



Share Network

Look & Learn Visit

Conference and Site Visit Report

Sigüenza, Guadalajara (Spain)

7th-9th June, 2022



Introduction

The [Share Network](#) (led by ICMC Europe), the International Organisation for Migration in Spain (IOM) and Fundación Cepaim organised a **Look & Learn visit** in Sigüenza (Guadalajara, Spain) on 7, 8 and 9 June 2022.

Co-funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the best practice exchange conference and visit was organised within the context of the [Share SIRA project](#), which expands and strengthens social orientation and integration approaches in 10 rural regions in Europe. The project is implemented in collaboration with the abovementioned partners, as well as Entraide Pierre Valdo (EPV), IOM Regional Office in Brussels, IOM Poland and the Regional Development Agency of Karditsa (ANKA).

Building on the positive synergies of the SIRA multi-stakeholder cooperation platforms and pilot actions, the objective of the Look & Learn visit was to **showcase place-based social orientation and inclusion practices** for newcomers in a rural area, as well as to **foster peer learning and exchange** between EU countries. The visit to Guadalajara is one of the two visits organised in the framework of SIRA. A second visit will take place in Grenoble (Isère, France) in September 2022.

During the two-day visit to Sigüenza, a European delegation of **43 participants** from **Belgium, France, Poland and Spain**, participated in a series of interactive activities and conferences (*see agenda in Annex 1*). Participants, most of them engaged in the reception and integration of newcomers in rural areas in their respective countries, were drawn from national,

regional and local authorities, civil society organizations, local development groups, academia, volunteer groups, and some were migrants and refugees as well.

Sigüenza, in [Guadalajara](#), was an ideal setting for the first SIRA Look & Learn visit. The town belongs to the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha, which is one of the most depopulated areas in Spain, with 273 municipalities (29%) having less than 200 inhabitants. Sigüenza has a longstanding tradition of welcoming migrants and refugees and hosts one of the main reception centres for asylum seekers, migrants and refugees in Spain, managed by ACCEM. The municipality, that counts with a population of approximately 4,300 people, has residents from more than fifty different nationalities.

Although very diverse, the EU's rural territories share a number of **common challenges**, such as rural exodus, ageing populations, limited employment opportunities, poor transport connections, problems of access to basic services or lack of digital connectivity. These challenges can amplify the common integration barriers faced by refugees and migrants.

Nevertheless, newcomers have the potential to be a **key driver of rural revitalization**, by addressing some of the common challenges that rural territories face, and reverse population decline, address labour shortages and build more resilient communities. Moreover, rural and



smaller communities can offer specific opportunities for integration¹.

In the EU, integration and the future development of rural territories are the focus of several **major new policy initiatives** launched in 2020-21, such as the [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027](#) and the [long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas](#). While the positive synergies between refugee and migrant integration and rural revitalisation policies remain to be fully exploited², these initiatives recognise the key role played by local communities in welcoming newcomers and supporting the development of their territory, and highlight the importance of place-based approaches to policymaking, multi-stakeholder partnerships and multi-level governance cooperation.

Within this framework, the Look & Learn visit offered participants the opportunity to discuss the **potential of migration for rural revitalization**, as well as common advocacy strategies and operational, multi stakeholder frameworks to strengthen the socioeconomic inclusion of newcomers in rural areas. The conference further provided the chance to **exchange and share best practices** linked to the reception processes, access to labour market and housing, as well as community engagement. International participants were able to reflect on how to translate these practices into their own local, regional and national contexts. Taking place a few months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the conference also offered some reflections on hosting Ukrainian refugees in rural areas and the repercussion in existing programmes.

¹ See also the [Share-IFRI publication Resettlement in small towns and rural areas in France](#) (July 2019)

² For further information see the Share Network's [Policy Brief on Building Inclusive Rural Territories](#) (March 2022)

Day 1: Field visit of ACCEM's reception centre

In the afternoon of June 7th, participants **visited ACCEM's reception centre for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the locality**. After a brief visit to the centre's facilities, the participants were able to learn more about ACCEM's work in Sigüenza and the particularities of the Spanish reception and asylum system from the Centre Manager, **Ana Belén Sanz Cerezo**.

