners in accessing French language learning, training, and employment in France:

- Poor command of the French language,



both oral and written, in private and professional contexts, hindering autonomy, rights, socialization, and cultural integration.

- Lack of knowledge about the labor market, job search codes, and involved actors.
- Unequal mastery of computer tools.
- Lack of self-confidence and difficulty in developing personal skills.

Habitat-Cité's language trainings with the aim of accessing employment are carried out by a multidisciplinary team of language teachers, professional integration officers, digital advisors, and cultural partners. The program focuses on language skills, professional projects, and the development of the beneficiaries' social capital. The goal is to facilitate the integration of as many individuals as possible into employment or vocational training, whether it be initial or continuing education, and into mainstream systems.

Website: <https://www.habitat-cite.org/projets/formations-linguistiques-a-visee-professionnelle/>

## Keys to success

• **The flexibility** offered by the semi-intensive training schedule (12 hours per week) allows trainees to easily balance their personal commitments (such as administrative appointments, childcare, and part-time jobs) with their training.

• **The retention of trainees in the program** is facilitated by the social and professional support provided by the project managers, who actively work to overcome any obstacles that may hinder trainees from staying in the training.

• **The limited size of each learner group**, with approximately ten trainees per group (totaling around sixty trainees per session), is highly appreciated by the participants. This smaller

group size allows for more individualized support and guidance from the facilitators.

• **The manual and artistic workshops**, including audiovisual, theatre, and carpentry, serve to unlock speaking skills, foster group cohesion, and bring out latent skills that trainees may possess without even realizing it, such as communication, entrepreneurship, creativity, respect for instructions, and leadership abilities.

• **Upon completion of the training course**, trainees have the option to continue their learning by enrolling in a second training session or seeking professional support from a specialized advisor.

## Difficulties - lessons learned

- **Although asylum seekers are eligible for training**, their professional integration (access to employment or vocational training) is contingent upon obtaining a work permit, which is extremely challenging. As a result, asylum seekers often participate in multiple training sessions with Habitat-Cité without being able to secure employment, unless they are discouraged by administrative obstacles.
- **Many trainees face obstacles** that make it difficult for them to remain in training for an extended period: difficulties in attending language training for individuals experiencing homelessness (particularly due to geographical instability and health issues related to poor housing), or those who cannot afford transportation costs. Habitat-Cité has allocated funds to provide monthly transportation tickets for trainees who lack financial resources.
- **The inclusion of young parents**, especially young mothers, in training remains challenging in the absence of childcare services offered by the NGO during the training period.
- **In 2020, the language courses were reduced from 250 hours to 135 hours** per training session to comply with health requirements for smaller group sizes (10-12 people) during the pandemic. While smaller groups allow teachers to allocate more time to each trainee, the 135-hour duration is insufficient for learners focusing on literacy. Some trainees are unable to pass the French language exam after the initial training session and need to enroll in a second session.

## Feasibility conditions

- **Allocate sufficient human resources** to the project for overall coordination and enhanced socio-professional support of the trainees.
- **Receive training in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)** and language level assessment to establish initial evaluation tools in collaboration with language teachers.
- **Develop in-house expertise** in providing professional support to foreigners and individuals in precarious situations: acquire administrative knowledge necessary for addressing employment obstacles, monitor possibilities of regularization through employment, and gain knowledge of local, regional, and national measures that facilitate the integration of new arrivals, among others.
- **Establish a network with economic partners** in the region to promote the integration of trainees.



## Germany

# Network Job Integration

The involvement of multiple public bodies responsible for employing refugees adds complexity to the steps they must take to finalize their employment. When seeking job opportunities, refugees are required to interact with various entities, including the BAMF (the authority responsible for processing asylum applications), the social administration, the employment agency, the health insurance company, the administration for foreigners, the chamber of commerce, the chamber of crafts, and many others. Since 2015, there have been several instances where individuals have secured employment but subsequently lost it before even starting due to insufficient coordination among the involved parties.

As a result, Asylarbeitskreis took the initiative to offer training courses to all interested volunteers and create a directory that compiles the contact



information of refugee jobseekers. This directory is distributed to employers, schools, and advice centers that express interest. In the summer of 2016, Asylarbeitskreis Heidelberg introduced the concept of a round table, providing a platform for individuals to meet, establish connections, exchange knowledge, address needs, and share ideas. The aim was to develop a network of employment stakeholders specifically focused on the unique requirements of refugees and asylum seekers.

In 2017 and 2018, the network successfully organized three major JOB SPEED DATINGs, which facilitated connections between employers in the region, including two theaters, and asylum seekers. This initiative resulted in numerous employment contracts and internship opportunities. Additionally,

the network arranged several preparatory workshops with asylum seekers, held at the men's reception center, covering various topics such as:

- CV preparation, including taking a picture
- Identifying the desired job type
- Assessing skills and determining what can be offered
- Understanding available job opportunities and job descriptions
- Guidance on appropriate questions to ask
- Dress code recommendations and do's and don'ts.

Website : [www.asyl-heidelberg.de/unsere-angebote/arbeit/](http://www.asyl-heidelberg.de/unsere-angebote/arbeit/)

## Keys to success

- **Engaged staff in all organizations.**
- **A dedicated leadership**, someone who is in charge of keeping the network functioning.
- **Regular meetings**, preferably once per month or at least every 6 weeks, which proved to be achievable and meaningful.
- **Open exchange of experiences**, needs, and desires.
- **Collective training on new regulations**, laws, and requirements.

## Difficulties encountered – lessons learned

- **Within all administrations and organizations**, it was possible to find people who are engaged and highly interested in improving their jobs and networking with other actors.
- **All involved partners** benefit from communicating with actors in other fields.
- **A better understanding of the significantly different work conditions** of the partners.
- **Resolving difficult cases** is possible through more direct contact among the actors.
- **Establishing new and shorter ways of contact** between the partners sometimes requires diplomatic efforts within their respective organizations.

