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DISCUSSION PAPER

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1. Introduction

As the ARRIVAL REGIONS project aims to support the social and economic integration of non-EU migrants in rural Central Europe, it deals with the concrete and practical ways of such support. All pilot actions were designed to test different ideas of social innovation. We aim to explain and discuss their impact on rural societies, in an attempt to exchange our practical experiences and to produce new knowledge. Another purpose of this paper is to discuss the transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches.

Altogether, this information provides a framework for future elaboration of policy recommendations and tool-box for the whole field of integration of non-EU nationals in rural areas of Central Europe. To solve these tasks, the Lead Partner (Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography) and the Work Package Leader (Središče Rotunda) have analyzed Pilot Final Reports and Peer Review Reports.

Each part consists of introduction with general description of the pilot action (1), impact of social innovation in particular region (2), possible transferability of pilot action to other regional contexts (3) and conclusion with the most valuable lessons learned from the pilot action (4).

2. GAL Escartons and the Waldensians Valleys: Pilot action “HOME - Extra-EU Citizens and Integration through Accessible Services”

2.1. Introduction

The CASA (HOME) pilot action was developed on the territory of 9 municipalities in the Pellice Valley; some activities also took place in Pinerolo and Torino. In line with identified challenges, the initial idea was to increase the intercultural competencies of the help desk operators in order to improve the services provided for non-EU nationals. To achieve this goal, partner 2 organized tutoring and cultural mediation activities for the local service providers, as well as the necessary assistance for non-EU nationals. To reduce bureaucratic obstacles, the pilot action team elaborated supportive information materials about integration and distributed them among public offices and migrants. In total, about 30 operators and 53 migrants were involved in the pilot action. Moreover, the pilot action initiated an analysis of the housing market for foreign citizens, which showed that migrants do not have sufficient access to guarantee funds that are needed for access to housing.

2.2. Impact of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action was successful in reaching a wide range of offices and helpdesk operators and has helped them to increase their expertise in communication with non-EU citizens. A significant number of migrants also benefited from cultural and language mediation. The pilot action team collected useful information about access to housing for non-EU citizens and analysed various existing possibilities for setting up a housing fund. The qualitative analysis of the indicators confirms a very positive reaction from offices and non-EU citizens. Both, the direct tutoring and the materials provided by the team contributed to an increase in awareness and involvement in the issues addressed by the operators. PP2 believes that this new awareness can improve and speed up the economic and social integration of non-EU citizens in a short period of time, allowing them to become active members of society and contribute to the development of the rural area.

2.3. Transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action is easily transferable to other regional or national contexts and is not specifically linked to the territory where it took place. The tutoring and cultural mediation activities could be useful for office workers with solid professional skills, but without relevant intercultural experience. The lack of training programs in this field makes the pilot action a great example of how to overcome bureaucratic obstacles and introduce better services for non-EU migrants. The majority of materials prepared during the pilot action could be easily used in other territories after they have been adapted to national laws, regulations, and procedures.

2.4. Conclusion

The pilot action shows that an improvement of already existing services may result in successfully fostering the integration of non-EU nationals in rural areas. Approaching public institutions proved to be difficult at first. However, demand for support and tutoring, as well as the inclusion of offices, increased after the first positive results. Positive feedback from public offices gives hope for the future of the pilot action in the region.

3. The City of Osijek and Information Legal Center: Pilot action “Living with us”

3.1. Introduction

Despite the presence and employment of non-EU citizens in Osijek, comprehensive support schemes are missing. The pilot action team has developed the infrastructure and the program for the inclusion and integration of migrants and other disadvantaged groups by establishing the Centre for Inclusion and Integration. The establishment of the Centre was supported by diverse sources of funding through the projects implemented by DKolektiv in cooperation with local municipalities. The Centre represents the space for building bridges between different population groups and a place where they can receive direct assistance. Other integration activities directed at migrants and local residents included language courses, legal consultations, and promoting intercultural dialogue through thematic events. Overall, about 50 non-EU nationals were involved in the pilot action, with active participation in the planning and realisation of the activities.

3.2. Impact of the piloted social innovation approaches

The methodology applied in the pilot action included the use of co-creation tools for planning the events and services targeted at migrants. Active networking, volunteering, and joint events improved existing collaborations and capacities for integration support. Regular communication and exchange with local stakeholders such as the employment service, the social welfare service, and other local organizations ensured additional support for the pilot action and the formation of new vital collaborations.