ACCEM's centre in Sigüenza is one of the few ones in Spain located in a rural area³. ACCEM offers a **comprehensive reception and integration programme** that can last up to 18 months and that aims to facilitate people's autonomy and support them in their socio-professional insertion. The up to **90 beneficiaries** that can be accommodated in the centre receive a **variety of services** in the centre's facilities: legal, language learning, health and mental care, re-qualification of skills, and administrative support. The offices of the centre's staff are located on the premises, next to the beneficiaries' flats, allowing for continuous and direct communication.

ACCEM's focal point highlighted that rurality brings with it important challenges, such as the **higher cost of services due to isolation, lower mobility and scarcity of social entities**. When the centre opened 30 years ago, it seemed a risky bet.

For organisations to succeed in this context, **holistic and innovative approaches** are required. They must actively **seek**

resources, create inclusive economic activities, and promote different solutions to the needs. For example, ACCEM carries out active employment and labour insertion projects for both asylum seekers, migrants and the local population. Language learning is also key. ACCEM's **pilot action** funded under the Share SIRA project, for example, consists of reaching out to the immigrant population in different municipalities to offer them language classes. In addition, social entities are **creating social enterprises for employment insertion** that respond to the local context, the demand for work and the needs of the territory.

GOOD PRACTICE

[SAVIA NUEVA](#) was created by ACCEM in 2010, being the first social company⁴ of its kind in Castilla-La Mancha. SAVIA offers training programmes in gardening, horticulture and cleaning for the beneficiaries of the centre as well as for the local unemployed and socially vulnerable population in the area. This inclusive approach is the main pillar of its success, support and social cohesion.

The support of the Autonomous Region of Castilla-La-Mancha is crucial. The grants awarded by the Regional Government ("Junta de Castilla-La Mancha") are key, while parts of the profits of the company are reinvested in its own action. ACCEM's future objective is to grow the social

³ Most of the reception centres in Spain are located in cities. The Ministry of Interior has the competence of the asylum system. It works closely to implement the asylum framework with a few non-governmental entities: the Red Cross, CEAR and ACCEM, who are

responsible among other of reception centres for beneficiaries of international protection.

⁴A social enterprise is an operator in the social economy whose main objective is to have a social impact rather than to make a profit for their owners.

company and, above all, to make it more autonomous and become self-sustainable.

Finally, participants also appreciated the opportunity to **learn about the experience of one of the beneficiaries** of ACCEM, who benefitted from the labour insertion programme at SAVIA. While rural territories struggle with the exodus of the population, she decided to stay, having found a job in Sigüenza, and was now planning to resume her studies in order to evolve professionally.

The first day ended with a reflection on strategies to ensure the **acceptance and engagement of the local community**. After 30 years, ACCEM's projects have managed to gain the support and trust of the local community. This has been possible thanks to the inclusive nature of its activities. These include organisation of intercultural activities aimed at the local and immigrant population (open doors, festivals, gastronomic days), as well as the inclusive approach of the job placement project through SAVIA.



Collective discussion of the European delegation & ACCEM representatives at the Reception Centre.

Day 2: Conference & World Café

On the 8th of June, the conference took place in the Plenary Hall of Sigüenza's Town Hall. The conference included three panels with the participation of **43 representatives** of various local, regional and national authorities, practitioners and civil society organisations linked to the fields of migration, rural development and demographic challenge from international delegations, Sigüenza and other Spanish regions.

Participants were welcomed by **Rabab Ahmad**, *Thematic Specialist at the International Organization for Migration Regional Office in Brussels*. She opened the conference with a reflection on how rural areas can provide unique opportunities for integration, adding that **“the arrival of newcomers brings, in turn, new possibilities for rural development and revitalisation (both demographic and economic) to these areas”**. She reminded that each national context is different, and that the conference would be a great opportunity to exchange best practices from different settings.



Participants listening to opening words.

Panel I: Addressing demographic challenges & rural revitalisation through migration: national, regional and local responses & frameworks



First panel. From left to right: Adolfo Patón, María Jesús Merino, Jesús Alique López, Rabab Ahmad & Juana López Pagán (online).

The **first roundtable** was moderated by **Adolfo Patón**, *Regional Coordinator of Fundación Cepaim and President of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) in Castilla-La Mancha*.

Adolfo Patón, made an introduction, taking advantage of this meeting framework as a fundamental point in social and territorial cohesion. He presented the aim of the panel: to address how the political and legal framework builds the basis for the revitalization of rural areas through migration.

The first speaker, **Juana López Pagán**, *General Director of Policies against Depopulation of the Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge*, attended the conference online.