## Feasibility conditions

- **Dedicated and open-minded individuals** who reliably organize the network meetings and send out invitations.
- **Knowledge, know-how, and regular training** on updates related to laws, administrations, and their respective responsibilities.
- **Strong communication skills.**

Italy

# Non Solo Asilo and A.R.L.O.

The NON SOLO ASILO [NSA] project started in 2011 and, at that time, was mainly involved in supporting refugees, including providing economic support for their self-employment projects.

Starting from 2016, building upon the experience gained in previous years and with the availability of economic resources, NON SOLO ASILO has transformed itself from a project into a service. This transformation is reflected in its structure, methods of access, and utilization by the target audience.



NON SOLO ASILO aims to assist refugees in developing their professional projects, enhancing their employability, and achieving autonomy through professional counseling, guidance, job support activities, and experiential learning.

The project goes beyond traditional approaches that focus on stable personal characteristics and secure employment, instead emphasizing the co-construction of life trajectories. Through vocational guidance, individuals progressively plan and build their lives, including their professional paths.

NSA is divided into three main- phases:

- Reception at the Città dei Mestieri
- Counselling
- Possibility of economic support for the implementation of individual projects (up to a maximum of €3,500)

Within the NON SOLO ASILO project, the A.R.L.O. activities are carried out, which involve active job research.



ARLO consists of coaching and assisted job research aimed at promoting the autonomy of participants in their job search. The degree of operator support is defined individually with each participant. Together, the operator and the participants undertake concrete research actions, with the cooperation of other participants, gradually increasing the number of independent actions during the activity and between meetings.

Currently, A.R.L.O. holds two weekly meetings, each lasting about two hours. As a trial during the Covid-19 outbreak, online meetings were also conducted. ARLOLive was implemented starting from March 2020 and has been particularly successful, especially among women who were previously unable to participate due to caregiving and domestic work responsibilities.

A.R.L.O. is also designed as an activity to support vocational guidance in NON SOLO ASILO. During A.R.L.O. meetings, participants' skills, competences, and specific individual needs are observed, which can be addressed in dedicated moments in small groups or individually. These include:

- Updating the CV for a specific job offer and simulating the interview.
- Providing information about professional schools and language courses, offering coaching in form filling, and working in small groups to prepare for entrance tests.
- Interacting with lawyers for legal consultancy needs.
- Additionally, at the beginning of each meeting, A.R.L.O. provides an information sheet with opportunities for other complementary local services or projects that can provide further information or skills.

A.R.L.O. meetings consist of:

- Welcome and program presentation to new participants.
- Sharing information about other opportunities and projects, with each participant summarizing the activities they have carried out with us (both ARLOLive and classic ARLO).
- Sharing the screen and reading job offers together, followed by individual work in private break-out rooms with a 1:1 session (1 operator / 1 participant) (only Arlo Live).

In classic ARLO (in-person):

- Delivery of updated job offers in paper form.
- Individual support in selecting job offers and preparing for interviews.
- Individual support when participants move to the computer room to respond to selected offers, register on employment agency websites, and search for companies to apply to.

Arlo Live provides 1:1 online support with 1 operator for 1 participant. Arlo Classic provides 1 operator or volunteer for every two participants to ensure optimal use of available time and minimize frustrations related to using IT tools.

## Keys to success

- **“Capability approach”** based on the self-determination, self-efficacy and adaptability of the participants.
- **Focus on the enhancement of social network** for the job research (and not merely hard skills).
- **Awareness of the refugee gap theory** (absence of strong migratory chains and pre-existing relationships in the places where asylum seekers carry out their arrival project; increased insecurity of the labor market) that make harder to identify and to build professional trajectories consistent with one’s objectives, even in the medium and long term.
- **Continuous development of each person’s autonomy** / focus on the individual as the starting point for his or her activation.
- **Creation of safe spaces** where to share the difficulties people facing in their job search.
- **Active job research approach** (based on the model of job club) - not configured as the final piece of professional counselling, but as a human-centered transversal and flexible activity to which people can turn at any time they believe they need it.

## Difficulties met – lessons learnt

- **The multiple dimensions of life taken into consideration** (not only employability, but the intertwined individual needs brought in by the beneficiaries) require overlapping skills and training by the professional team and make it necessary to constantly connect the dots with other areas of interventions in Cooperativa Orso.
- **Difficulties in finding fundings:** since activities aimed at increasing the employability of migrants are conceived as projects and not as services, economic fundings are bound to the project life - so they always have a beginning and an end that often does not match people’s life situation.

## Feasibility conditions

• **A suitable, warm, and welcoming setting** is essential. It should be a place that can be attended autonomously and spontaneously by those who wish to do so. This is important for supporting people's independence and self-determination.

• **Instead of taking people in**, a soft type of coaching should be proposed. For example, if an appointment is agreed upon and the person does not show up, the operator does not call them back.

• **The project should be able to work with a continuous flow of new recipients** rather than a defined stock of people.

• **The grant maker's economic resources should be utilized in a flexible manner** to accommodate the emerging needs within the project.

# Integration Goes Online – Digital Learning for Vocational Training

The COVID pandemic, hitting the world in spring 2020, created many problems, one of the biggest being the closure of schools and meeting rooms. The population of asylum seekers, both in Germany and elsewhere, was particularly vulnerable in this context. Especially those living in camps suddenly had no access to anything, as working WiFi was not part of the camp facilities. For most others living in private homes, it was a bigger problem since they were used to doing everything online with their smartphones and usually did not have their own laptops or tablets.

All refugee language students were severely affected as they could not attend their language courses online. Even harder hit were refugees who had studied and learned with many volunteer teachers for the theoretical part of their vocational training in one of the community rooms every weekend. These teachers knew they had no chance of obtaining the necessary certificates to complete their training after three full years, as the lockdowns completely prohibited learning groups.