3.3. Transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action is transferable to regions where target groups with similar needs are present. It is envisaged to implement the methodology of the pilot action in Sisak-Moslavina county that suffered the consequences of the earthquake (December 2020). The pilot action is implemented in cooperation with a local organisation - the Agency for Local Democracy (Sisak). The methodology is adapted for asylum seekers and migrants with subsidiary protection.

3.4. Conclusion

The project has better prepared local stakeholders for the future integration activities by establishing cooperation and improving knowledge about integration. Local institutional networks can profit from the establishment of the Centre for Inclusion and Integration and may become more sustainable in terms of welcoming capacity. The experience of the pilot actions shows the importance of co-creation and networking for establishing links and networks between migrants, resident society and local organisations.

4. The Mountain Union of Ceva and UNCEM: Pilot action “HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS MEET PUBLIC CAS”

4.1. Introduction

Non-EU citizens in the Unione Montana di Ceva were facing significant bureaucratic obstacles while applying for a residence permit in municipal reception centers, which had a negative impact on their employment and integration prospects. In order to raise awareness among local institutions and citizens about migration policies and the importance of establishing a local welcoming culture, the pilot action team formalized the collaboration with the responsible ministries at the national level. After this, PPs 5 and PP6 started to interact directly with the main Italian organizations promoting safe and legal pathways of migration (the Humanitarian Corridors). This exchange encouraged the revision of existing migration policies with the participation of local public authorities. On the local level, the pilot action provided support for the integration of non-EU nationals into the labor market with the help of job training courses. In total, nine local and non-local stakeholders took part in the pilot action.

4.2. Impact of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action initiated the development of alternative procedures for migration for non-EU citizens, with the possibility of speeding up the process of issuing necessary documents. This simplified the integration into the local labor market of non-EU migrants coming via Humanitarian Corridors. Partner managed to involve both local and national-level stakeholders, which was useful for raising awareness and the inclusion of several target groups, including operators of social services and reception structures, as well as civil society actors.

4.3. Transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action is transferable in the sense that it effectively raises the awareness of local service providers. Specifically, the pilot action demonstrates a centralized approach to local authorities through the improvement of national-level collaborations. The next local event, scheduled for October or November 2021, is aimed at raising the awareness of other local authorities in the province of Cuneo on the subject of safe and legal pathways of migration.

4.4. Conclusion

The experience of the pilot action highlights the importance of close contact with the national stakeholders in order to approach local actors. The plan for the future is to use Humanitarian Corridors to advocate for further revisions of the Italian legal system and migration policies and to promote the establishment of a local welcoming culture for non-EU citizens. The next important step of the Mountain Union of Ceva is the presentation of the piloted initiative to the National Strategy of Internal Areas.

5. The University of West Bohemia: Pilot action “Centre for Coordination of Integrational Activities in Bor”

5.1. Introduction

The main idea of the pilot action was to cover the lack of local integration services for non-EU nationals in the city of Bor and to foster their participation in local life beyond their workplaces. The establishment of the Coordination Center for Integration Activities is aimed at solving these tasks. The Center worked on a daily basis as a relevant and respected partner for key local institutions and facilitated communication between stakeholders to establish communication channels. Non-EU labor migrants continuously made use of the Center's support and services, such as language courses and legal consultations. In order to involve the resident society, the Center also organized local events and approached public institutions (e.g., schools) in order to mediate the daily issues of migrants and their children. At the same time, Partner offered Czech language courses for the employees of several big companies directly at their workplace. In total, about 50 non-EU nationals completed the language courses and used the consultation services.

5.2. Impact of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action supported the integration of non-EU nationals and had a positive impact on networking between stakeholders. Not only did language courses facilitate the living together of foreigners and members of host society, they also supported the personal and professional growth of the participants. During the pilot action, PP7 initiated the establishment of a local welcoming network while approaching and collaborating with the local municipalities on the issues of integration as well as with other stakeholders.

5.3. Transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action is transferable both nationally and internationally. A proactive coordinator with good orientation in the local environment and advanced soft skills allowing them to motivate local stakeholders to participate in the pilot action is a crucial element of success. Another important feature may be the motivation and openness of local municipalities and employers.

5.4. Conclusion

The pilot action shows how minor changes in local institutions and services may boost the integration of non-EU (labor) migrants and stimulate local stakeholders to pay more attention to the needs of the migrants. Another observation is the crucial role of language courses in building trust with the resident society. In this spirit, language courses have a huge positive impact on the quality of life of migrants in rural areas.

