

D.T2.5.5

PILOT ACTION CONCLUSIONS (WORK PAPER)

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1. Introduction

Over the last decades, rural areas of Central Europe have been undergoing processes of demographic change. The negative consequences of youth emigration and the aging of local populations can already be felt by local economies and infrastructures. At the same time, the last decade brought a lot of non-EU nationals to many rural regions of Central Europe, turning them into New Migration Destinations for both regular and irregular migrants. Unfortunately, due to existing prejudice and missing intercultural experience, a lot of rural stakeholders and representatives of the civil society see increased immigration rather as a threat to their home regions. Nevertheless, we believe that the newly arrived migrants provide an incredible opportunity for rural regions of Central Europe to counterbalance the negative results of demographic change. As the majority of these regions neither have a long-lasting experience of managing the arrivals of international migrants, nor developed ethnic networks that can provide informal support for the newcomers, rural regions of Central Europe should search for innovative ideas that can turn integration of non-EU nationals into a success story. This will allow migrants to become legitimate members of local societies and grow roots in rural regions.

The Arrival Regions Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE project aims to develop successful social innovation approaches to support the integration of non-EU nationals by running and analyzing nine pilot actions in rural areas of Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Slovenia. All pilot actions were carried out between April 2020 and August 2021. Each of the pilot actions has been focused on at least one of the three main goals of the project: support of migrant youth, support of economically active migrants, and creation of a welcoming culture in rural regions of Central Europe. The overall goal of this working paper is to present specific lessons learned from each pilot action, as well as the general lessons learned of the project as a whole. All of the lessons learned that will be presented below are based on information provided in pilot action reports (A.T2.3-5) and reports from the peer review of each of the pilot actions that took place between May 2020 and June 2021 (D.T1.4.3). This working paper serves as a starting point for the upcoming deliverables on policy recommendations for social innovation in the integration of non-EU nationals (D.T2.6.2) and the tool-box for social innovation (D.T2.6.4)

2. Recommendations for a successful social innovation project supporting the integration of non-EU nationals in rural Central Europe

The following chapter presents general information about the pilot action that were carried out within the Arrival Regions Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Project, as well as the specific lessons learned from each of the pilot actions.

2.1. Specific lessons learned from each pilot action

PP2: HOME Extra-EU Citizens and Integration through Accessible Services

The pilot action (PA) is located in the Pelice Valley which is part of the Piedmont Region. Most of the migrants in the region come from Romania, Morocco, and Albania, but also from China, Nigeria, and Peru. Their presence can be traced back to two migratory waves: in the 90s, Chinese, Moroccan, Albanian and Peruvian nationals arrived in the region. After 2011 followed the so-called “North Africa Emergency”. After contacting key players of migrant reception in the region, GAL EVV identified the main challenges: difficulty in accessing support regarding matters of fiscal bureaucracy, household management (e.g., bills, service contracts, rent), and labour documents (e.g., contracts, payslips). Following these reflections, GALL EVV developed the following strategy in order to improve the access of migrants to the host society. Instead of employing new staff, the local service providers (help-desk operators) already working in the area were equipped with all the necessary skills to interact with migrants and address their needs with the support of cultural mediators.

Specific lessons learned:

1. No need to ‘reinvent the wheel’. It is useful to work with already existing networks and their expertise by customising the services they provide to the new target group.
2. It is useful to involve cultural mediators with a migration background since they understand much better the challenges migrants have to face.
3. Infographics and print materials are an efficient and cost-effective way to ‘sustain’, disseminate and give visibility to the project, after the funding period is over. This equally makes the knowledge generated during the project easily transferable to other regions.
4. Public institutions and actors can become more inclusive and open by understanding the challenges migrants have to face on a daily basis.

