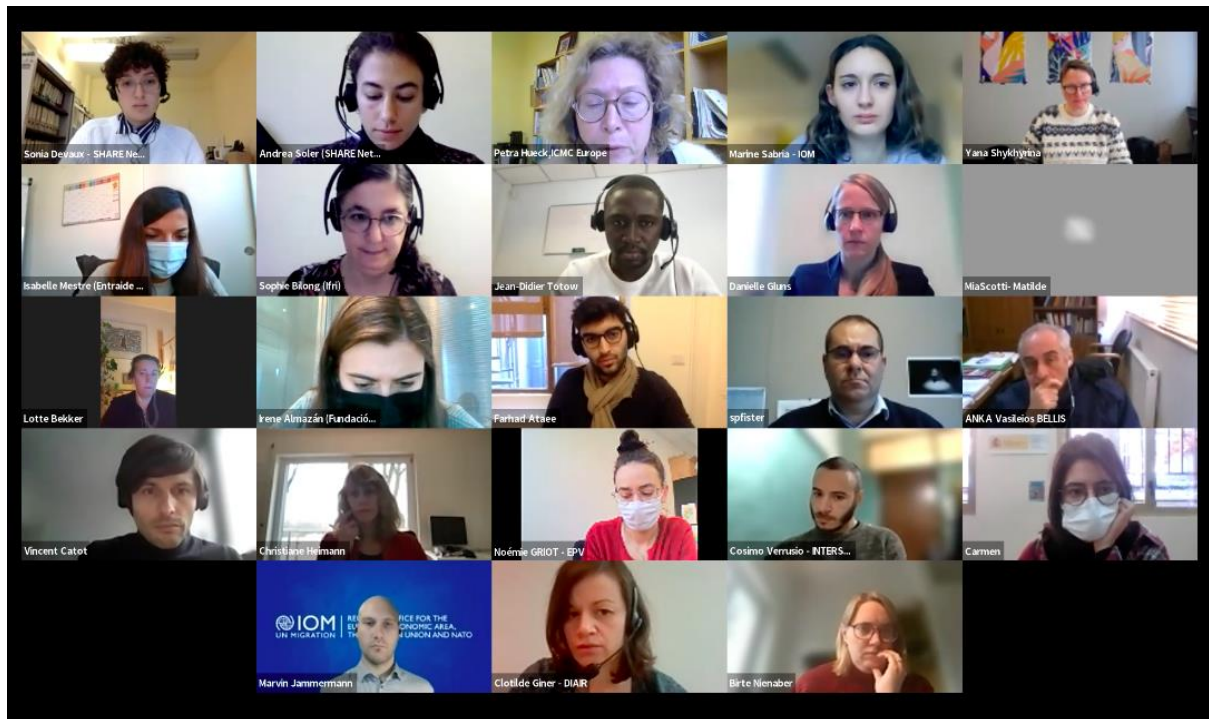


Share SIRA

Expert group on Orientation and Integration in Rural Areas

Migrant and refugee participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social orientation and integration actions, as well as governance, in rural areas



Monday 13 December 2021

10.00 – 12.30

Zoom



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On **13 December 2021**, in the framework of our SIRA project, **42 experts** from a diverse range of organizations and institutions came together for the second meeting of the Share Network Expert Group on Orientation and Integration in Rural Areas. This meeting focused on *migrant and refugee participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social orientation and integration actions, as well as governance, in rural areas.*

Plenary: Making the link between participation and inclusive, prosperous territories

Participation in the Rural Vision and the Integration Action Plan

Petra Hueck (Director, ICMC Europe) introduced some reflections on the participation of refugees and migrants in rural territories. She stressed that **participation is a key element in ensuring bottom-up strategies for integration**. The participation of migrants and refugees in rural and remote territories is still rather underdeveloped compared to larger cities and faces specific challenges. In this context, cooperation between different stakeholders allows for the identification of key areas for social integration, as well as strategies to address the main challenges of rural territories. This is also one of the key objectives of the [SIRA project](#).

Participation is addressed in two key policy initiatives at the EU level: the [EU Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion for 2021-2027](#) and the [Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas](#). The Action Plan emphasizes that integration and inclusion of people with a migrant background is a two-way process requiring a whole society approach. The Plan stresses the importance of involving people with a migrant background in the design, implementation and evaluation of integration and inclusion policies and programmes. It also encourages the creation of **multi-stakeholder partnerships** involving migrants at the local level, and in particular in rural areas.