6. The Municipality of Piran: Pilot action “Combating Discrimination against Migrant Children and Women”

6.1. Introduction

The municipality of Piran has a strong multicultural background and a relatively large share of the migrant population. Increasing awareness about migration and human rights in schools and kindergartens is hence of particular importance for this region, especially for the prevention of discrimination. Fighting discrimination became the main target of the pilot action. The pilot action focused on the integration of migrant children and their parents through games, music activities, and cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the project encouraged migrant women to participate in Slovenian language lessons, which contributed to their integration into local society. In total, more than 25 children of non-EU nationals and their parents were involved in this pilot action.

6.2. Impact of the piloted social innovation approaches

First of all, PP8 managed to mobilize and involve local stakeholders and public institutions by providing them with information about the needs of the target group. The pilot action intensified the interaction between resident and migrant children in early education, which resulted in stronger personal development and social integration on both sides. The stakeholders involved in the pilot action acknowledged the effectiveness of the educational tools for this achievement.

6.3. Transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action is transferable to other Slovenian municipalities and public institutions like schools and kindergartens. If other regions or governments show interest in implementing similar actions, it is possible to provide them with the know-how, practices, and inventions elaborated during the run of this pilot action. Initiators should place special emphasis on the preparation of simple and interesting materials and activities connected with the culture of both the host society and migrant children. There is also a need for the involvement of teaching staff with sufficient intercultural experience.

6.4. Conclusion

Schools and kindergartens expressed their interest in continuing to participate in the project. This demonstrates that public institutions can successfully serve as a space for dialogue between the local society and non-EU citizens. Working with children may be especially effective for establishing such a dialogue since it also often involves their parents.

7. The Municipality of Postojna: Pilot action “Starting Point Postojna”

7.1. Introduction

Before the start of the pilot action, the territory of the Municipality of Postojna lacked institutions that comprehensively covered the needs of non-EU migrants. In order to change this, the Municipality of Postojna created the Starting Point Postojna - an office providing comprehensive assistance during the integration process of migrants living in this region. The office employed five people who assisted immigrants both at the headquarters and in the field. PP9 was in constant contact with local stakeholders in order to gain access to the target groups, identify their needs, and find tailor-made solutions to their problems. Apart from offering legal and social consultations to non-EU migrants, the office organised Slovenian language courses, individual school support for migrants and support in the creation of business plans for potential entrepreneurs. PP9 also used various events and workshops co-created in order to involve both migrants and the resident society. Overall, more than 180 non-EU migrants and 70 local residents were involved in the pilot action.

7.2. Impact of the piloted social innovation approaches

During the pilot action, the team managed to establish an active communication and exchange network with a wide range of stakeholders in the region. Due to this, the needs of the target group were deeply integrated into the concept of pilot action. This process boosted the circulation of information about the pilot action and has efficiently established the support system for non-EU migrants. Additionally, the pilot action provided a necessary space for dialogue and the exchange of ideas, which fostered the formation of a new local community, including migrants.

7.3. Transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action is transferable both in the national and international context. The main emphasis should be put on three things: the involvement of staff with relevant multicultural experience, the flexibility of provided services demanded by the target group, and the establishment of sustainable communication channels with local stakeholders. Equally important is the availability of a public space for performing the activities.

7.4. Conclusion

The pilot initiative emphasizes the advantage of diversified services and exchanges with local stakeholders for the involvement of broader target groups. A complex approach towards meeting the needs of non-EU nationals can make the program more solid and attract the attention of the host society. The pilot action also confirms the need for common spaces for the success of similar integration activities.

8. The West Pomerania Region and the University of Szczecin: Pilot action “EACH OF US IS UNIQUE AND IMPORTANT - Multicultural Education in the Classroom”

8.1. Introduction

The pilot action has covered the territory of West Pomerania Region with a greater number of immigrants from Ukraine or Belarus. In order to spread the welcoming culture in schools and increase the intercultural competence of teachers, the team concentrated on the inclusion of specific education practices (presentations, workshops) in the learning process. One part of the pilot action consisted of organizing thematic competitions with the aim of developing locals' intercultural sensitivity towards various minority groups living in West Pomerania and their daily challenges. Furthermore, children from the host society had the opportunity to share their culture with their migrant classmates. On top of that, the pilot action team held 20 online workshops to create a space where students could learn more about the concept of multiculturalism and exchange their thoughts and ideas. In total, more than 390 children and 34 teachers were involved in the pilot action.

8.2. Impact of the piloted social innovation approaches

PPs 10 and 11 facilitated the involvement of experts and stakeholders who helped to shape the educational tools through their comments and feedback. In the process of networking, the pilot action team created awareness about the integration of non-EU migrants and their children among local stakeholders. Implemented practices were welcomed by the teachers and gave impulse to new discussions among the students. Thanks to the pilot action, the West Pomeranian Region started the process of shaping new attitudes among children and adolescents as well as providing teachers with valuable experience of intercultural practices.