She stressed that Spain is a country with a great territorial imbalance. She pointed out

the importance of managing diversity and generating multi-sectoral opportunities in the territory. She emphasized that **connecting rural and depopulated areas** is one of the Government's priorities for the next years. In this context, Spanish national authorities are working with all levels of governance, and in particular, municipal authorities, to develop multi-sectoral policies, services and projects adapted to the needs. She underlined the need to focus instead on **enhancing opportunities for all inhabitants to choose where to live**.

Jesús Alique López, *Commissioner for the Demographic Challenge of the Government of Castilla-La-Mancha*, highlighted the fact that the region is quite innovative in terms of rural development and measures to address the demographic challenge. He gave an overview of Castilla-La-Mancha's pioneering 'Law on Economic, Social and Tax Measures Against Depopulation and for the Development on the Rural Environment'⁵, which came into force in 2021.

GOOD PRACTICE

The '**Law on Economic, Social and Tax Measures Against Depopulation and for the Development on the Rural Environment**' contains social, economic and fiscal measures to curb rural exodus and combat depopulation. It provides a cross-cutting framework guaranteeing the same opportunities for all inhabitants in the territory, regardless their country of origin. The Law establishes a **depopulation proofing mechanism**: all regional sectoral laws, plans and strategies must be

accompanied by a demographic impact report. In addition, all calls for proposals launched by the Junta de Castilla-La Mancha must include **positive incentives** for those that are planning to invest and stay in depopulated areas. It is reinforced by the '**Regional Strategy against Depopulation in Castilla-La Mancha**', which foresees 210 actions and a budget of **3,322 million euros** to support entrepreneurial initiatives, the integration of immigrants and the provision of public services. After a **participatory consultation process**, the initiative successfully mobilised social and political support, and was passed with a majority in the regional parliament.

Jesús Alique concluded his reflection by saying that "**depopulation cannot be fought from village to village, we have to work at a more macro level and coordinate with all levels of government**".

María Jesús Merino, *Mayoress of Sigüenza and President of the Association for the Local Development of the Sierra Norte de Guadalupe*, advocated for maintaining the business fabric of the region and encouraging entrepreneurship.

She explained to the participants that thanks to the work of ACEM in the reception centre and the local community, Sigüenza was a town of great cultural diversity, which is now applying to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. She reflected on the **possibilities that rural territories offer people to stay and remain**, referring to **rural towns as welcoming spaces** for newcomers, which in turn are generators of opportunities. This is the case

⁵ For more information, you can also read the [Case Study](#) produced by the European Network for Rural Development

of Sigüenza where 12 new businesses have opened in the last months, some of them led by migrants. As strategies to follow, she spoke of policy coherence and multi-level coordination, of working with all relevant stakeholders, as well as of the dignification of employment and equality. **“When institutions at all levels of governance work together in defining a clear roadmap and support each other with funding, then everything becomes possible”**, she stressed, highlighting the long-term cooperation her administration maintains with regional and national authorities.

At the **end of the session**, as a result of some of the reflections made during this panel, the importance of not instrumentalising migration, avoiding a utilitarian vision of it, and of building together a narrative that reflects the transformation of Spanish society in all its dimensions, as well as its diversity and cultural richness, was highlighted. Some participants pointed out that the **lack of services** in rural areas remains a challenge, which especially affect migrant women. With few childcare facilities in these territories, migrant women’s chances of accessing the labour market are furthered reduced. Moreover, as pointed out by some of the participants, rising housing prices put the migrant population in great difficulties as they tend to be concentrated in precarious jobs.

Panel II: The role of local actors in supporting the inclusion of newcomers: opportunities and challenges of a multi-stakeholder approach



Second panel. From left to right: Marta Hernández Pavón, Bibiana Cossio, Driss Said, Carmen Ayllón, Irene Almazán.

The **second roundtable** was moderated by **Irene Almazán**, *Project Officer of the Share SIRA project at Fundación Cepaim*, and focused on the role of civil society, **community engagement and migrant participation** in rural areas.

Carmen Ayllón, *Project Officer at Fundación Cepaim*, presented the ongoing Horizon 2020⁶ research project [Welcoming Spaces](#) which maps spaces that foster a **sense of belonging and self-esteem** of newcomers. She presented examples of welcoming communities across different EU member states, which serve as a basis for triggering action and supporting future advocacy strategies.

