

# Better policy, stronger communities, improved integration: exploring meaningful participation for the integration and inclusion of newcomers in the EU

October 2022

In this Share policy brief, we explore participation for the integration and inclusion of newcomers in the EU.

We take a look at **participation** in EU policy, in particular the role of participation in EU rural development and revitalisation policy. We also present the results of our mapping of participation for integration in practice, and profile 12 examples of successful and promising approaches from across the EU. We conclude with our recommendations for action by key stakeholders to further develop this important area of work in the coming period.

This Share policy brief:

- Reflects the discussions, reflections, tools and resources shared at:
  - The second meeting of the *Share Expert Group on Orientation & Integration in Rural Areas*, held in December 2021 and 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](#).
  - The **Share Look & Learn visit** [Towards sustainable integration in rural areas: promoting mutual learning at European and regional level](#) in Sigüenza (Guadalajara, Spain), in June 2022.
- Incorporates insights from additional Share research, consultation and exchange undertaken since 2020.
- Builds on the momentum of recent EU policy commitments and approaches for integration and participation in rural territories, notably the [EU Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion](#) and [Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas](#).

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## What is the Share Network?

At [Share](#), we focus on connecting and engaging with local European actors and communities working or interested in the refugee and migrant inclusion, refugee resettlement, complementary pathways of admission, refugee sponsorship and relocation.

Established in March 2012 by ICMC Europe, Share supports regions, cities, towns, and rural communities interested in welcoming refugees and migrants. We collaborate with these communities, offering training and capacity-building focusing on smaller communities and rural territories.

Over the years, our work has expanded to include approaches that benefit all newcomers, including refugees, asylum seekers, labour migrants, unaccompanied minors, and victims of trafficking.

We also engage with a wide range of stakeholders at the European, national and local level, to coordinate best practice exchange, conduct research and amplify the voices of local actors and communities. Our work provides a solid evidence base for integration practice and outcomes at a local level.

## Introduction

Integration is a two-way social and economic process of adaptation, experienced by refugees, migrants and receiving communities. Together, these actors have a wealth of expertise and experience that can help develop more responsive and effective integration policy and programming.

Many newcomers however remain the targets of integration policy and actions, rather than actively participating in shaping and implementing them. Similarly, the inclusion of those in receiving local communities in decision-making and action for welcome and integration remains far from systematised.

### ***Why participation?***

Participatory approaches promote the inclusion of newcomers *and* local communities in the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the integration policies and actions that affect them.

Our **Share Inclusive Territories approach**<sup>1</sup> presents a vision and framework to guide the participation of all populations within a specific territory as integration actors.

Within this approach, participation creates a ‘triple win’ for:

- **Refugees and migrants**, who have opportunities to share their expertise, bring attention to the difficulties they face, and be equipped with new skills and learning opportunities, which in turn supports their broader participation in all areas of wider society.
- **Organisations and authorities**, by improving the effectiveness and efficiency of integration programmes, and promoting engaged citizenship for newcomers.
- **Policy and decision-makers**, via policy and funding frameworks that better respond to the actual needs and aspirations of refugees, migrants and receiving communities.

In recent years, participation is playing an increasingly important role in EU contributions to global refugee protection. Community sponsorship enables local volunteers to welcome and accompany refugees, supporting their integration and building local solidarity. The participation of volunteer sponsors enables local communities to make a direct contribution to growing of national capacities to receive refugees via resettlement and complementary pathways of admission.

The EU’s rural and smaller communities are continuing to play an increasingly important role as integration actors. Participation can also play a foundational role in supporting welcome and inclusion of the diverse range of newcomers that live and work in the EU’s rural territories, and directly engaging local communities in rural development and revitalisation policymaking and programming.

### ***Looking to the future...***

The Share Network is a community of practice focusing on building EU capacities to welcome and support the integration of refugees and migrants, particularly at local and regional level. Our recent mapping and consultation show many promising examples of participatory practice for the settlement and integration of newcomers across the EU. The overall approach however remains fairly ad-hoc, and institutional and organisational commitment to participation as a core integration activity is still fairly limited. In general, many stakeholders struggle to move their practice beyond consultation and information and toward more meaningful participation.