The Long-term Vision aims to revitalise the EU's rural areas by reducing regional disparities and creating new opportunities for rural areas. It proposes a Rural Pact and a Rural Action Plan identifying complementary actions under four 'strands' (stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas and communities). As in the Integration Action Plan, the Long-term Vision highlights multistakeholder and multilevel governance cooperation as central to realising the aims of EU rural development and revitalisation policy. ICMC Europe's Director however recalled that the participation of migrants in the public consultation that preceded the launch of the long-term vision was not significant. **While the long-term vision aims to leave no place behind, this promise should also focus on leaving no one behind, as newcomers are an integral part of rural communities.**

The Share Network: participation and inclusive territories

The Share Network enables participation through:

- **Peer learning and best practice exchange:** by identifying and disseminating best practice and lessons learned in refugee and migrant participation in the EU.
- **Capacity-building:** by championing co-creation approaches for refugee and migrant integration across the Share Network, through training, capacity-building, and the creation of tools and resources.
- **Partnerships:** by developing and piloting participatory approaches for newcomer integration, in partnership with actors in smaller and rural territories.
- **Advocacy:** by advocating for the inclusion of participatory and co-creation approaches for integration in EU policies and funding instruments.



In the current programming period (2020-23), the Share Network is seeking to mainstream participation more consistently throughout its governance, activities and advocacy. Therefore, **two key tools have been created in order to guide SHARE activities and advocacy in 2020:**

- Our [10 key principles for refugee and migrant participation](#)
- Our [ladder of participation](#) provides a framework to situate current work on participation, and assess the type and level of engagement and involvement it is producing. It is a reference tool to guide the development of new participatory and co-creation activities.

One of the essential activities of the Share Network on participation in the 2020-2023 period is the [Rural Ambassadors for Inclusive Territories programme](#). Our ambassadors are refugees and local elected representatives of small and medium rural communities who have first-hand experience of the inclusion and integration of newcomers in rural areas of France. The programme aims to:

- **Foster the recognition of newcomers as agents of rural revitalisation** and part of the solution to the many challenges affecting rural areas.
- **Create mechanisms to encourage the participation of newcomers** in governance, and design, implementation and evaluation of actions for integration.
- **Advocate for more and better integration actions** at the local, regional, national and European levels.

Challenges and lessons learned

Partners of the Share SIRA project highlighted that **conflicting schedules, mobility constraints and lack of equipment to attend online meetings were some of the biggest hurdles to encourage the participation of refugees and migrants in the project's activities**. Obstacles related to the ability to speak the language are also key.

Moreover, the main challenge is **moving from the information and consultation stages to the co-creation and governance stages**. Most actions are ad hoc: inviting newcomers to conferences or asking them to co-present a presentation or share some testimonies without a clear action plan, strategy or organizational changes. One of the main questions to address in this webinar is therefore: *How to institutionally and systematically develop the involvement of refugee and migrants in integration actions and policies?*

With these obstacles in mind, we shared five lessons learned for migrant and refugee participation in rural territories, in the framework of the Share Network's activities:

1. **Co-creation takes time and needs to be integrated into the long-term integration process.** Participation requires a change of attitudes, approaches and practices in organisations, institutions and society. Therefore, it is a process not a project. It is essential put in place a dynamic of participation through continuous mobilization.
2. **Inclusion of people needs to be planned.** The second lesson learned concerns the importance of taking into account migrants' constraints and needs for co-creation. Managing expectations and starting from a common identification of needs, desires and opportunities, leading to the validation of common objectives, are generally a good practice.
3. **Empowering people to actively participate in decision-making through capacity-building.** It is important to offer activities outside the strict framework of co-creation that facilitate speaking, expression, participation in collective life in order to reinforce self confidence. Depending on the project, certain skills or knowledge will be required, and therefore it is also necessary to foresee training times to reinforce these skills.



4. **Taking into account** language barriers. There are several options such as working with interpreters, hiring multi-lingual staff, offering the possibility of working in groups with a common language.
5. **Finding resources to support participation.** Finally, participation requires a dedicated budget in order to value the contributions of migrants who bring their expertise and offer their time.

The Greek Forum of Refugees: a model for structuring participation across Greek territories

Jean-Didier Totow, President of the [Greek Forum of Refugees](#), a refugee-led organisation based in Greece, presented the actions and objectives of his association. It was created in 2010 by refugee communities to address the challenges of integration in Greece, and obtained official recognition in 2012.

The Greek Refugee Forum has four main lines of action:

1. Support to legal and informal communities through **capacity building, self-organization and activities coordination.**
2. **Women empowerment** through training, and mental health support.
3. **Social and political representation** through councils for integration with municipalities.
4. **Integration through sport.**

Jean-Didier Totow concluded his presentation by introducing some of the various actors that are part of the Greek Forum of Refugees' network, such as the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, the European Network on Statelessness, or the European Union Strategy for Fundamental Rights.