PP3+4: “Living with us”- organization for social development

The PA is located in the fourth largest town of Croatia, Osijek. There are over 30 migrants in the town that come from Pakistan and Nepal and are employed in the local construction and recycling company. Despite their presence, there is no comprehensive or ongoing support for them, since local service providers don't yet have the necessary knowledge and skills to support them in the process of integration. The purpose of the PA is to empower the local community and prepare them for the arrival of migrants. Moreover, the PA supports the integration of non-EU nationals through information services and volunteer programs which ensure their participation in the local community life (intercultural workshops, language, meeting with local volunteers). By developing a network of local stakeholders, the accessibility of their services for non-EU nationals should be improved. The final goal is to establish a Centre for Inclusion and Integration that will provide well-organised comprehensive support and space for interaction between non-EU nationals and the local population.

Specific lessons learned:

1. The pilot action was designed together with the representatives of the target group in order to directly address their needs. This has proven to have a positive impact on the PA since it had good participation rates and positive feedback.
2. Volunteering organizations are an important part of local support networks, as they can actively support the implementation of the pilot action during and after its pilot phase.
3. It is important to develop a pilot action, which can be profitable for various (marginalized) social groups (e.g. creating a centre where different groups can meet and connect).
4. Big political entities (cities, regions, municipalities) have a lot of influence and great advantages in the implementation of the pilot action (due to their access to various funding opportunities, already existing capital, opportunity to connect different stakeholders, etc.) → Pilot actions profit from the support of such actors.
5. A good media strategy has helped to awaken interest in the project and raise awareness about migrants' struggles within the local community.

PP5: Humanitarian Corridors meet public CAS

The project is carried out in the Unione Montana di Ceva, located in Cuneo province, one of the richest regions in Italy. As a result, the practice of welcoming migrants and their integration is rather exemplary. The rising number of foreign workers has also led to the development of a shadow economy, illegal employment, and exploitation. The starting point for the initiative was an analysis of the publicly managed Special Assistance Centres (CAS) and how desirable they are, compared to private assistance centres. The idea of the PA was to create a direct link between Humanitarian Corridors (HC) and public CAS in order to establish a stronger connection between the migrants and the labour market. Since the arrivals are based on direct legal access to the Italian territory, they can easily proceed with asylum applications. This gives the newly arrived refugees a greater chance to obtain a residency permit in a relatively short time. The process is embedded in a Memorandum with the religious bodies that manage HC, the public institutions, and the CAS. This should be followed by the welcoming of non-EU migrants and the implementation of an integration path through public CAS.

Specific lessons learned:

1. Each region should develop a strategy of arrival and integration that would foster and accelerate the process of welcoming and legalization of migrants (esp. refugees) in order to be able to begin the process of integration as soon as possible. Similarly, all actors need to be working towards the same goal.
2. Strategies should cover both arrival and post-arrival activities. It is important not to leave migrants alone after the arrival (the welcoming actors should organize different social activities, provide social and psychological support, help with employment).
3. This pilot action shows that in order to maximize the positive effect of a pilot action, it is important to involve so-called “door-openers” to local society: mayors, priests or any other well-respected individuals.
4. If migrants do not self-determine their place of arrival, it is difficult to influence if they are going to stay in the region after the integration measures have been completed since most have their own planned migratory mandate.
5. Transferring already existing ideas to new (spatial) contexts (bringing Humanitarian corridors to rural regions) is beneficial, because already existing knowledge, networks, and infrastructures can be used.

PP7: Coordination Centre for Integration Activities Bor

The PA is located in the West-Bohemian town of Bor that was affected by massive out-migration from the region after 1945, causing numerous social problems persisting until today. The unemployment rate is the fifth-highest in the Pilsen region, although four of the five biggest industrial enterprises of the automotive industry are located in the surroundings of the town. A significant number of the employees are foreign workers, mainly from Ukraine, Serbia, Moldova, and the Philippines. However, there is insufficient welcoming infrastructure and a lack of integration services. This is particularly challenging for the municipality since employers are lacking the motivation to support the integration of their employees. As a result, foreign workers are not aware of the existing integrational activities and are living parallel to the receiving society. A secondary target group are Vietnamese entrepreneurs who have been living in the region for the last decades. The aim of the PA is to establish a Centre for the promotion, motivation, and mediation of integration activities of non-EU nationals. In practice, the centre would mediate communication between all parties in order to promote the integration of migrants in the long term. This would include activities such as giving individual assistance and advice on legal and social issues, language and integration courses, and the organising of leisure activities leading to the discovery of the local culture.