Our key task in the coming period is therefore to ensure the **mainstreaming of participation across policymaking and action for the inclusion of newcomers** in the EU. We must build on existing expertise and learning from successful practice in order to work toward institutionalising and systematising participation for refugee and migrant integration in the EU, at all levels of governance and policymaking.

We must further ensure the full inclusion of the EU’s smaller and rural communities, including by piloting participatory approaches within wider place-based strategies for newcomers’ integration. A shared framework is needed to seek

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<sup>1</sup> See our first Share Policy Brief [Building Inclusive Rural Territories](#)

common solutions across all rural regions in EU, including for participatory approaches. But it must remain flexible and adaptable to the national, regional and local contexts in which resources, challenges and opportunities differ widely. It remains crucial that rural actors across regions and countries can share good practice and successful approaches.

The new EU 2021-27 policy context for integration and rural revitalisation offers much by way of support for these goals in the form of new priorities, measures and actions for participation. All stakeholders must now work together to ensure that implementation makes good on these commitments.

**At Share, we look forward to contributing the experience and expertise of our community of practice to the implementation of EU policy commitments for participation for refugee and migrant integration in the coming years, in particular for rural territories.**

## Participation for inclusive territories

### ***Participation in EU rural areas: specific challenges, territorial solutions.***

The EU's rural areas cover over 80% of its territory and are home to 137 million people (30% of the total EU population).<sup>2</sup> They are very diverse, and include inland regions, mountain areas, islands and coastal areas, more than half of which are classified as 'remote'.<sup>3</sup> Across these territories there are wide disparities in migrant populations, available integration services and frameworks, and community touchpoints.

Despite their diversity, rural territories across the EU share a number of common challenges, including:

- Declining and ageing populations.
- Limited opportunities for stable employment, in particular for young people.
- Lack of digital connectivity.
- Poor transport connections.
- Challenges for rural populations to access services (such as education, healthcare, leisure, banking and deliveries).<sup>4</sup>

The participation of newcomers in rural and more remote EU territories is still relatively underdeveloped compared to urban areas. Our consultation across the Share Network demonstrates how many of the general challenges faced by EU rural areas also impact the development and the implementation of participatory approaches in these same communities: in particular transport and mobility, digital connectivity and digital exclusion.

By creating opportunities for positive, formal and informal encounters between newcomers and rural residents, **participation can build the foundations for more inclusive rural territories.** In the longer term, building solidarity from the ground up challenges misinformation and stereotypes, builds mutual understanding, and makes a crucial contribution to creating positive change in public narratives on migration.

More broadly, participation can play a key role in ensuring rural development and revitalisation is driven by rural communities themselves, including refugees and migrants. Participation is a key concern for all populations living in the EU's rural and more remote territories across the EU: 56% feel 'left behind by society', while just under 75% think that public policy does not sufficiently address rural issues such as demographic decline, transport and digital connectivity and access to services.<sup>5</sup> By ensuring local input into rural policy and decision-making, participatory approaches directly address the concerns of rural populations and help create better, more responsive local policies that draw on grassroots knowledge and expertise.

There are significant differences across Member States as to how participation is understood, approached and taken account of within policy and funding frameworks, and integration actors at all levels can lack expertise and opportunities to access best practice inputs. Access to resources to support grassroots participatory work is a key

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission Knowledge Centre on Migration & Demography (2021) [Atlas of Demography online tool](#)

<sup>3</sup> 'Remote' rural areas and regions are those in which the majority of the population live more than a 45-minute drive by car from the nearest city (European Commission (2020) [Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas](#))

<sup>4</sup> Dr Matyas Szabo, European Commission Directorate General for Agriculture & Rural Development (2020) Share Expert Group presentation: [EU Vision for Rural Areas](#)

<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2021) [Factual Summary of the Public Consultation on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas](#)

issue particularly for stakeholders in smaller or more remote communities, and there is a clear need for institutional and grassroots training and capacity-building on understanding and implementing participatory methods.

### ***Who participates?***

**Legal status**, and the rights that accompany different types of status, greatly affect how newcomers in the EU experience integration and inclusion.