Asylarbeitskreis came up with a new idea: online work stations for students. The NGO organized access to the internet in the community room of a smaller camp, which did not have WiFi. They purchased electronic devices,





books, and WiFi sticks. Single tables were installed and divided by self-made Plexiglas when meeting in person. Then, as conditions became even more restricted, Asylarbeitskreis established work stations in different places throughout the city. This way, students could use the stations and communicate with their respective teachers who were sitting at home.

From 2020 to 2022, nearly 40 people from Gambia, Afghanistan, Syria, and Eritrea managed to complete their vocational training with the help of the NGO. They are now working as cooks, carpenters, tailors, childminders, nurses for hospitals or elderly care, and electricians. All of them have found jobs.

### Keys to success:

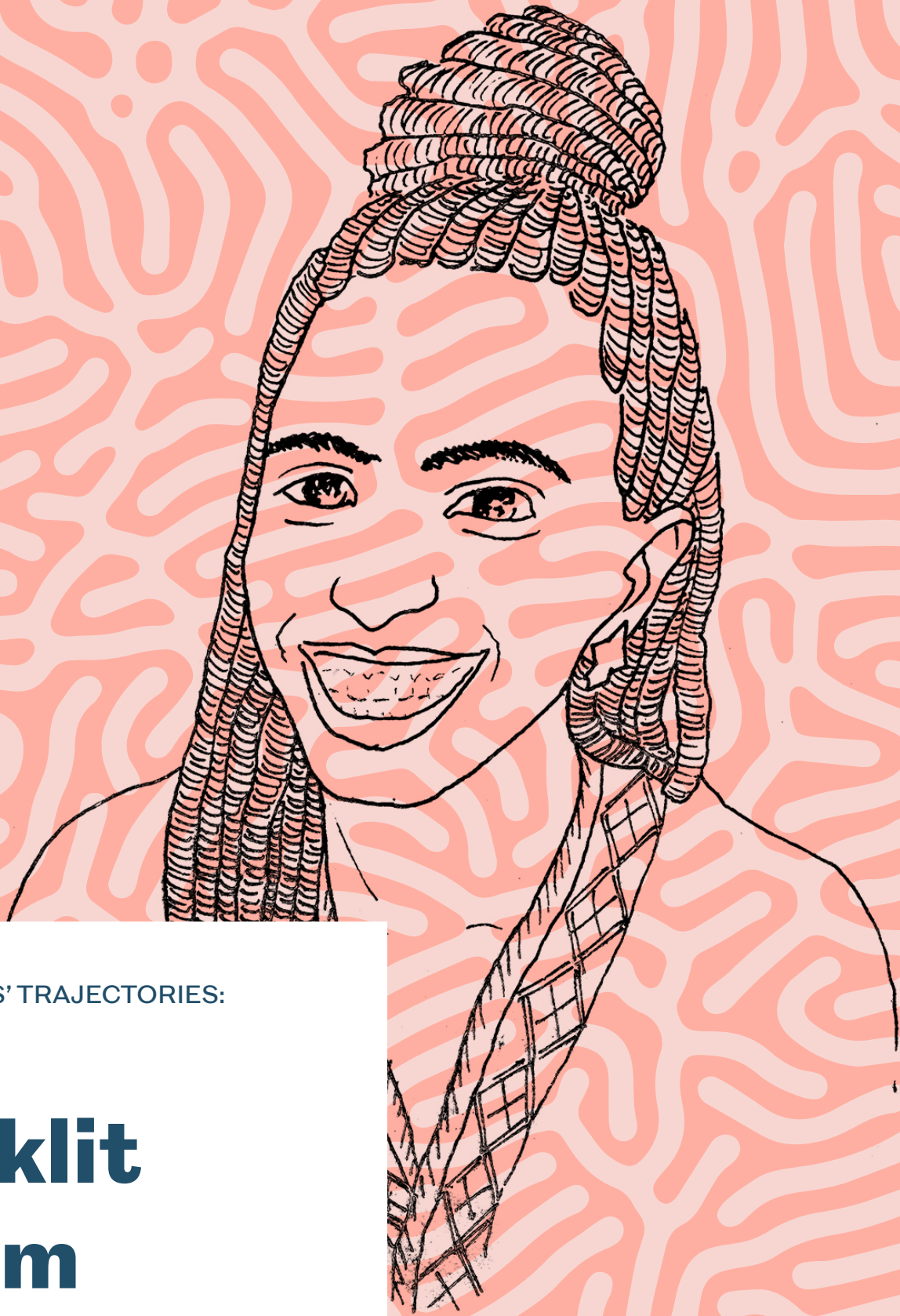
- **One or two people with vision and practical skills.**
- **Convincing cooperation partners** with rooms in different parts of the city.
- **A large number of qualified and dedicated volunteers**, preferably experienced teachers or well-trained students.

### **Difficulties encountered and lessons learned:**

- **The most important lesson: You can overcome unpredictable circumstances,** even a lockdown during a pandemic.
- **With sufficient input and support, people’s energy doubles under challenging conditions** when they strive to achieve a specific goal, such as passing an exam for a profession.
- **However, having advanced language skills and investing hundreds of hours in learning** are essential to manage such challenges. To achieve the goal, the teacher-student ratio was set at 4:1.

### **Feasibility conditions:**

- **Availability of financial and technical resources.**
- **Room(s) equipped with a laptop** and the means to go online in any way possible.



MIGRANTS' TRAJECTORIES:

**Meklit  
from  
Eritrea**

When I was one-year-old in 1986, my parents were forced to leave Eritrea and go to Ethiopia. Life in Addis Ababa was nice, and I loved going to school. I was a good student, and it felt like home to me. However, when I turned 15, we were forced to go back to Eritrea. We embarked on a journey to Asmara, but unfortunately, my mother and three younger sisters got lost along the way. They never arrived, and the reason remains unknown to this day. The loss is indescribable. From that point on, it was just my father and me.

Shortly after our arrival, my father fell seriously ill. I took care of him with all my heart, but it was a tremendous sacrifice. Unfortunately, I couldn't continue my education, which meant I would never have the opportunity to pursue further studies. After 16 months, my father passed away. The very next day, I found myself in prison, still dressed in my black mourning attire. I spent five days and nights there. It was only through the intervention of a friend of my father that I was released. He promised that I would join the military directly after my release, but I refused. There was no way I could ever bring myself to shoot someone in my entire life.