Specific lessons learned:

1. Create a link between migrants and service providers which are only present in urban areas (e.g. NGOs in Pilsen, Prague...).
2. Snowballing works for reaching the audience.
3. Start with a small and flexible project to test whether the selected approaches are working. Think of expanding the project only when you have stable positive results.
4. Language courses can serve as a tool to approach the target group and build mutual trust, necessary for further cooperation.
5. Curricula, location and the times of language lessons should be designed to meet the needs of the target group (every-day conversation, premises of the company, flexible timetable according to working hours).
6. Demonstrate to the target group that language knowledge can boost one's confidence and quality of life.
7. It is beneficial to involve actors with migration background that have the cultural and linguistic background of the target group.
8. The coordinator of the activities should have a good set of 'soft' skills.
9. Involve employers and show them that the action is in their own interest.

PP8: Combating Discrimination against Migrant Children and Women

The project is located in the municipality of Piran, which is part of the Obalno-Kraška region. In addition to the Italian minority, there are many migrants from the former Yugoslav republics. The aim of the PA is to raise awareness about migration in schools and kindergartens in order to tackle discrimination against migrants. Moreover, the PA aims to establish a network of stakeholders who have the capacity to recognise migrants' needs and guide them through institutional procedures in the local community. Through education and greater awareness in schools, the project aims to create a more inclusive environment and empower migrant mothers and their children in the process of learning the Slovenian language in order to break the linguistic and social barriers.

Specific lessons learned:

1. Children are a bridge to older generations. Integration activities should include multiple generations from both local and migrant backgrounds.
2. Schools can serve as public spaces or meeting points for migrants and locals in order to develop contact between both groups and improve intercultural communication. This is particularly crucial for rural areas with limited public spaces.
3. In terms of language learning, it is easier to organize learning groups based on the native language of the target group.
4. Building trust requires working with intermediaries of specific groups.
5. It is necessary to think about how to adjust the project in case the demand increases so that those who partake do not exceed their capacities. A solution to this could be delegating the tasks to external actors.
6. The transferability of the project is much easier if there is an already existing network and the project is rather low-cost.

PP9: STARTING POINT POSTOJNA

The project is located in the Primorsko-Notranjska region in the Municipality of Postojna. The main motivation behind the project was the lack of a governmental office or a non-governmental body that would comprehensively cover the needs of migrants living permanently in the region. There are five target groups that the project supports: unaccompanied minors mainly from the Middle East, migrants from the Western Balkan states, and a number of migrants from Venezuela, Egypt, Algeria, and Sierra Leone. The PA represents a first point of contact for all migrants which provides comprehensive assistance during the process of integration into the local environment. It supports them with managing and understanding official documents, offers legal advice, gives them career guidance support, and provides access to job opportunities through attending courses and job shadowing. Moreover, it establishes peer-to-peer learning, empowers migrants in learning the Slovenian language, and organises activities in order to get to know the local culture. The leaders of the PA are in constant contact with local stakeholders in order to identify and keep track of the needs of migrants, and together with them try to find optimal solutions to their problems. Through the PA, the office also created a bridge between local society and immigrants. It expanded the social network and employment opportunities for migrants by organising various workshops, thematic evenings, sport and cultural events.

Specific lessons learned:

1. Small size is a “plus”. It is easier to build a network and communicate the project ideas and results in a small rural setting.
2. Intensive contact with the target group allows one to understand their needs and develop trust (e.g. the unattended migrants live and study at the dorm and have 24/7 contact with the project managers).
3. Diversify the list of activities offered by the pilot action in order to attract various target groups and hence support various aspects of societal integration.
4. A lot of rural areas lack public spaces where representatives of various social groups can meet and interact. There is an urgent need to develop such meeting points if they are missing.