8.3. Transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches

The concept of the pilot action is transferable and can be implemented in any other region or even in a single school that wants to improve the intercultural competences of both teachers and pupils. The motivation and involvement of schools and their personnel are critical for the success of implemented activities. The tools were designed for diverse groups of students and teachers, which makes them usable with minor adjustments to the needs of specific classes. They are designed as activation exercises and as an invitation for further discussions, which requires moderation from teachers.

8.4. Conclusion

One of the most obvious conclusions is the necessity to build on the knowledge of local stakeholders while planning integration activities. In our case, this helped in shaping the educational tools and optimising the agenda. Another point for discussion is the role of schools and teachers in the progress of a welcoming culture in rural regions. The pilot action draws attention to the higher interest of smaller territorial units in the topic of migration, which may point to the untapped integration potential of rural schools.

9. The Burgenland District: Pilot action “EMI BLK”

9.1. Introduction

A lack of platforms for establishing contacts with the host society was one of the most significant challenges for migrants in the Burgenland District. Even working non-EU nationals can feel alienated since their employment serves as imaginary evidence of completed integration. Rarely are integration activities designed to meet their needs. For this reason, the main goal of this pilot action was to bring both migrants and Germans together at the activity camps. The list of activities besides the camps included training and thematic workshops in offline and online formats. During the camps, participants enjoyed team-building and sports activities as well as excursions that allowed them to discover the region. The most active participants were invited to the Team Leaders Training, where they could improve their leadership skills and management capacities. The workshops focused on the questions of identity, sexism, racism, and discrimination in daily life.

9.2. Impact of the piloted social innovation approaches

The pilot action contributed to the establishment of connections between non-EU migrants and members of the host society. Such elements are crucial for the future development of structures facilitating the integration of non-EU nationals in rural areas. As representative of a local authority, PP12 tested various methods for the integration activities.

9.3. Transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches

The fact that the concept of the pilot action was inspired by the Swedish project “Ny På Landet” already proves its transferability. For example, participants of the Annual Integration Conference in the district of Kulmbach were surprised that such a “small” pilot action could attract migrant participants and thought about adapting this pilot action to their regions in order to facilitate the social integration for working migrants. It is necessary to highlight the involvement of members of the host society in the camps and workshops as one of the main features of this pilot action.

9.4. Conclusion

The pilot action demonstrates the combination of online and offline activities and, thus, highlights the importance of flexibility in the implementation of concrete actions and measures. It also stresses the need to conceptualize integration as a multifaceted and ongoing process that includes both the members of resident society and different groups of migrants.

10. The Lodzkie Region: Pilot action “Legal support and better communication - how to make Ukrainian citizens feel better and safer in the Lodzkie Region”

10.1. Introduction

The situation in the Lodzkie Region was characterized by low integration of non-EU labor migrants. Despite being employed, Ukrainian workers still have difficulties accessing public services. In order to change this, PP13 decided to support both employees of public institutions and non-EU nationals in the region. The first part of the pilot action consisted of a Ukrainian language course for public servants aimed at improving their communication with migrants. Public servants had the possibility of attending the courses online from their workplace. The second part of the pilot action was legal consultations for non-EU migrants in different places of the Lodzkie Region. The most common topics for the consultations were the legalization of residence, company law, family law, and the drafting or verification of documents and applications. Overall, more than 36 public servants participated in the language course from 7 different counties of the Lodzkie Region, and 264 migrants requested legal consultations.

10.2. Impact of the piloted social innovation approaches

Enhancing the language competencies of public servants has undeniably led to a significant improvement in the quality of public services for Ukrainian labor migrants. This removed the mental barrier and, at the same time, made the work of public servants much easier. Legal consultations were helpful in overcoming bureaucratic obstacles and providing new knowledge to non-EU migrants. With these activities, PP13 tested the demand for such kinds of services in the region, which is useful for future planning of integration initiatives.

10.3. Transferability of the piloted social innovation approaches

The activities implemented in Lodzkie Region are evaluated as transferable to other regions (e.g., focusing on the public sector). Meanwhile, it's necessary to pay attention that this pilot action was elaborated for a homogenous migrant group consisting mainly of Ukrainian workers. Inclusion of more diverse groups may bring additional challenges for planning and implementation.