I was 17 years old when one of my father's colleagues helped me get into his lorry and drove me close to the border of Sudan in a two-day journey. The price he demanded from me was so terrible that I don't want to talk about it ever. At the border, a smuggler took over and transported me to Khartoum. In Khartoum, there are many Eritrean refugees who live together in small, illegal communities. A community of women welcomed me, and in the beginning, I spent my time sleeping and crying. I am incredibly grateful that they never asked why, but instead showed me kindness.

After a period of feeling numb and in shock, I realized that I was pregnant. I had wanted to erase that man from my mind, and now he was back and would always be a part of my life. The women cried with me and assured me that they would help. In Sudan, it was impossible to terminate a pregnancy as it was strictly prohibited under all circumstances. Many women attempt to illegally abort unwanted pregnancies, but it is incredibly dangerous and often leads to death. I gave birth to the child, a girl, when I was 18. Despite everything, I felt immense gratitude that I could love her. The women continued to support me in every way possible, showcasing the beautiful culture of Eritrea.

I learned to bake Injera, the national dish of Eritrea, from a shop woman in the neighborhood. Injera is a type of pancake bread that is consumed daily by everyone. It's not easy to make it perfectly, but I became quite skilled at it and managed to save some money by selling it.

As a refugee, I was unable to attend school, go to university, or move about freely. I longed to study and expand my knowledge about the world. I desired a future where I could make my own plans and pursue my ideas. I wanted to acquire a profession that would benefit others and provide me with personal growth. Additionally, I yearned for freedom as a woman. However, achieving such freedom was impossible in Sudan, even for non-refugees. In this conservative Muslim country, women are obligated to wear a hijab and accept subordinate roles to men. Returning to Eritrea was not an option either, as leaving the country without permission is considered a crime. If you return, you are subjected to imprisonment.

In the following years, I witnessed many people arriving in Khartoum only to leave again. They would travel through the desert to Libya and from there make the perilous journey across the sea to Europe. Alternatively, some would find individuals who could secure the funds for their flights. It seemed to happen swiftly for them - they would be accepted as refugees, and then their children could follow suit. My shop woman gathered everything she could and lent me the money for a ticket to Europe. However, it was only enough for me, not for my four-year-old daughter. It was the most difficult decision I had ever made when I finally embarked on my journey. I followed the same process as everyone else: I entrusted the money to someone I would never meet, who would handle the paperwork, tickets, and customs at the airport. Eventually, I found myself on the plane. I left my child in the care of the two women who had become like family to us, praying fervently that we would be reunited soon. In 2012, I arrived in Sweden and sought asylum, filled with hope.

However, everything turned out differently from what I had anticipated. The officials at the hearing regarded me with constant suspicion, as if I were fabricating my story. Their gaze conveyed their disbelief in my Eritrean origins. They claimed that my language was incorrect, stating that my Amhari and Tigrinya sounded like those spoken in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Consequently, they



concluded that I must be Ethiopian. I was utterly shocked. I had already explained my situation multiple times, and I attempted to do so again, but they refused to listen or believe me. It was an indescribably dreadful experience.

Weeks went by, and my desperation grew with each passing day. My child was thousands of miles away, waiting for me. Sleep eluded me, and I found myself in tears. I tried to maintain strength and courage, refusing to give up. Every day, I sought solace in the public library, immersing myself in learning and occupying my mind to prevent myself from going mad. I used the public computer to send messages to Khartoum without fail. Over time, the women grew angry, suspecting that I was deceiving them. All I could repeat each time was, "I am still waiting." They had never encountered a situation like mine before, and neither had I. The system had worked for everyone we had ever known, so why not for me?

And then, one day, I received no response from the women. I tried everything—calling people who might have been able to visit them, sending messages to others, and writing to the women every single day. Despite my efforts, two months went by without any contact. Filled with desperation, I went to the Red Cross, hoping they could help me locate my daughter. However, they couldn't make any promises. Khartoum, being a vast city, had overwhelmed their local helpers with thousands of cases of missing individuals. Overwhelmed and shattered, I couldn't hold back my tears any longer. A doctor admitted me to the psychiatric hospital.

During my stay at the hospital, my wonderful and loving Swedish family, whom I had found in my early days, did everything they could for me. After spending four months in the hospital, I began living with them. I cherished them deeply and made an effort to be of service to others. As an asylum seeker, I wasn't allowed to work in Sweden, so I volunteered as a translator for fellow Eritreans. Their stories continue to resonate with me to this day.

It took the Swedish authorities five long years to reach their final decision on my asylum application. Ultimately, my application was rejected, leaving me in an illegal status once again. Sweden intended to deport me to Ethiopia, where I would face further deportation to Eritrea. In Eritrea, my fate would have been imprisonment or military confinement, with no end in sight. Heartbroken,

I had to bid farewell to my home and family once more. I embarked on yet another escape, this time taking a Flixbus to Germany. However, this made me a clear "Dublin case" under which the government would deport me back to Sweden, the European country I initially entered. From there, the cycle of deportation to Ethiopia and then Eritrea would continue.

Fortunately, a compassionate priest in Mannheim offered me church asylum, with the support of her church community. This act of kindness saved me from deportation. I consider myself incredibly lucky. Many volunteers generously shared their time with me, teaching me German, cooking together, providing companionship, and some even becoming dear friends. I am forever grateful for their kindness. However, it was undeniably challenging. Spending eight long months without venturing outside was incredibly difficult.

Meanwhile, my friends persisted in their fight tooth and nail. Finally, I was able to apply for asylum and step out of the confines of the church "prison," only to find myself in the prison of being a stateless individual without real rights once again. I continued to learn German and embarked on an "Ausbildung," which was a hard-fought opportunity created by German asylum activists to pave the way for us refugees to secure a future in their country. Last September, I successfully completed my exam to become a kindergarten teacher, and I now work with troubled children—a role I deeply enjoy.