Académie pour la participation des personnes réfugiées ('Academy for the participation of refugees'): a replicable curriculum for participation in decision-making bodies

(Read the presentation [here](#))

Clotilde Giner (Social Innovation Advisor, Délégation interministérielle à l'accueil et l'intégration des personnes réfugiées) presented the [Académie pour la participation des personnes réfugiées](#), an initiative coordinated by the Interministerial Delegation for Refugee Integration (Diair), UNHCR and the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI). The project started with a [study](#) published by IFRI in May 2020 that explores approaches to rethinking integration policies through migrant and refugee participation.

Clotilde Giner introduced then the key requirements to be selected as a laureate of the Academy. The first criterion is status: candidates must have refugee or subsidiary protection status. Another requirement is prior engagement with the migrant/refugee community, for example by working with NGOs, refugee-led organizations or support groups. Finally, candidates must have a good level of spoken and written French but also be willing to have a public profile. The selection came up with a very diverse group of 12 laureates.

The main objective of this initiative is to enable refugees to actively take part in decision-making processes. **Farhad Ataee**, one of the laureates of the Académie, concluded the presentation by giving more details on the stages of the project:

- In the first year of the project the laureates were **trained in public speaking and discovered the French institutional and associative landscape.** Regular meetings enabled them to meet experts involved in the field of asylum and integration, in a spirit of **active exchange and mutual learning.**



- In 2022, the first laureates will have the **opportunity to integrate the decision-making bodies of partner organizations** (boards of directors, project selection juries, etc.), whether they are associative, philanthropic or government bodies.

ParticipAzione: building capacity to promote the meaningful participation of refugees for inclusive and mutually supportive communities

(Read the presentation [here](#))

Cosimo Verrusio, Project Manager at Intersos Italy, gave a short presentation on [ParticipAzione](#), which is a **training and empowerment programme for refugee-led organisations and local community-based organisations**. From 2018 to 2021, the programme supported 40 organisations in 12 Italian regions, 97 refugees were trained, 50 000 people were reached and 60 stakeholders were involved.

The programme is divided into four pillars:

1. Training
2. Micro-grant
3. Individualized coaching
4. Networking

In terms of lessons learned, Cosimo insisted on the fact **community engagement is a process and not a project**. Community engagement requires time, but also clear criteria, as well as financial and administrative trainings, mitigation measures and risk management strategies in place.

From the experience of the programme, Cosimo suggested to the experts some **key principles to foster participation**:

- Understanding local dynamics and contexts;
- Dedicated staff on the field;
- NGO structure;
- Mapping of CBOs/RLOs;
- Monitoring structures;
- Feedback mechanisms;
- Administrative and financial procedures;
- Maximum flexibility;
- Involvement of refugees in programme's decisions;
- Women's participation;
- Protection response mechanism.

Cosimo concluded his presentation by sharing the achievements of the programme for the year 2021: the supported associations received more visibility in the media, they strengthened their network and developed partnerships with other associations, received new funding and, last but not least, had access to decision-making meetings with institutions.

Breakout room 1 - How to promote the meaningful participation of migrants and refugees in policymaking and governance?

The session was organised around three main questions:

First, **what is the difference between meaningful/sustainable participation and "ad hoc" participation? How to avoid tokenisation?**



Académie representatives emphasized that they often have to ask themselves this question. Indeed, inviting refugees to participate in events often does not lead to meaningful participation because there is a **lack of dedicated spaces and adequate tools for participation**. At the end of the programme, laureates of the Académie had the opportunity to integrate the decision-making bodies of partner organizations (boards of directors, project selection juries, etc.). Clotilde Giner explained that these opportunities are successful when the laureates are **provided with sufficient material beforehand to understand the objectives of their role**.

Other experts explained that in Greece the **creation of councils with the participation of refugees and migrants** is mandatory at the municipal level and stressed that it is crucial to ensure that these are meaningful. AN.KA., in collaboration with the Greek Forum of Refugees, is in negotiation with municipalities to support them in the establishment of these councils. However, there are obstacles as refugees must first form legal associations approved by the state.

The experts insisted on the important **role of refugee and migrant-led organizations for meaningful refugee and migrant participation**. However, these organizations are often limited in their ability to influence policy due to a lack of experience with the advocacy sector. It is therefore essential that other NGOs and CSOs **support these organizations through capacity building**. For instance, in November 2021, ECRE organized a training seminar for refugees and refugee-led organizations on EU advocacy in order to address this issue.