GOOD PRACTICE

The presentation of good practices that have been identified within the Welcoming Spaces project was divided by the type of actor carrying out the initiatives, i.e. those

⁶ The Share Network co-organised in September 2021 an online [event](#) with 4 Horizon2020 projects and the

European Commission on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

carried out by public entities; citizen and third sector initiatives; and those implemented by companies.

A notable case would be that of Quintana Redonda in Soria, where several **welcoming initiatives from the administration, the third sector and companies converge**. On the one hand, there is a company that offers good working conditions and hires people of migrant origin with qualifications. On the other hand, resin is being promoted in this area as a factor of revitalisation and sustainability, and many migrants are independently managing the exploitation of resin on their own, as well as hiring staff, mostly of migrant origin. This is also where the public sector comes in, as financial support is being provided to resin workers. Furthermore, Cepaim's Nuevos Senderos project is present in the municipality, acting as a liaison with the different actors and as a cultural mediator.

This case exemplifies that the confluence of several welcoming initiatives, allows the **emergence of a welcoming space, being the will to welcome and multi-stakeholder engagement essential for its success**.

Other welcoming initiatives were also highlighted especially for promoting community cohesion, such as the social garden, the [Pippioteca](#) and Intercultural Festival of Molina de Aragón.

Driss Sadi, current *Coordinator of ACCEM's Emergency Centre for Ukraine*, spoke from his personal experience as a migrant who arrived in Sigüenza 30 years ago. He emphasized that **rural areas have advantages as places of residence** for newcomers, notably the strong social networks. As a migrant himself, he

commented that if migrants are to be part of this society, they must participate in all social spheres. He raised an important point: not to focus only on the folkloric aspects of the newcomers' countries of origin (such as gastronomy or music), but to strive to **improve their access to housing and decent employment opportunities**.

He stated that **"migrants, like anybody else, are a whole self and they have agency and concerns like any other"**, which is why **"they must have a place in the spaces of citizen participation and have their own voice in the society in which they live"**.

He ended his reflection with a note on the importance of **non-discrimination** between immigrant groups, warning that it can lead to tensions and community unrest: **"every time there is a new crisis, like the one in Ukraine now, most of the aid is channelled to one single group. It is important to base aid on needs and not on nationality"**.

Marta Hernández Pavón, *Coordinator of the Women's Centre of Sigüenza*, presented the work of this entity in the locality over the last twenty years. The centre works in cooperation with other actors in the area such as ACCEM and the Town Hall, offering its services to the local population and newcomers. She re-stated one of the previous points about the double disadvantage that migrant women face in rural areas. She concluded by stating that working with migrant women is essential for the wellbeing of the whole family.

Bibiana Cossio, *Project Officer at the Valencian Federation of Associated Worker Cooperative Companies*, presented [Migracoop](#) project, which was launched two years ago in the Region of Valencia and

encourages **entrepreneurship** and the integration of migrants into the labour market through the social economy and **cooperativism**. The project aims to:

- Explore the possibility of decent and quality employment for migrants.
- Give new solutions to depopulated territories willing and able to welcome migrant population.
- Promote economic activity under the formula of cooperative or social economy enterprises.
- Train and empower the people in charge of depopulated territories and migrant collectives so that they become real agents of change who can promote processes to face the challenges posed.

GOOD PRACTICE

The creation and consolidation of a network of people, communities and organisations that act as **agents of change**, allows the facilitation, accompaniment, collaborative articulation and future projects in the field of migration, rural revitalisation and cooperative work.

During a final interactive discussion, the speakers of the panel stated that **migrants and refugees have agency** and should be informed and given all the opportunities to participate in the hosting society. In addition, some participants advocated for the **regularisation of the status of migrants** as a pre-condition for socioeconomic integration and participation in society.

Panel III: Housing & migrant social inclusion in rural areas: case studies & best practices



Third panel. From left to right: Marine Sabria, María Jouve, Rebeca Fernández, Andrea Soler.

Andrea Soler, SIRA Coordinator at the International Catholic Migration Commission Europe. She opened the reflection by stressing that access to housing and the labour market are fundamental aspects of the integration of newcomers. She emphasized that **matching skills and needs** is crucial, as well as **protecting the social and labour rights** of migrant workers. For this, coordination between state services, service providers, civil society and the private sector is key.

In the third roundtable, **María Jouve**, Focal point for SIRA at IOM Spain, presented the **PEAR project** for the promotion of employment in rural areas and the **ESTUDIO** project financed by the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration of Spain.