Last year, the new German government enacted a law that allows people like me to apply for lawful residency. In January, I received my German documentation along with the blue European passport. My friends were overjoyed, celebrating with boundless happiness, but I couldn't help but remain in a state of disbelief. Eighteen years without official papers, eighteen years as a refugee—it's not something you can simply switch off and instantly feel like a regular person. It was only in March of this year, at Malmö Airport in Sweden, that the realization finally hit me: I made it! I was allowed to pass through the gate just like everyone else! After five years, I would be reunited with my Swedish parents! Tears of relief streamed down my face. I was indescribably happy.

Next month, I will use all my accumulated vacation time to embark on a single journey—to Africa, specifically Ethiopia. It is a return to my roots, a search for any traces of my daughter.



**Good  
practices –  
cross-  
cutting  
projects**

## Germany

# Supporting artists in exile



The non-profit organization WIR MACHEN DAS (“We are doing it”) emerged in 2015 from a network of over a hundred female artists, cultural and public intellectuals, social scholars, and journalists.

The organization’s main objective is to create a platform for social and cultural interaction and exchange between newcomers with migration and refugee backgrounds and long-established residents in Germany. It aims to foster connections, facilitate networking, build social competence, and empower women to have a voice and be active

in public life. Additionally, it provides informative support to established and young migrant and refugee artists, authors, and journalists, promoting their work and introducing them to the German public.

The main ongoing projects of the organization are as follows:

## Weiter Schreiben (Writing on)

“Weiterschreiben.jetzt” is a platform for authors from war and conflict zones.

The project aims to enable renowned refugee authors to continue writing in Europe, increase the visibility of literary perspectives from newly arrived authors in German discourse, facilitate their integration into the local literary scene, and encourage artistic exchange.

Since 2017, authors from Syria, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Angola, Egypt, Burkina Faso, South Sudan, Belarus, and Roma & Sinti writers have regularly published short prose, poems, and stories, as well as participated in literary letter exchanges.

The authors collaborate with well-known German-speaking authors in tandems and perform together at literary and musical events.

All published texts are illustrated by artists from war and crisis zones.

## Meet Your Neighbours

Meet Your Neighbours is a project that initiates and promotes conversations between people with and without a migration background across Germany.

The project aims to:

- Strengthen individuals with a migration and flight history and increase their participation in society.
- Enable dialogue and exchange on an equal footing.
- Promote democratic coexistence and social solidarity.
- Connect people, local actors, and organizations through various meetings and events such as biographical workshops, multilingual storytelling salons, and workshops held in different regions of Germany.

## Geruch der Diktatur (The Smell of Dictatorship)

Authors Dima Albitar Kalaji and Annett Gröschner artistically investigate the interconnections between the Syrian and GDR dictatorships using research methods.

They delve into archives and engage in conversations with Syrian and German contemporary witnesses who lived under both systems.

More information can be found at <https://geruch-der-diktatur.jetzt>

## Dazugehört podcast

In the WIR MACHEN DAS podcast called “dazugehört” (a wordplay of “listening” and “belonging”), Aylin Karadeniz engages in conversations with various actors from the arts, culture, academia, and civil society about shaping a society that embraces pluralism and solidarity.

In each episode, Aylin invites a member of the advisory board of WIR MACHEN DAS to discuss topics such as activism, empowerment, solidarity, and belonging with her and an additional guest.

The approach of dazugehört is personal and biographical, recognizing that the private sphere is political. Each individual examines society and the challenges we face in times of rising populist forces from their own perspective and based on their experiences.

The podcast aims to connect these perspectives to understand the complexity of the manifold questions related to the issue of belonging. It explores power-critical empowerment, achieving solidarity across different groups and contexts, and building sustainable activism.

Website : <https://wirmachendas.jetzt/en/>



## Keys to success

- **Collaboration with individuals**, focusing on their expertise and empowering them.
- **Opening and sharing established spaces** for migrant and refugee newcomers.
- **Expertise in trauma-related work relationships.**
- **Highly professional team**, including individuals with migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- **Strong connections to public and private sponsors** and effective fundraising.
- **Strong public relations management.**

## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **As a relatively young NGO**, WIR MACHEN DAS has to spend a significant amount of time and energy searching for funding solutions. For instance, they invest heavily in external relations and lobbying.
- **Many projects receive funding for only 1-3 years**, which makes it difficult to offer long-term contracts to staff. Despite this challenge, they are working on an organizational development strategy to achieve sustainability and enable growth.
- **Due to a lack of financial resources**, WIR MACHEN DAS cannot offer full-time contracts to their staff. However, they provide a family-friendly work environment and aim to provide necessary resources in the future.
- **While the conditions for their work are generally very good** in Germany, recent factors such as the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis have made applications for public funding increasingly difficult.

## Feasibility conditions

- **A network of well-established actors** that offer expertise and connections to successfully set up tandems and secure funding.
- **WIR MACHEN DAS can only collaborate with individuals in exile who have fled from zones of war** and conflict if the NGO provides them with a safe space and a work environment that is aware of and addresses potential post-traumatic stress situations.
- **Flat hierarchies and a focus on teamwork**, without inflated egos.

# The Women's group

Specific attention must be given to the processes of inclusion for women with a migration background, particularly asylum seekers, refugees, and those who have experienced trauma, as well as children. These individuals possess valuable resources but also face significant vulnerabilities. It is crucial to foster a strong network among women and provide opportunities for their inclusion in individual life contexts, whether through specific inclusion projects or autonomous lives within the community. This approach enhances social and language skills while creating genuine opportunities for integration for these women. Otherwise, they risk being left dependent on a partner for support or becoming susceptible to potential illegal activities as single women. One important measure to reinforce the individual paths of women with a migration background, including asylum seekers or refugees, is the establishment of a consistent and supportive "protected space" that provides guidance and support over time.