EU rural communities and territories are home to a diverse range of newcomers, including asylum seekers, resettled and relocated refugees, students, migrant workers and entrepreneurs, family migrants, unaccompanied children and victims of trafficking. Migrant workers and students, for example, have temporary residence status with limited access to labour markets and public services. Asylum seekers have very limited rights while awaiting a decision on their claim, often for long periods, while undocumented persons have no legal status and are deprived of basic rights.

While national policies on access to rights for migrants and refugees have become increasingly restrictive, policymaking at the local level can - and does, in many instances - prioritise the participation of newcomers. All newcomers are crucial for multistakeholder partnerships and cooperation for integration at regional and local level, regardless of status, and their participation helps policy and funding frameworks to be developed based on the **actual needs and aspirations of both newcomers and local communities**.

It is therefore vital that participation approaches are firmly embedded in the early welcome and settlement phase, avoiding differential treatment or exclusion based on legal status and ensuring participation across the political, social, cultural, religious and economic spheres. Our experience of implementing Share SIRA has demonstrated that to be truly inclusive, communities must ensure that all present on a territory can fully participate, regardless of legal status. Ensuring broad participation for all fosters social cohesion and helps build stronger and more resilient communities.

## Temporary Protection for refugees from Ukraine: normalising participation for all...

The Russian invasion of Ukraine that began on 24 February 2022 triggered mass movement of refugees into the European Union. In recognition both of the impact of this movement on national asylum systems and the need to assist those fleeing, on 4 March 2022 the Council of the European Union unanimously decided to trigger the Temporary Protection Directive. Although adopted in 2001 following the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, this was the first time that the Directive had been triggered in response to the movement of refugees into the EU.

### Temporary Protection: setting the conditions for full participation

Temporary protection under the Directive is provided to Ukrainian nationals and residents fleeing the invasion. It ensures:

- Freedom of movement and settlement within the EU.
- Secure residency in an EU country until March 2024 (recently extended from March 2023)
- Access to the labour market
- Access to basic social rights including assistance for basic needs, healthcare and school education and accommodation.
- A right to secure private accommodation or live with family members or friends already in the EU.
- Extension of temporary protection status to family members (both immediate and extended family).

Around 7.8 million refugees from Ukraine have entered the EU since the invasion began, and just under 4.5 million have registered for temporary protection\*.

### Normalising participation for all...

Temporary protection provides flexibility for refugees from Ukraine to settle in the EU in a country and locality of their choosing, making independent decisions based on factors such as existing family and community support and contacts, local language skills, availability of housing and how far individual skills and experience might fit local labour markets.

The OECD estimates that 1.2 million refugees from Ukraine will enter the EU labour market by the end of 2022, with employment providing workers and their families with resources to enable their participation in the communities in which they live. The flexibility of settlement and access to the labour market under temporary protection also benefits receiving societies: the OECD predicts that many Ukrainian refugees will find employment in sectors with existing labour shortages, with no overall negative impact for employment or wages for resident populations\*\*.

By setting the conditions for the broad and flexible participation of refugees from Ukraine in EU societies, temporary protection has motivated the widespread participation of local communities in providing welcome and assistance for refugees from Ukraine. From families providing accommodation in their own homes, to volunteers acting as sponsors and mentors, community participation in the EU response to refugees from Ukraine takes place within a framework of the broad acceptance of Ukrainian refugees into EU societies facilitated by temporary protection.

\* [UNHCR Ukraine Refugee Situation data portal](#)

\*\* Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (June 2022) [The potential contribution of Ukrainian refugees to the labour force in European host countries](#)

## Participation in EU policy: promising new momentum...

2020-21 saw the launch of two new EU policy initiatives setting new long-term visions and priorities for refugee and migrant integration, and rural/territorial development and revitalisation:

Refugee & migrant integration	Rural / territorial development & revitalisation
<p><b>Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Launched by the EC in November 2020.</li><li>• Led by Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME).</li><li>• Follows the <u>2016 Commission action plan on the integration of third-country nationals</u>.</li><li>• Incorporates <u>EU Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy</u> (agreed 2004, reaffirmed 2011).</li></ul>	<p><b>A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas: towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Launched by the EC in June 2021.</li><li>• Led by Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI).</li><li>• Implemented by the rolling Rural Action Plan and Rural Pact.</li></ul>

### Integration

The September 2020 [New Pact on Asylum and Migration](#) states that everyone legally present in the EU should be able to 'participate in and contribute to the well-being, prosperity and cohesion of European societies'. It describes integration as 'a key part of the broader EU agenda to promote social inclusion', and announced a new [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion \(2021-2027\)](#) subsequently launched by the European Commission in November 2020.