The PEAR project has favoured integration, mobility and labour insertion in rural areas with low population density through the promotion of employment among the migrant population. To this end, work has been carried out in parallel at two levels, in

order to have a multidisciplinary approach and maximise results: with the administration and staff working in the rural area in the front line, and with the migrant population in general, and migrant women in particular.

PEAR has promoted the **generation of employment opportunities** through training and education of the migrant population in rural areas; training related to entrepreneurship and self-employment; reduce the digital divide among the female migrant population residing in rural areas; and facilitate employment among the migrant population in rural areas through advice and support in the search for funding and business creation.

María Jouve also presented the main findings of ESTUDIO, in particular the need to change the narrative on migration, the possibility of offering welcome packages to the migrant population to encourage them to stay in rural areas and improve connectivity.

Rebeca Fernández, *Project Officer of the [Nuevos Senderos](#) project in the office of Fundación Cepaim in Molina de Aragón*, had the opportunity to present the project to the European participants. This project aims to respond to two needs: **improving the processes of social and labour insertion of non-EU migrants and attracting population to depopulated rural areas**.

Fundación Cepaim works as a mediating entity between non-EU migrants (including refugees) and companies, town councils and other entities involved in the socio-labour integration itinerary. The association identifies migrant families willing to move to a depopulated area and establishes

contact with landlords and employers. They present the offers to the family who after a visit to the locality decides whether to move or not. The project officer stressed that job offers must be of high quality in order to proceed with a transfer and that migrants cannot be left out, so pre-training is carried out to avoid lack of resources and skills.

GOOD PRACTICE

Providing **information** on opportunities and what it means to live in a rural area allows to manage expectations, facilitates adaptation and prevents secondary movement. In the Nuevos Senderos project, the migrant family receives pre-settlement information and post-settlement support. Having a social entity as intermediary ensures **good coordination and support**.

Rebeca Fernández shared the project's recent outcomes: in 2021, the project had **230 participants** (120 women and 110 men), of which **80.4%** improved their employability.

Marine Sabria, *Project Assistant at IOM RO Brussels*, presented the [HELIOS project](#) (Hellenic integration support for beneficiaries of international protection). This project in Greece supports and promotes the integration of beneficiaries of international protection by providing: integration courses; accommodation support; employability support; integration monitoring; and the awareness-raising of local communities, highlighting the value of integration.

World Café – Towards sustainable integration: co-designing a roadmap for socioeconomic inclusion in rural areas by country delegations.



Participants exchanging at the premises of ACCEM's reception centre.

In the afternoon, the participants moved their location to ACCEM's centre for the **World Café session** and gathered in groups. For an hour and a half, each group co-designed a **roadmap for the socio-economic integration of newly arrived migrants in rural areas**, reflecting on objectives, actions, challenges, opportunities, actors to involve and resources.

The groups were divided by country in order to adapt the roadmap to the particularities of each national context. A total of four groups were formed: 1 from Poland, 1 from France and 2 from Spain, as the Spanish group was larger. Special attention was paid to mixing participants from different regions.

A Roadmap for Poland

The Polish group began with the diagnosis of the current situation especially considering large numbers of people fleeing the war in Ukraine. They explained that the country has been heavily impacted by the

recent crisis and arrivals, but that this has also led to implementing good practices such as: setting information points and infolines, establishing distribution warehouses, as well as organizing integration activities, trainings and workshops to promote access to health care and education.

The group identified some of the **barriers** hampering integration and adaptation of people seeking protection, notably systemic discrimination –different treatment of asylum seekers depending their country of origin and the way they arrived in Poland– as well as fear of the local community.

The **needs** identified by the group were the following: scaling up good practices and promoting change in the local communities' approach and mindset (especially in smaller towns).

The **goal** identified by the group was to foster more welcoming and open small towns in Poland. In order to achieve this, Polish participants identified a **set of actions**:

- Establishing municipal information points to provide municipal support and coordination centres for migrants;
- Granting the same rights to all asylum seekers, regardless of their country of origin; and
- Organizing awareness-raising and education activities for the local communities.



Members of Polish delegation discussing.

A Roadmap for France

The French delegation presented an ideal reception process for newcomers in French rural areas, which would include the following **conditions**:

- Fast-tracked obtention of residence permits/protection status;
- Adapted legal framework that would ease the administrative burden of hiring migrant workers
- Enhanced local integration;
- Strong local networks and social links, including with the private sector and training companies;
- Strong complementary pathways such as community-sponsorships schemes;
- Reinforced language acquisition and access to digital services via civil society organisations or volunteers;
- Facilitated mobility and access to employment opportunities.