The experimentation and practice of the "Women's group" began in 2017 with women participating in reception projects within the National Reception System (SAI and Micro Accoglienza Diffusa) in the Susa Valley territory, located in the province of Turin. The meetings are facilitated by a psychologist operator, and a co-leading model has been adopted involving receptionists and language operators based on the group's different phases. The course comprises regular meetings aimed at fostering group cohesion. Each meeting addresses various topics that are significant in the lives of the participants during that particular phase,

such as childcare, women's health, and local knowledge. Particularly in the initial stages, the group can be inclusive of both foreign and Italian women. Once the group was established and two additional groups were formed, a specific training course was developed to cater to the growing number of participants and their specific training needs. This training covers topics such as women's rights, legal aspects, health, employment, the education system, social services, and the fundamentals of digital skills. Local individuals with expertise in these areas actively participate in the meetings.

During these meetings, the groups gather to prepare materials and questions for the subsequent sessions, where the host women actively participate as experts. The selected female experts from the local community include schoolteachers, lawyers, doctors, employment center workers, and social workers. These experts are women who can provide training, valuable information for foreign women, and serve as examples of potential female professions in Italy. Other topics covered in the meetings include an intercultural dance course led by a dance teacher and discussions on body well-being

and women's health facilitated by a midwife. The groups encourage active participation, and there are times when children are present, while other times a babysitting service is arranged. In the later groups, the presence of mediators is crucial as they serve as excellent co-leaders. In the earlier group, these professional figures were not present, and at times, it was necessary to rely on body language. Nevertheless, mediation is essential for ensuring true participation.

### Keys to success

- **Creating a network among women.**
- **Providing training on fundamental issues** such as health, women's rights, work, social services, employment centers, schooling, and education.
- **Empowering women for autonomy.**
- **Enhancing knowledge of local services and resources.**
- **Encouraging self-expression** through body work and language.
- **Learning Italian through practice** with both Italian and foreign women.
- **Offering children opportunities for informal socialization** to prepare them for inclusion in preschools. This is important as migrant women and children often require assistance from social services for minors due to unfamiliarity with the school environment.



## Difficulties encountered - lessons learned

- **Ensuring the constant presence of a professional mediator.**
- **Challenges with integrating the Women's group with other groups of Italian women** due to larger and more diverse group dynamics.
- **Finding a suitable location** to accommodate both mothers and children together.
- **Organizing babysitting services** with a well-defined educational project.

## Feasibility conditions

- **The presence of several women with similar needs**, such as migrant women with children of similar age groups.
- **The availability of professional mediators.**
- **A local environment that is sensitive to women's migration issues** and their specific needs.
- **The presence of social services** and individuals willing to collaborate in training and meeting women.
- **Having a working team that can provide daily follow-up** with participants on the topics discussed during the group's meetings.
- **The presence of babysitters trained in inclusion needs**, ensuring that these moments are truly educational and inclusive.

## Germany

# The garden project

The city of Heidelberg decided to place 130 men “with no prospect of staying” in one camp, primarily consisting of young men aged 19 to 26, with some up to 35, hailing from Algeria, Georgia, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and the majority from Gambia. The camp was located in a nicely renovated former housing complex that previously accommodated middle-ranking officers of the US army stationed in Heidelberg since 1945. In front of the house, there was a large area of trampled grass measuring 3 x 50 meters, scattered with bicycles and garbage.



Garden Project before ▲ Garden Project after ▼



As the Asylarbeitskreis was present in the camp through the language project, conducting regular visits each week, the idea of establishing a gardening activity began to take shape.

Initially, the administration was not supportive of this activity. However, the full-time janitor aka informal social worker of the accommodation center backed the idea, as did the workers from the municipality's garden and landscape department. They dedicated an entire weekend to using a small caterpillar to dig out the old grass, and they delivered truckloads of soil. Subsequently, the residents of the accommodation center fully embraced the project and worked on the ground for two weekends, completing the task.

Two prominent garden shops in the area generously donated flowers and plants. Approximately 10 men consistently took care of the garden: they sowed, planted, and implemented a watering schedule. The inhabitants of the center all praised the garden's beauty. Engaging in a mean-

ingful activity that brings rewards or living in pleasant surroundings enhances self-esteem.

The garbage disappeared, and everyone took care of the space, spending time outdoors while enjoying the presence of the flowers. The project thrived for two and a half years until the closure of the accommodation center.

Website: [www.asyl-heidelberg.de/über-uns/neuigkeiten/](http://www.asyl-heidelberg.de/über-uns/neuigkeiten/) (scroll down to 2016)

## Keys to success

- **Regular presence of volunteers in the accommodation center** (3-4 times per week)
  - **Well-organized fundraising** and friendly cooperation with the city's garden administration
  - **Volunteers with gardening experience** and a positive attitude
- Implementation of a personalized watering plan with assigned responsibilities, visible to everyone
- **Two committed volunteers** and approximately 5-8 enthusiastic residents

## Difficulties encountered – lessons learned

- **People of all cultures and ages are equally touched by the beauty of flowers and a growing garden**, regardless of gender. They feel respected, welcomed, and worthy of the effort, and they reciprocate with respect and care.
- **Working together on this project proved to be a significant bonding factor for men** from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds.
- **Accepting and taking responsibility for the living area is valuable in itself** - people take ownership and care.
- **Many participants referred to it as “your garden”**, while only 6-7 considered it “our” garden. This indicates that the majority participated to help us or do something together but didn't fully take ownership of the project.
- **Although the vegetables they were growing** (zucchini, green beans, salad, potatoes, eggplants, peppers, and herbs) were not preferred by most people, they still enjoyed the work, the care, and the overall pleasant experience, even if it had limited practical use for them.

## Feasibility conditions

- **The space doesn't need to be large**, but it should have some landscaping.
- **Fundraising for plants and tools** is necessary.
- **A lockable space**, such as a shed, is required for inhabitants to store tools and watering cans.
- **A dependable group of volunteers** is needed.
- **A reliable watering plan** with assigned responsibilities is essential.