PP10+11: EACH OF US IS UNIQUE AND IMPORTANT Multicultural Education in the Classroom

The project is located in the communes of West Pomerania with a greater number of immigrants from Ukraine or Belarus. These areas are characterized by strongly developing market of tourism, including spa and health tourism. Moreover, the food and mineral industries are important branches of the local economy. Immigration to Poland and West Pomerania is primarily of economic nature, which is manifested by the dynamically increasing number of issued work permits for foreigners, seasonal work permits and declarations on entrusting work to foreigners.

The pilot action wants to integrate intercultural competencies into the education system in the region in order to facilitate understanding and respect for migrants, interact and communicate with them in an effective and appropriate manner and therefore establish positive and constructive relations with them. Similarly, the pilot action wants to improve the intercultural competencies of pupils and teachers by enabling them to take part in workshops run by experts and prepare special didactic materials for them. This will help to develop a friendly and positive atmosphere for migrants in the school. The target group of the pilot action is mainly Ukrainian migrants who have been migrating to the region, but also migrants from other countries.

The country of origin of immigrants is important when it comes to integration challenges. Citizens of Ukraine are perceived as easily adapting to living and working conditions in Poland. Although this is largely true, it does not mean that the needs of migrants from the so-called culturally close countries (such as Ukraine or Belarus) can be ignored. It should be noted that apart from the issues of legalisation of entry and work, migrants also face challenges of integration with the local society. The pilot action wants to prepare locals for the arrival of migrants in order to tackle prejudice and discriminative behaviours.

Specific lessons learned:

1. The topic of migration should be depoliticized and humanized, since we all have similar needs.
2. Regional and local public administration entities have a lot of material and administrative resources, which can guarantee the sustainability of a pilot action. However, the success of pilot action directly relies on wider changes in educational institutions and the involvement of teachers. Educational institutions need to take a more proactive approach in building appropriate relationships with local authorities, as well as strengthening relationships with local NGOs supporting immigrants.
3. Hate and discrimination can be unlearned, in particular by children who can, later on, pass their knowledge and experiences onto their friends and families.
4. Access to certain actors can be challenging (e.g. the education system in Poland is centrally managed by Ministry of Education and Science and regional authorities have no direct impact on the learning program).
5. A great opportunity for change is the use of creative and innovative potential of young people through non-formal activities (e.g. intercultural ambassadors).

PP12: EMI BLK

The project is located in the Burgenland District, which is hosting a number of migrants and refugees mainly from the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Africa. Due to the rurality of the region, a lot of migrants move out to urban areas after receiving a permanent residency permit. One of the key reasons behind this is the absence of a welcoming culture, which hinders their integration. In terms of integration into the labour market, the language barrier and the lack of knowledge of social norms are also important hurdles to an adequate integration in the company. Numerous integration projects have been successful in achieving labour integration, however social integration seems to have been forgotten. The idea of this pilot action is to organise weekend camps that include young adults, both migrants and Germans. The participants must already be working or attending an apprenticeship. The activities of the camps include team building, sports activities while discovering the landscape of the region, activities concerning the culture and tradition of the region, competitions between groups. The aim of these activities is to familiarize migrants with the local society and culture, create space where both sides can learn from each other on an equal basis, develop skills such as consistency, self-confidence, team leadership, management, etc.

Specific lessons learned:

1. Each region requires tailor-made social innovations to answer the specific needs of the local target groups (the concept of Ny på landet needed to be adapted to the needs of the migrants living in Burgenland district and the local situation).
2. Clearly defined long-term goals are necessary.
3. What seems easy, might be challenging (e.g. involvement of the German young adults, participation of local businesses in the project, etc.).
4. Success depends on group cohesion.
5. There will always be opposition to any good initiative. It is, therefore, necessary to incorporate advocates of the pilot action.
6. It might be complicated to actively involve stakeholders in the organization of a pilot action. Thus, the project leader should consistently persuade local stakeholders to take part in all pilot activities.