10.4. Conclusions

The pilot action contributes to the concept of integration as a multifaceted process and tests the alternative role of language courses targeted at the employees of public institutions, which are the most important contact points for non-EU migrants. Such an approach may be fast and effective due to the establishment of emotional contacts and mutual interests between public servants and migrants. As for the legal consultations, they proved to be effective for dealing with bureaucracy.

11. Lessons learnt

All in all, the pilot activities tested during the project involved non-EU migrants, resident society, public institutions, private organizations, and businesses. The main types of implemented activities were public services, legal consultations, cultural and language mediation, language courses, and thematic workshops or events. The most common impact of the pilot actions deals with the establishment of the local welcoming network and communication channels between stakeholders. Nevertheless, many pilot actions also successfully satisfied unmet needs of non-EU nationals and contributed to the changes of attitudes towards non-EU migrants in rural areas.

It is essential to mention that all pilot actions were implemented during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, with significant challenges for the teams. Almost all partners had to adjust their activities and switch them to online mode. The most common challenges associated with the pandemic were: limitations in the number of participants or locations; permanent uncertainty in the future of pilot action; a lack of capacity among local stakeholders; and changes in the sociopolitical climate. Nevertheless, all partners successfully found alternatives and used combined tools to run the majority of scheduled activities.

The WP leader provided the following comments on the result of the pilot actions and added recommendations for the future based on discussions with the project partners:

11.1. On the Waldensians Valleys:

The pilot action was welcomed among local stakeholders and migrants, allowing a swift response to the pandemic-related restrictions. Housing issues remained a challenge as - despite the efforts made - no rental guarantees could be issued. Other self-defined indicators of the pilot action were fulfilled. In the future, more activities addressing the needs of the migrants and the local population should be implemented.

11.2. On the City of Osijek and DKollektiv:

The essence of the success of the pilot activity is the established cooperation between the city of Osijek and local organizations, good communication and exchange with other local stakeholders, and a combination of professional and voluntary services together with the implementation of the regional strategic plan.

11.3. On the Mountain Union of Ceva and UNCEM:

The pilot action is aimed at promoting a novel and different approach to managing migration flows in rural areas. Its main feature was in the networking process at the local and national level to fulfill the basic needs of migrants. The new model was successfully applied and allowed to resettle non-EU migrants. The model is replicable and transferable.

11.4. On the University of West Bohemia:

The pilot action managed to involve employers, migrant workers, and municipalities in a common approach that could provide meaningful assistance to individuals. Consultation services have gained popularity among migrants. Cooperation with employers as stakeholders represents a challenge as their motivation is often driven by expected short-term advantages. Follow-up activities depend on financial resources that have not been found yet.

11.5. On the Municipality of Piran:

This pilot action is a valuable example of cooperation with schools and teachers, which was vital for the pilot action's successful implementation. Similar approaches should be replicated in other towns in Slovenia (and beyond) where the promotion of integration is a hot issue. Migrant women are an important target group for activities promoting integration.

11.6. On the Municipality of Postojna:

The pilot action achieved all objectives, including the promotion of language skills and career plans among young migrants. Most beneficial were the activities of individual assistance. In the future, further stakeholders should be aligned to contribute to the activities. Empowering migrants to become mentors for newcomers of the same mother tongue is a positive feature that needs to be developed in the future. The municipality of Postojna aims to dedicate 25,000 Euro from its budget to continue activities in 2022.

11.7. On the West Pomerania Region and the University of Szczecin:

The activities succeeded in promoting integration among children. Other activities for intercultural dialogue in local public institutions were effective, too. For future activities, earlier involvement of youth in the elaboration of teaching tools is recommended. Differences between schools in urban and rural settings might need to be considered more carefully. The responsibility to continue the activities was transferred to the Secretariat for the Youth of the West Pomeranian region.

11.8. On the Burgenland District:

Due to the pandemic, many activities were moved online, but the pilot action was considered successful. Burgenland district therefore pledged its own resources to continue the activities for another six months after the end of the Arrival Regions project. When acquiring new participants, it is crucial to scout the common interests of local residents and migrants in order to facilitate communication. Another important task is fostering cooperation between the institution that runs the project and the local businesses, which would enable access to new potential participants. It also makes sense to boost media coverage to increase awareness about the pilot action.

11.9. On the Lodzkie Region:

The language course and legal consultations received positive feedback from non-EU citizens. Migrants living in the most rural areas of Lodzkie Region were difficult to reach. The Marshall Office aims to use the financing from the 2021-2027 financial period to implement similar activities in the future. As a recommendation, the program of the language course should consist of more conversation exercises and could be carried out in a less formal way. The participants of the language course could be divided into groups based on their professional background, which would stimulate communication between them and focus them on specific topics.