They continued with the reflection that **the choice of rural life must be a free and informed choice**. The group referred to the particularly challenging situation of the French context in which transfers from

arriving zones and cities to rural zones are organised in the framework of the national asylum system, and are not always based on consent. According to the participants, this leads to secondary movement to urban areas. The group's rapporteur stressed that **providing pre-settlement information** on the conditions of reception, way of life, the opportunities and potential difficulties of living in rural areas, is key. Similarly, the host society has to be aware of the procedures and conditions facilitating reception and be trained on intercultural communication. If informing is the first step, **building the capacities of local actors** is naturally the second; without these, the integration process cannot happen. Organisations working in the field of migration can play the role of facilitator.

They identified several **good practices** such as organizing visits for newcomers to rural areas to inform their choice or identifying ambassadors/sponsors to bridge the gap with the local community and share their testimonies to improve integration programmes.

They emphasized that one of the biggest challenges in rural areas is the **lack of mobility options**. Recognition of driving licences is not always automatic and passing the highway code in French is difficult for many newcomers that do not speak the language yet.

GOOD PRACTICE

The group presented a good **mobility practice** carried out for 2 years by Entraide Pierre Valdo in a small town. The town hall provides a room where volunteers and migrants repair bicycles that can then be used free of charge by migrants to look for

work. The project will now be extended to electric scooters for longer distances and they seek to establish a partnership with another organisation to train migrants on repairing these electric vehicles.



Members of French delegation discussing.

A Roadmap for Spain

One of the Spanish groups presented an ideal scenario for the reception and welcoming of migrants in rural areas. Such scenario would include:

- rapid processing of residence and work permits;
- social rent and housing policies;
- guaranteed access to basic services (education, language courses transport, health specialities, resources for conciliation, internet connection, etc.); and
- face-to-face access to administrative procedures.

In terms of employment, the enforcement of labour policies and inspections would guarantee the basic rights of migrant workers and most of the jobs in rural would be considered as “**occupations of difficult coverage**”, implying that these vacancies can be filled by migrant workers in Spain.

In addition, initiatives such as community engagement, as well as entrepreneurship and cooperativism would be encouraged.



Members of Spanish delegation discussing (1st group).

The other group foresaw **integration as a continuous process, tailored to each person needs** and based on referral mechanisms to specialised services and monitoring. Participatory approaches that target the autonomy of the person should also be promoted. The group emphasized the importance of **intersectionality and intercultural sensitivity** and the need to have trained professionals, i.e. that the person or families are placed at the starting point before leaving their country of origin and not only from the moment of arrival in the territory, and stressed the importance of bidirectionality in all processes of social inclusion.



Members of Spanish delegation discussing (2nd group)

The conclusions of World Café were then shared in the Plenary Hall of the Town Hall as the culmination of such an intense day of work and discussions.

Guided tour around Sigüenza

Once the conference day was over, the participants enjoyed a guided tour and discovered the historical heritage of Sigüenza, courtesy of the local Tourist Office.



Participants at the Castle of Sigüenza after the guided tour of the locality

Conclusions and next steps

Making rural areas welcoming and attractive places for all requires an integrated approach and the contribution of a wide range of stakeholders. Effective development and revitalization of rural areas improves the conditions for integration, just as the removal of barriers to integration has positive effects on wider rural development.

Several key questions were raised during the conference:

- Who generates the **discourse and narrative of migrant integration in rural areas**? Do migrants in rural contexts have the resources to influence this narrative?
- How can **meaningful participation** of migrants and rural communities in decision-making be promoted?
- How can we make **staying in rural areas** a real option? How can public policies contribute to and encourage this?

Several recommendations were identified:

1. Moving to rural areas should be an **informed and free choice** for all.
2. Integration and rural development require an **integrated approach**. It is essential to ensure **coherence and synergies** between different policies. Improved provision of **services and communications** in rural areas (quality and affordable public housing; maintenance and/or creation of transport options, leisure, education, conciliation services, etc; and micro-credits for self-employment

projects) would also strengthen the inclusion of newcomers.