PP13: Legal support and better communication - how to make Ukrainian citizens feel better and safer in the Lodzkie Region

The project is located in the Lodzkie Voivodeship, in particular the city of Łódź. The target group of the project is Ukrainian migrants who are working in industrial factories, logistics, warehouses as well as agriculture in the region, as well as employees of public bodies in the region (for Ukrainian Language courses). Since most of these professions do not require higher qualifications, most of the migrants face difficulties in adapting to life in Poland. The activities of the pilot action consist of offering legal advice to Ukrainian migrants through sessions with lawyers, the development of an easy-to-use guide for foreigners, as well as the development of a FAQ handbook documenting the legal advice activities. All of these activities take place in smaller urban centres across the region. Moreover, the language competencies of employees of the local and regional administration that often come into contact with migrants were improved through Ukrainian language courses at A1-B1 level. These courses were held online in order to bring together people from different parts of the region.

Specific lessons learned:

1. Big public bodies have the advantage of creating, promoting and maintaining projects supporting the integration of non-EU nationals, in particular through their access to funding.
2. Support of national organisations (both formal and informal) is crucial.
3. It is necessary to get to know the communication and promotion channels used by the specific target group.
4. The services should be accessible for target groups living in different parts of the region.
5. If the participants in the language class group are too diverse, it is difficult to find common topics for communication.
6. Participants of the language course can choose the lesson schedule that fits their routine.
7. An opportunity to participate at the language course during the working hours is a plus.
8. Language courses should be tailor-made for the needs of the specific target group (e.g. improving everyday communication skills, learning about culture and tradition)
9. In case of the dominance of a group with one cultural background, it is useful if representatives of public bodies learn the basics of the language of this group. This can improve communication between migrants and officials, lower the hierarchies and mitigate some potential conflicts based on misunderstandings.

General Lessons Learned

Each pilot area has tested a unique social innovation approach. Nevertheless, a lot of pilot actions have resulted in similar lessons learned. This chapter provides the structured list of the lessons learned that were confirmed by more than one pilot actions. We believe that each stakeholder who wants to successfully introduce social innovation approaches as a way to support integration of non-EU nationals should take into consideration our general lessons learned.

Target groups and their challenges

- Focus on **durable solutions** to everyday problems. For instance, choose a target group with a **long-term perspective** for staying in the area or migrants which should focus on ways of supporting them in their process of integration.
- Get to **know your target group**. This is absolutely necessary in order to **understand the challenges** they are facing, both long- and short-term, and how to tackle them effectively.

Involvement of the target group

- The pilot initiative needs to **address the specific needs and interests** of the target group.
- **Co-creation of the pilot action** concept boosts participants' interest and involvement.
- The **inclusion of the target group in the project** team is equally necessary. This not only ameliorates cultural and linguistic mediation, gives space for shared experiences between migrants and locals, creates trust, but also creates role-models for the migrants partaking in the pilot action and going through the integration process.
- Building trust requires **working with intermediaries** of specific target groups.

Involvement of the host society

- Based on our approach of **integration being a two-way process**, the pilot action should aim to integrate both locals and migrants of different ages, income and cultural backgrounds.
- The pilot action should not only be **tackling prejudice and stereotypes** against migrants, but also encourage locals to develop a sense of curiosity towards other cultures through public events promoting openness and respect. Moreover, the pilot project should convey the message that migrants are not a burden and a threat, the international migration is

rather a chance for a region to deal with the negative outcomes of demographic change and skills shortages

- A lot of rural areas lack **public spaces** where representatives of various social groups can meet and interact. There is an urgent need to develop such meeting points if they are missing.
- A successful pilot action should **adopt an integrated approach** that addresses the needs of various social groups living in a region (migrants with different cultural and educational backgrounds, local stakeholders, civil society, different marginalised groups, etc).

The role of stakeholders

- **Stakeholders are the gatekeepers** of various target groups and can **provide big material and institutional support for the pilot activities**.
- According to our experience, there are usually little to no cooperation and collaboration between rural stakeholders dealing with the integration of migrants. Hence, **the network of the stakeholders** should be established and actively involved in the pilot action from the moment of conceptualization. This network should include representatives of public, private and non-governmental institutions.
- Communication with stakeholders requires **an individual approach**. In other words, each stakeholder should recognise **the benefits of participating** in the pilot action (especially business stakeholders). The project management needs to identify the benefits and promote them.