The Action Plan on Integration aims to support Member States and other stakeholders to design better integration and inclusion policies.<sup>6</sup> It includes concrete actions, guidance and details of EU funding for integration and inclusion in four key areas: education and training, employment, health and housing.

In terms of participation, the Action Plan:

- Highlights how migrant participation in consultative and decision-making processes contributes to effective integration policies and programmes that reflect real needs.
- Promotes multi-stakeholder cooperation for integration that involves newcomers and host communities alongside other actors, especially at local level.
- Commits EU financing to build the capacity of national, regional and local authorities to involve migrants and migrant organisations in decision-making processes.
- Recommends Member States involve migrants and migrant organisations in the 'design, implementation and evaluation' of all (both EU and non-EU funded) integration and inclusion policies and programmes.

<sup>6</sup> Within the European Union, integration is a national policy competence - Member States decide national integration policy and programmes. The European Union supports them in this task by providing guidance for integration policy and practice and making EU funds available to support integration measures and cooperation.

Publication of the 2021-27 Action Plan was preceded by a 12-week public consultation<sup>7</sup> and targeted discussions with key stakeholders, including Member States, local and regional authorities, social and economic partners, civil society organisations, funders, international organisations and migrants, including refugees.

The Action Plan does not distinguish between different types of migrants, instead addressing integration for “migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background”, but does restrict its scope to those legally residing in the EU.

## Refugee and migrant participation at EU level

During 2018-19, in the framework of the [Urban Agenda](#), the European Commission established the [European Migrant Advisory Board \(EMAB\)](#). Established as an 18-month pilot programme, the EMAB was designed to address the need to better manage the involvement of migrants and refugees in policymaking processes. It enabled nine individuals from refugee and migrant backgrounds to act as expert advisors for the [Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees](#), and as key contributors to its [Action Plan on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees](#).

Following this pilot action, the European Commission created the [Expert Group on the Views of Migrants in the field of Migration, Asylum and Integration](#). Expert Groups are established by the European Commission to obtain specialist advice from outside experts as a basis for policymaking, and refugee and migrant participation has been mainstreamed into this wider structure. Members of the Expert Group on the Views of Migrants were selected via an open call for proposals, and the group [first met in November 2020](#).

## Rural Development & Revitalisation

[A Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas: Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040](#) was launched by the European Commission in June 2021.

The Long-Term Vision aims to revitalise the EU’s rural areas by reducing regional disparities and creating new opportunities, presents a vision of rural territories as inclusive and diverse communities of intergenerational solidarity, and fairness, open to newcomers and fostering equal opportunities.

It sets out drivers shaping the future of rural territories and identifies complementary actions under four ‘strands’ (stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas and communities). To coordinate its implementation, the Vision includes a rolling Rural Action Plan structured around flagship initiatives in each of the Vision’s four thematic strands.

In terms of participation, the Long-Term Vision:

- Emphasises building social resilience, including by implementing actions to support the inclusion of people with a migrant background.
- Identifies the involvement of local communities in decision-making as a key driver and opportunity for quality of life in EU rural communities.
- Emphasises new approaches to active public participation, particularly in more remote rural communities, such as online consultations of rural constituencies and online voting on key decisions on the future of specific communities.

The Rural Action Plan includes a flagship initiative on the participation of women in rural areas, including a specific strand to boost women’s participation in rural decision-making. It also pledges to support the implementation of the Action Plan on Integration - with its specific commitments on participation, detailed above - by exploring the establishment of rural partnerships to promote migrant integration and inclusion.

Through the accompanying [Rural Pact, the Commission invites rural stakeholders](#) at EU, national, regional and local level to work together in supporting the shared goals of the Long-Term Vision. A [Rural Pact conference](#) held in

<sup>7</sup> Read our contribution to the consultation [Building Welcome from the Ground Up](#)

Brussels on 15-16 June 2022 brought stakeholders together to [endorse the Rural Pact and gather commitments for its implementation](#). Conference participants strongly emphasised the participation of smaller and rural communities in rural revitalisation as a key enabling condition for the successful implementation of the Long-Term Vision.