3. **National legal and policy frameworks** should be developed to ensure easy access to status and effective integration of migration across all sectors and priorities. These frameworks should be accompanied by **action plans** with clear objectives, measures to be taken and a **substantial budget**. A **mechanism for assessing the impact** of policies on rural areas and on the migrant population should also be established.
4. Strong **multi-level coordination arrangements** at local, regional, national and European, should be supported, as phenomena such as depopulation and integration cannot be tackled by one stakeholder alone.
5. **Urban-rural linkages** should be promoted as the rural environment continues to suffer from serious imbalances. Additionally, governments must be transparent and fair when providing **services to citizens in all areas**.
6. Although a **common framework** across all rural regions in EU is needed to seek common solutions, it must remain **flexible and adaptable** to the national, regional and local contexts as resources, challenges and opportunities differ. Therefore, encouraging and supporting the **exchange of good practices and approaches** between regions and countries is to be welcomed.

7. Encourage positive **narratives about rurality and migration** that focus on the skills, capabilities and potential rather than the shortcomings of migrants and rural areas.
8. Migrants are active subjects and not passive objects of policies. At the national, regional and local levels, all efforts should be focused on ensuring that they participate in **the policy-making process** and form part of the whole in the **community** in which they live. Moreover, the individual needs should be assessed to offer adequate support and integration services. The **role of communities in local policy-making** should also be enhanced.
9. An **inclusive approach to integration** actions must be encouraged to ensure they benefit both the local community and newcomers. In this way, the impact will be maximised and it will grant wider acceptance by the host community.
10. Supporting **civil society organisations** with expertise in integration, refugee protection and special needs in their **role as mediators and facilitators** between the local community, authorities and newcomers is essential.
11. **Boosting traditional industries and the creation of new economic activities** generate employment opportunities. The process of socio-occupational integration is quite complex and requires the involvement of a multitude of actors and **robust matching of skills**

and needs. Vocational training opportunities can help to fill the gaps, although the **recognition of qualifications** needs to be facilitated.

12. It is important to acknowledge the intercultural challenges and generational differences faced both by migrants arriving in the territory and local people living there. Moreover, the application of a **gender perspective** is essential, as the double barrier faced by migrant women in rural areas has been identified as a common challenge in all countries.

All the rich recommendations and reflections shared during the two-day visit will be disseminated by the Share Network in subsequent events. A **second Look & Learn** visit will take place **in September in Grenoble** (Isère, France) and will focus on partnerships and cooperation mechanisms between rural and urban areas. The conclusions of this meeting will be summarised in a report.

Annex 1. Agenda

DAY 1: Share Look & Learn Field Visit to Sigüenza Reception Centre	
16.30 – 16.45	Arrival of delegations
16.45 – 17.00	Opening & Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andrea Soler, <i>SIRA Coordinator, ICMC Europe</i>: Brief introduction of the SIRA project • Irene Almazan, <i>SIRA Focal point, Fundación Cepaim</i> & Maria Jouve, <i>International Organization for Migration, Focal point for Integration Projects</i>: Brief introduction of the objectives of the Look & Learn visit & of the topic of the field visit
17.00 – 19.00	Look & Learn Field Visit to Reception Centre in Sigüenza Facilitated by Irene Almazan, <i>SIRA Focal point, Fundación Cepaim</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking tour in the reception centre for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees by ACCEM staff & beneficiaries • Presentation of reception and early integration procedures, challenges & lessons learned by ACCEM staff & beneficiaries • Discussion with a local labour insertion company: focus on the challenges & best practices for labour insertion in rural areas • Q&A and open discussion with all participants on challenges and best practices to support the inclusion of newcomers in rural areas, including in emergency situations
20.00	Dinner