Participants also added that **participation should be an essential point in the checklist for the evaluation of programmes** in order to achieve structural and sustainable changes.

Second, **what systematic changes are necessary to promote co-designing and governance?**

Some experts put forward the idea of systematically developing a **local strategic plan** that would include migration and integration priorities. There is often an image of refugees and migrants in local society as a “particular group” apart from local community. It is important to **address migrants and refugees as inhabitants that are involved in local life in the same way than any other local inhabitants**. This is a long and continuous process.

Moreover, **participation requires proper planning**. Refugees and migrants must be involved in the conception phase of projects in order to ensure that the projects are truly co-designed.

Thirdly, **how can different stakeholders best support meaningful participation?**

Experts explored the idea of a **whole of society approach** to integration. **Although policymakers have a fundamental role to play in the integration process, stakeholders from all sections of the community must be considered**. For example, in Greece, farmers are great allies for the participation and integration of refugees and migrants because they need their labour. It is necessary to look for such actors who have shared interests for integration.

Breakout room 2 - How to organize and structure multi-level participation across territories (from local level to EU)?

In the first part of the session, **Yagoub Kibeida** gave a brief presentation of [MOSAICO](#), a Turin-based refugee organisation, to the experts.



During the discussions, experts agreed that when looking for ways to engage migrants, it is important to **identify spaces** where migrants tend to be present, such as churches or diaspora groups, for example. They also stressed that migrant communities are a **good vehicle for engagement**, have more impact than individuals and can address issues more quickly. **Diversity** is crucial for building strong communities, as well as for the inclusion of people of all genders and with diverse skill sets. Building strong communities also means avoiding religious or political conflicts within these communities to build trust and mutual respect. Once communities are structured, the next step is to encourage networking and ensure their **participation in existing local structures**.

Experts agreed that while migrant participation is crucial, it is a **social process** and requires time and support. In particular, it is important to provide all information in a transparent way to migrants. **Intercultural mediation and training** of all stakeholders involved in the integration process are also essential to ensure the development of a sense of belonging, which is the basis for an active participation.

Finally, participants discussed the fact that there is a general crisis of participation in our society, which implies the need for new forms and ways of participation.

Breakout room 3 - How to foster migrant and refugee participation in social orientation and integration actions (design, implementation and evaluation) and in building evidence-based practices?

The session was organised around three main questions:

First, **how to progress from mere information/consultation to co-creation in integration/research projects, especially in the context of rural areas?**

The experts highlighted some good practices. First, **peer-to-peer support** can provide communities with coaching and ties to host communities (connecting them with schools, networks, etc.). Volunteers, who could come from the host community and the diaspora, in turn need coordination and support, which can be ensured by municipalities at the local level. Experts also underlined that it is **crucial to address stereotypes within communities**. It is also important to conduct research to support advocacy efforts. As all these actions require sustainability over time, and finally the experts addressed the **challenges that may arise in terms of funding**.

Second, **which form should capacity-building take in order to support participation? Are there specific needs for rural territories?**

The experts stressed that **capacity-building should be provided** for newcomers and for other types of stakeholders from the local community. Regarding capacity building for newcomers, the experts recommended to adapt the trainings to the needs of newcomers and the capacities of the organizations, meaning that the training topics would vary from one organization to another. **Establishing partnership with other stakeholders** can facilitate the mutualization of means and costs linked with the facilitation of trainings. It is also essential to leave some space and freedom to the migrant communities to lead their own activities and build their capacities, by for example supporting refugee-led research projects. Finally, experts emphasized the **need to address digital exclusion** in particular in the pandemic context.

Regarding capacity building for other stakeholders, the experts highlighted the importance of **providing training to local authorities** (mayors and technical officers as well in order to guarantee sustainability). Since participation at the local level is not always systematic, continuous advocacy is also key to convince policy makers to design integrated approaches. Finally, one last point raised by



experts is that **identification of stakeholder and outreach stages**, especially in rural areas, are essential since there is fewer actors and networks are more informal.

Third, **how can we adapt our participation strategy to the diversity of migrants' profiles, experiences and life constraints? How to involve the most marginalized in participation (e.g. Women, LGBTQA+, those with a disability, etc.)**

In order to **ensure that non highly-skilled migrants are involved**, the experts suggested some best practices such as hiring multi-lingual staff, developing peer-to-peer support schemes, etc. As well, in order to **fight against the "participation fatigue"**, the experts recommended to clearly explain and visible the interest and value of migrants participation, and to invite them to co-create and not only respond to consultation.