In contrast to the Action Plan on Integration, the Long-Term Vision does not restrict the scope of beneficiaries its actions can address. It instead emphasises the creation of inclusive rural communities that promote the well-being of all inhabitants. It makes specific commitments regarding integration and inclusion for refugees, migrants and people of a migrant background, and explicitly urges the inclusion migrant agricultural workers in wider initiatives for rural tourism, biodiversity and land management.

The launch of the Long-Term Vision was preceded by an [open public consultation](#) held during September-November 2020. While this participatory exercise informed the Vision's final priorities and objectives, refugees and migrants did not widely participate, submitting just 0.52% of consultation responses (while making up 5.5% of the EU's rural population).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Joint Research Centre, European Commission (2019) [Migration in EU Rural Areas](#) and outcomes of the 2020 public consultation on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12525-Long-term-vision-for-rural-areas/public-consultation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12525-Long-term-vision-for-rural-areas/public-consultation_en)



## Participation and the Share Network

### Share Expert Group on Social Orientation and Integration in Rural Areas

#### Key lessons for migrant and refugee participation

December 2021

- 1. Participation takes time.** It requires a change of attitudes, approaches and practices, and is a process rather than a project.
- 2. Inclusion must be planned ahead.** To address the often-limited time and resources of newcomers, ensure their involvement from the outset, and provide information to manage expectations.
- 3. It is vital to empower people to actively participate in decision-making.** Identify and value skills, provide capacity-building and support professionalisation.
- 4. Pay attention to language.** Work with professional interpreters, and use same language groups wherever possible.
- 5. Provide resources for participation.** To be sustainable and meaningful, participation requires reliable and dedicated resources.

In 2020, we began a new programme of work to mainstream participation for refugee and migrant integration across our Share Network activities.

#### Our priority:

Map and assess participatory and co-creation practices for refugee and migrant integration across the EU, with a particular focus on smaller and rural communities

#### Our actions:

- Share Look & Learn visit to Sigüenza (Guadalajara, Spain) [Towards sustainable integration in rural areas: promoting mutual learning at European and regional level](#) (June 2022).
- [Share Refugee Advisor Workshop for Community Sponsorship](#), exchanging best practices for meaningful participation of refugees in community sponsorship (January 2022).
- Share Expert Group meeting on [Migrant and refugee participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of social orientation and integration actions, as well as governance, in rural areas](#) (December 2021).
- Stakeholder and partner consultation, including dedicated expert interviews and a short online survey on challenges and drivers for participation in integration.
- Share Network expert webinar [Participation & co-creation for refugee & migrant integration in the EU](#) (December 2020).

#### Our priority:

Create Share tools and resources for participation and disseminate them to practitioners and policymakers across the EU

#### Our actions:

- Two Share tools for participation, to guide our work and that of our partners and members:
  - The [SHARE Network Ladder of Participation \(Refugee & Migrant Integration\)](#).<sup>9</sup> The ladder provides a framework in which to situate participatory work and assess the type and level of engagement it is producing, and a reference tool to guide the development of new participatory and co-creation activities:

<sup>9</sup> Our Share Ladder is adapted from the '[Ladder of Co-Production](#)' published by Think Local in 2015, and draws on the findings and recommendations of the 2020 study [La Participation des Personnes Exilées](#) by Share partner [Institut français des relations internationales](#) (also available in [English summary](#)).