DAY 2: Conference	
8.30	Arrival of participants at the conference hall in Sigüenza Town Hall
8.50 – 9.00	Welcome & Setting the scene <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rabab Ahmad, <i>Regional Thematic Specialist, IOM Regional Office Brussels</i>
09.00 – 10.30	Panel I - Addressing demographic challenges & rural revitalisation through migration: national, regional and local responses & frameworks Moderated by Adolfo Patón Monge, <i>Castilla-La Mancha Regional Coordinator and Head of the European Affairs Department, Fundación Cepaim</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dña. Juana López Pagán, <i>Director General for Policies against Depopulation, Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D. Jesús Alique López, <i>Commissioner for the Demographic Challenge of the Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha</i>: Presentation of the “Law 2/2021 of 7 May, on Economic, Social and Tax Measures against Depopulation and for the Development of the Rural Environment in Castilla-La Mancha” and the “Regional Strategy against Depopulation in Castilla-La Mancha”. • Dña. María Jesús Merino Poyo, <i>Mayor of Sigüenza & President of the Association for the Local Development of the Sierra Norte de Guadalajara</i> <p><u>Opening of the floor to all participants</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q&A • Question for all participants: do you identify any good practices in your country (regional/national level) on how to address demographic challenges & promote local development by welcoming migrants in rural areas?
10.30 – 11.00	Tea & Coffee Break
11.00 – 12.30	<p>Panel II: The role of local actors in supporting the inclusion of newcomers: opportunities and challenges of a multi-stakeholder approach</p> <p>Moderated by Irene Almazan, <i>SIRA Focal point, Fundación Cepaim</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carmen Ayllon, <i>Welcoming Spaces Project Officer, Fundación Cepaim</i>: Presentation of the project & best practices identified in Spain • Driss Sadi, <i>ACCEM Sigüenza – community participation</i> • Marta Hernandez, <i>Lawyer at the Women’s Centre in Sigüenza</i> • Bibiana Cossio, <i>MigraCoop Project Officer, Valencian Federation of Worker Cooperative Enterprises (FEVECTA)</i> <p><u>Opening of the floor to all participants:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q&A • Question for all participants: Could you share any concrete example related to successful multi-stakeholder approaches/partnerships/community engagement initiatives for integration in your country/region?
12.30 – 12.40	Short Break
12.40 – 13.30	<p>Panel III - Housing & migrant socioeconomic inclusion in rural areas: case studies & best practices</p> <p>Moderated by Andrea Soler, <i>International Catholic Migration Commission Europe</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • María Jouve, <i>International Organization for Migration, Focal point for Integration Projects</i>: Presentation of Study & PEAR projects • Rebeca Fernández, <i>Focal point Nuevos Senderos, Fundación Cepaim</i>: Presentation of Nuevos Senderos • Marine Sabria, <i>Project Assistant, IOM Regional Office Brussels</i>: Presentation of HELIOS project in Greece

	<u>Opening of the floor to all participants</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q&A
13.30 – 15.00	Lunch Break
15.00 – 16.30	<u>World Café Session: Towards sustainable integration: co-designing a roadmap for socioeconomic inclusion in rural areas by country delegations.</u> The aim of the session is to enable participants to reflect on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A roadmap to guide the socioeconomic inclusion of newcomers in rural areas. Participants will discuss goals, steps and actions to be taken, challenges, opportunities and resources, as well as stakeholders to engage with in their local/national contexts. Key takeaways and inspiring best practices they have learnt from the visit and their transferability to their local, regional or national context
16.30 – 16.45	Tea & Coffee Break
16.45 – 17.50	Plenary session: Reporting back from discussion groups & Open discussion on takeaways Moderated by Rabab Ahmad, <i>Regional Thematic Specialist, IOM Regional Office Brussels</i>
17.50 – 18.00	Concluding remarks & Next steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Andrea Soler, <i>SIRA Coordinator, ICMC Europe</i>
18.30 – 20.00	Guided tour of Sigüenza courtesy of the Tourist Office
20.30	Dinner

Day 3: Departure	
5h30	Departure of delegations

Annex 2. Media clipping

- Junta de Castilla-La Mancha, [*El Comisionado del Reto Demográfico participa en el encuentro europeo en el marco del proyecto Share 'SIRA en Sigüenza'*](#)
- Ayuntamiento de Sigüenza, [*Nuevas medidas de inclusión social*](#)
- La Tribuna de Guadalajara, [*Sigüenza, sede del encuentro europeo del proyecto 'Share SIRA'*](#)
- COPE, [*El Gobierno regional pone en marcha medidas de inclusión social en los pueblos recogidas en la Ley de medidas contra la Despoblación*](#)
- El Diario de La Mancha, [*El Gobierno regional pone en marcha medidas de inclusión social en los pueblos recogidas en la Ley de medidas contra la Despoblación*](#)
- El Español, [*El Digital Castilla-La Mancha – Imágenes del Día*](#)
- Plataforma Brihuega, [*Castilla-La Mancha pone en marcha medidas de inclusión social en las zonas despobladas de la región*](#)
- Guadaqué, [*Proyecto 'Share SIRA': enfoques territoriales inclusivos en las zonas rurales*](#)



Ayuntamiento de Sigüenza [link](#)



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