MIGRANTS' TRAJECTORIES:

# **Eyad from Syria**



I had completed my university studies in Syria and was making plans for the future. I graduated during the early stages of the revolution, and I actively participated in the demonstrations. In my hometown of Homs, the situation was extremely challenging as we took to the streets to protest against the regime. The city was divided, with one part under rebel control and the other under regime control. I resided in the area controlled by the regime, which was in close proximity to the front line. Tanks, soldiers, bombings, and gunfire were a common sight.

As the situation grew increasingly dangerous, my family and I had to relocate from our neighborhood to another one. During this time, I also volunteered with an organization that provided assistance to internally displaced individuals who had fled from one neighborhood to another. I believed that my involvement was making a positive impact and contributing to changing people's lives. However, amidst the escalating danger, my father made the decision that it was no longer safe for me to remain there. Consequently, he purchased a plane ticket for me to travel to Egypt as a means of seeking safety and a fresh start.

At that time, we anticipated that our displacement would last only one or two years. None of us could have predicted that it would drag on for such a long duration. I made my way to Egypt, where the financial and political situation proved to be less than favorable. I worked as a salesman, struggling to make ends meet and barely covering my rent and basic living expenses. There was no room in the budget for new clothes or health insurance.

In early 2014, conversations about fleeing to Europe and seeking refuge began to circulate. Initially, the idea seemed foreign and implausible to me. How could one illegally enter a European country and expect to magically attain legal status? However, as I delved deeper into the subject, I started to gain a better understanding of the situation. And so, that is precisely what I did.

The only viable route from Egypt to Europe was by boat across the Mediterranean Sea, embarking from Alexandria and aiming for the southern coast of Italy. Our journey at sea lasted ten days. The initial three days were dedicated to boarding passengers. As one of the first to arrive, I waited patiently for three days until the boat was filled with new passengers. Remark-

ably, the smugglers displayed a degree of compassion at the time, even ensuring that women and children had their needs tended to during the journey.

We were rescued by the Italian Navy and upon reaching the Italian port, we were met by awaiting Italian journalists. At that time, boats arrived every few days rather than every day or every hour, so our arrival garnered media attention. We were then taken to an emergency facility, which I remember being a football playground filled with emergency staff. Doctors examined us, and we were provided with essential supplies. However, our stay there lasted only a few hours. During that time, we had the opportunity to charge our phones and inform our relatives that we were safe.

I cannot recall the exact name of the Italian island, but it may have been Sicily. From there, we traveled by train to Milan, where we stayed for a few days. In Milan, there was an organization dedicated to helping refugees, and we took some time to catch our breath before continuing our journey. Unfortunately, we could not pass through Switzerland and Austria due to strict border controls at the time. As a result, we had to travel from Italy to France and then from France to Germany, ultimately reaching Berlin.

I had a contact in Berlin, who happened to be the brother of my friend in Egypt. He had arrived in Germany as a refugee himself in 2013. He was the one who received me upon my arrival at the main railway station in Berlin. I wasn't particularly surprised by the country, as I had the privilege of coming to Germany as an exchange student for six months in 2010. That's why I chose Germany as my destination, although I wasn't in Berlin at the time, but rather in Magdeburg. I experienced some frustrations typical of the process, such as waiting and dealing with paperwork. However, I didn't feel personally targeted by these challenges, as it was a situation faced by everyone.

I lived in a refugee camp for 13 months before moving to Refugio. It was not a place where you wanted to live for an extended period. The camp was a dreadful experience. I shared a room with three other people, who happened to be my friends. Although I was fortunate to live with familiar faces, having four people in a small space was still challenging. The shared facilities, such as the bathroom, toilets, and kitchen, were used by 15 rooms, which made

the conditions even more difficult. I recall not being able to properly use the shower in the camp and resorting to having my showers at a gym. Initially, for the first three months, we were provided with ready-made food due to our status. However, the quality of the food was very low. Eventually, we were allowed to cook our own meals. During this time, I managed to save some money from the journey and purchased a second-hand laptop. I started taking online courses to occupy myself.

My friends and I would explore the city, taking buses or S-Bahn trains to see where they would lead us. We were living in poverty, but we could at least afford a monthly ticket for transportation. It took about six months after my arrival in Germany to receive my residence permit.

I started learning German once I obtained a residence permit, known as the *Aufenthalts-titel*, which allows me to stay in Germany for one or three years. However, prior to that, I was still under the supervision of LAGESO (Berlin State Office of Health and Social Affairs). My documents were held there, which meant that I was not yet eligible to attend German courses. I remember my friends and I would attend free German courses twice a week, where we learned the basics. We were simply trying to make the most of our time and not waste it. But once we received our residence permits, we received the necessary documents from the job center and became eligible to start our German courses.

Someone told my friends and me about the Refugio project, so we decided to apply for it. At that time, I didn't know what I was applying for. For me, it was simply a way to escape the refugee camp. However, it turned out to be one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life. We were informed that we would have our own room and bathroom, but we would share a kitchen. In the refugee camp, the kitchen was poorly organized, with no one taking responsibility and people not knowing each other. There was a lack of care and concern. In Refugio, each floor has its own kitchen, and we are like neighbors who have personal connections. The kitchen sometimes becomes a gathering place, resembling a living room. We make an effort to keep it clean and cozy, unlike the functional but impersonal kitchens in the refugee camp.

I believe the first time I truly interacted with locals was when I moved to Refugio. I had my

frustrations, questioning whether my life would be like this forever. I had no connections with anyone and was even afraid to approach people on the street, unsure of how they would react. I wasn't even aware of organizations that help refugees. I don't recall being given any information about such NGOs in the camp.

I didn't have any major issues, but I did have some concerns. I was uncertain about the requirements for studying at a university in Germany, such as the necessary documents and qualifications. However, with my B.A. diploma and proficiency in English, I was easily accepted into the Technical University of Berlin. I didn't encounter any problems with health insurance.