## SHARE Network: Ladder of Participation (Refugee & Migrant Integration)\*

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<p><b>DOING TOGETHER...</b> Equal decision-makers</p>	<p><b>Organisational governance &amp; decision-making</b></p>	<p>Refugees and migrants are members of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisational Boards and management committees.</li> <li>Strategic meetings.</li> <li>Statutory consultative and policymaking bodies.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Refugee &amp; migrant-led organisations</b></p>	<p>Associations and public authorities provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct funding.</li> <li>Legal &amp; administrative support.</li> <li>Skills development opportunities.</li> <li>Access to professional and policy networks.</li> <li>Formal partnerships.</li> </ul>
<p><b>DOING WITH...</b> In an equal &amp; reciprocal relationship</p>	<p><b>Co-creation</b></p>	<p>Refugees and migrants are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partners in designing, implementing and evaluating integration actions</li> <li>Act as volunteers or with some form of financial compensation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>DOING FOR...</b> Engaging and involving people</p>	<p><b>Consultation</b> <b>Informing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Satisfaction surveys.</li> <li>Focus &amp; discussion groups.</li> <li>Feedback &amp; suggestion mechanisms.</li> </ul>

- o The Share [10 Key Principles for Refugee & Migrant Participation](#), to guide our training, capacity-building, pilot project and advocacy activities in the coming period.



### SHARE Network: 10 Key Principles for Refugee & Migrant Participation

1. Refugees and migrants are "experts of their own experience", with unique knowledge and perspectives that can improve integration programmes and policies.
2. Sustained and not ad-hoc involvement, wherever possible.
3. Dedicated budgets for participation (policymakers and authorities/organisations working directly with refugees and migrants).
4. Preparation before participation (through skills development and professional orientation).
5. Interpretation and translation support tailored to the language needs of participating refugees and migrants.
6. Gender-sensitive approach to ensure the inclusion of refugee women and girls in participatory activities.
7. Refugees and migrants facilitate training and capacity-building for professionals and volunteers.
8. Peer support and mentoring for refugees and migrants engaging in participatory work, wherever possible.
9. Refugee/migrant participation as a core evaluation criteria for all activities, programmes and policymaking designed to benefit them.
10. Compensation for refugees and migrants engaging in participatory work as far as possible, while acknowledging the value of volunteering (especially for vulnerable groups).

Our priority:

Mainstream participation across Share actions and advocacy, providing meaningful opportunities for newcomers to design, implement and evaluate actions for integration and advocate for the inclusion of participation in relevant EU policy and funding instruments.

#### Our actions:

- [Share SIRA Rural Ambassadors for Inclusive Territories in France](#). Our ambassadors are refugees and local elected representatives of small and rural communities with first-hand experience of the integration of newcomers in rural areas in France. They are participating in the design, implementation and evaluation of actions for integration, and in wider advocacy for integration at local, regional, national and EU levels.
- [Share Refugee Advisor Programme for Community Sponsorship](#). We support 23 refugees and migrants from the Middle East and East Africa, some of whom arrived via sponsorship pathways, to advocate on

*“When we arrived here we didn't know anyone, and it was people who didn't know us who came to us to help us integrate. Now when I see people in difficulty, I want to reach out to do the same.”*

**Maher Dahdal, Share ambassador Share SIRA Rural Ambassador in Saône-et-Loire**

specific sponsorship topics. Refugee Advisors select sponsorship advocacy priorities, while Share coordinates the programme, provides strategic advice and input and ensures access to training and capacity-building. Refugee Advisors provide expert input and facilitation for Share events and discussions at national and EU level, and form part of the core membership of the Share [Refugee Mobilisation Platform](#).

- **Expert researchers from refugee backgrounds**. Since 2021, we have employed refugees and migrants with academic experience as short-term expert peer researchers in Share projects and actions, conducting targeted outreach with our partners and wider network to ensure refugees are aware of these opportunities.

*“It is important that others see that integration in rural areas is possible. Very often newcomers are afraid of being isolated in small communities, but with the right services and support from volunteers newcomers in rural areas can integrate and flourish.”*

**Zozan and Khmlin Haj Mohamad, Share SIRA Rural Ambassadors in Corrèze**

#### Our priority:

Build stakeholder capacity through targeted information provision, training and capacity-building.

#### Our actions:

- We developed a participation training module, and provided practical training on participation and co-creation as tools for inclusive innovation for professionals working with migrants and refugees in four partner rural territories in France.
- We published 10 [regional factfiles](#) on migration, integration and rural revitalisation in the 10 partner European rural regions where the Share SIRA project is currently being implemented.