Mutual learning and knowledge

- **Analyze already existing offers** of services that support the integration of non-EU nationals in the regions.
- Establish networks with stakeholders who are already working in this area and through their **experiences and expertise** identify together with them what is missing and what could be improved.
- When developing a new project, project managers should base their activities on **already existing networks** (if they have proven to be successful), **extract from their** already existing knowledge and expertise and delegate tasks in order to avoid double work.
- The organizers need to **be locally well-connected** and determined people with a **good set of intercultural and soft skills**.

Building sustainable networks

- **A strong, reliable, diverse and long-lasting network** of local (and national) stakeholders is a key for a well-operating pilot action. Nevertheless, the creation and maintenance of a functioning network of stakeholders is a very time- and energy-consuming activity, hence a lot of time should be dedicated to these activities.
- It is important to set a **good and stable foundation** for the network so that it continues to operate after the end of the funding period.
- **Volunteers can be a benefit** for the project and can provide a lot of support. Nevertheless, the project requires permanent staff responsible for the running of the pilot action.
- It is necessary to think about how to adjust the project in case the demand increases so that those who partake do not exceed their capacities. A solution to this could be **delegating the tasks to external actors**.
- Temporary projects are usually not able to implement positive change. Hence, the pilot project manager should develop strategies and solutions to **make the actions permanent**, find additional funding sources or stakeholders who would be willing to carry on the work in the future.

Acquiring funding

- **An integrated approach provides more flexibility** for the development of the project. It not only provides means for the personal development of representatives of the target groups but also diversifies the funding opportunities for the project by increasing its legitimacy in the eyes of potential sponsors. Moreover, it creates a diverse network of stakeholders, more flexibility in activities carried within the pilot action and an increased chance to sustain the pilot action.
- Do not depend on one source of funding. **Diversify your sources of funding** and opportunities in order to avoid having to close down the initiative after the end of the funding period.

Adaptation and transferability

- Every initiative needs to **be flexible**, ready to learn and improve its concepts and practice along the run of the project.
- **Certain activities, but not all, can be digitized** if needed in order to adapt to emergency situations, such as the pandemic. It is important to stay flexible in order to keep integration activities running.

- **Tangible materials** such as lesson plans, infographics and print materials that can be replicated in other regions are good tools to sustain the results of the project and spread the ideas to external parties.
- The transferability of the project is much easier if there is an already existing network and the project is rather **low-cost**.

3. Conclusions

As it happens in many new migration destinations, non-EU nationals living in rural areas of Central Europe need additional support. The results of the Arrival Regions project show that selected social innovation approaches have positively influenced the integration of non-EU nationals in the pilot regions. Hence, we can highly recommend using the piloted social innovation approaches in other rural areas of Central Europe. The experience of the project partners has shown that the success of a project supporting the integration of non-EU nationals depends on several factors. First and foremost, each pilot action should be tailor-made for the needs of the specific region. Thus, good preliminary work with local stakeholders and representatives of target groups in order to identify the biggest issues faced by non-EU nationals is of vital importance. We also highly recommend the involvement of the migrant groups in the co-creation and organization of a pilot action. Second, we want to highlight the fact that many rural areas of Central Europe have little or no experience in dealing with international migrants. This means that in order to make migrants feel welcome and at home at the place of their arrival, these regions should work hard on the creation of a local welcoming culture. We would like to stress that integration is a two-way process and hence recommend the involvement of locals on various stages of the pilot action. Through active participation in integration activities, local inhabitants get a chance to meet and get to know the newcomers, mutually learn about new cultures, improve their skills in multicultural communication, and, as a consequence, become more open towards diversity. Third, the integration process is very complex and needs multifaceted support. Therefore, each pilot project supporting the integration of non-EU nationals should be based on a stable, active, and diverse network of stakeholders dealing with migration and integration. In addition to active support in pilot actions, stakeholders can usually be valuable gate-openers to various target groups. Finally, as the process of integration does not have a definite end, all activities supporting integration should be continuous. Diversifying funding sources will help to sustain the select social innovation approach in the region for long periods of time.