Looking back, the only thing that could have been improved is the opportunity to start learning the language immediately upon arrival, rather than waiting for six months to officially begin German lessons.

Since 2015, I have been living in the shared house Refugio. I am an active community member, a project representative, and a volunteer serving as a barista at the Refugio Café. Additionally, I am a committee member of the non-profit organization "Give Something Back to Berlin," which is also based in Refugio. They offer free music lessons, language cafes, open-air shelters, and more. I graduated from the Technical University of Berlin with a master's degree in Information System Management and have been working in this profession since 2022. Currently, I am searching for separate accommodation for myself.

For now, I will be staying in Germany, at least for the next five years. I am privileged to have the ability to work remotely. Once I obtain citizenship, I will be able to live wherever I want. I also hope to visit my sisters and bring my parents here for a visit.



# Recommendations

The shortcomings in the implementation of the reception of asylum seekers are rooted in the way asylum seekers are viewed in Europe. To respect the spirit of the European Convention on Human Rights, it is crucial not to perceive asylum seekers as a financial burden, but as future citizens who will contribute their experiences and skills to their host country. It is essential to bridge the gap between the philosophy of human rights, a value that the European Union claims, and the often contradictory reception conditions that exist under the already restrictive Dublin III Regulation.

The following recommendations were drafted by all project partners for policymakers at national and European levels, as well as organizations involved in advocacy, with the aim of making asylum law more humane and improving the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe, regardless of the specificities of each country.

## 1. Asylum procedures

- Enforce the right of non-refoulement and demand compensation from countries that do not respect the European law. Introduce the presence of independent European observers (not employed by the concerned states) at border posts to record breaches of the right to asylum, and report them to a competent European authority, which will be entitled to demand compensation from offending states.
- Recast the Dublin law in order to develop a truly balanced reception policy in the EU and allow asylum seekers to choose the country where they want to ask for asylum so they can join their already established family and implement their life project.
- Allow asylum seekers to write their asylum application in a timeframe that is neither too long so as not to drag out the procedure, nor too short so as to allow people to tell their often traumatic story. All asylum seekers must be offered assistance in writing the asylum application or at the hearing.
- Simplify the access to the asylum request and make the access to the administration offices, which are responsible for registration and asylum request, easier.
- Give the asylum request documents to the asylum seekers in a reasonable time, for instance within 3 months maximum.
- Ensure NGOs and social actors have sufficient financial and human resources to deal with the reception work in proper conditions when the state launches a call for tenders.
- Obviously also a proper monitoring and evaluation of activities should be provided.
- Organize one place for the reception of asylum seekers where the administration provides information on asylum procedures and services on different topics as health services, accommodation, etc. So the asylum seekers can find answers to their questions and needs in one place.
- Require a minimum of 2 or more judges to rule on the validity of an appeal.

## 2. Temporary accommodations and long-term housing

- Create Ensure sufficient accommodations are available for all asylum seekers and refugees to prevent them from sleeping on the streets or in squats.
- Maintain the same accommodation for individuals throughout the entire duration of the asylum procedure to provide stability in their administrative processes.
- Allocate families and spouses to be housed together – whether they are legally married or not - and ensure accommodations are adequately sized for larger families.
- Provide privacy by allowing the option to lock rooms in registration centers.
- Locate accommodations near public transportation or in proximity to city centers. If not feasible, provide public transport assistance to asylum seekers accommodated far from these areas.
- Create sufficient cooking and laundry spaces within accommodations and have them in good care.
- Maintain proper hygiene standards in accommodation centers by implementing measures for cockroach and bedbug control.
- Establish safe accommodations for women and children to prevent sexual harassment by staff or other residents. This can involve measures such as restricted staff access to rooms, installation of cameras, designated women’s bathrooms, and inclusion of female staff members.
- Engage local social actors to restore, refurbish, and manage vacant buildings (public abandoned buildings, abandoned industrial sites) for the accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees when there is insufficient housing supply in an area.
- Expand the “intermediate rental” model in collaboration with NGOs and landlords, while providing support to landlords in understanding the specificities of accommodating asylum seekers. Offering incentives to landlords who rent their properties to asylum seekers and refugees can be an effective approach.
- Facilitate access to housing for individuals with limited resources by offering enhanced support through social workers.
- Make the construction of social housing mandatory in all cities to meet the high demand.
- Simplify the process of settling in rural and peripheral areas to alleviate the burden on major cities, aligning with the asylum seekers’ life plans.

## 3. Education, linguistic courses and employment

- Promote an inclusive approach to integrating refugee children into schools, allowing for their swift inclusion in standard classes, similar to the approach taken with Ukrainian refugees.
- Offer language courses from the beginning of the asylum procedures and systematically provide linguistic courses up to B1 level, rather than limiting them to A1 or A2 levels. Implement more time for the respective courses.
- Grant access to vocational training and employment opportunities for asylum seekers right from the start of the asylum procedures.
- Establish specialized educational and employment programs for women, along with childcare systems within or in close proximity to training organizations.
- Combine language courses, job inclusion activities, and legal support for



asylum seekers and refugees to achieve better outcomes.

- Provide diverse learning methods to accommodate the specific needs and challenges faced by different groups of asylum seekers. This can include long-term courses for illiterate individuals, supplementary courses alongside vocational training, evening classes, etc.
- Ensure training and support methods that recognize asylum seekers as adults with their unique backgrounds. Active involvement of asylum seekers in their life journey is essential.
- Offer financial compensation to refugees participating in linguistic courses to alleviate the need for them to work and allow them to focus on their training. Some individuals drop out due to the necessity of working to support themselves.
- Enhance employer awareness regarding the recruitment of asylum seekers and refugees. Similarly, ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are well-informed about labor market demands and shortages to enable them to choose sectors with high employment opportunities.
- Encourage businesses to provide internships for asylum seekers and refugees, allowing them to gain exposure to various job roles before committing to specific vocational training.
- Mandate only a B1 speaking level for citizenship requirements to avoid discrimination against illiterate individuals.

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