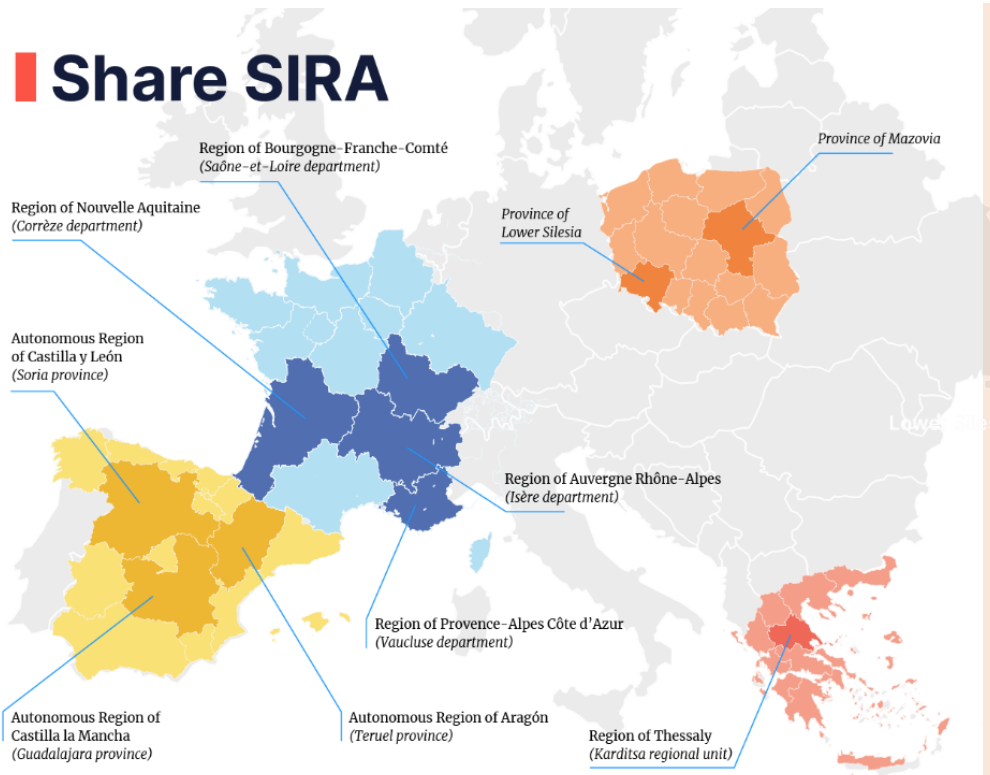
#### Our priority:

Pilot participatory approaches to designing, implementing and evaluating actions for refugee and migrant integration, in partnership with actors in rural territories.

#### Our actions:

Our Share SIRA programme is contributing to a more expansive and accessible evidence base for participatory approaches for the integration and inclusion of newcomers in EU rural territories. It has established local multi-stakeholder cooperation platforms in ten rural territories in four EU Member States (France, Greece, Spain and Poland), gathering regional and local stakeholders participate including public authorities, mainstream service providers, civil society and faith-based organisations, local associations, educational institutions, employers and newcomers themselves. SIRA platforms were supported to develop and propose pilot integration actions based on the specific needs and capacities of their individual territories, and invited to submit project proposals. During 2022-23, SIRA is implementing and evaluating ten-month pilot integration actions with participatory and/or co-design elements.

# Share SIRA



## SHARE SIRA

### Strengthening and Expanding Social Orientation & Integration for Newcomers in Rural Areas

Share SIRA uses multistakeholder and participatory approaches, and pilot actions, the later involving both local communities and newcomers, to improve and strengthen social orientation and integration in rural areas in the EU.

Co-financed by the AMIF 2014-20, SIRA works directly in 10 rural territories across France, Greece, Poland and Spain.

SIRA is a two-year programme implemented during 2021-23.

## Our recommendations for participation for integration in EU rural territories

At Share, we build **partnerships in rural territories** as a strategy to guide the involvement of smaller and rural communities in receiving refugees and migrants. Participation is a crucial part of ensuring more robust cooperation frameworks that meaningfully engage actors and stakeholders - particularly refugees, migrants and receiving communities, and regional and local authorities.

Our mapping and consultation demonstrates that while many examples of successful practice for participation for integration can be found across the EU, in general practice remains broadly at the first *'doing for'* level of the [Share Ladder for Participation \(Refugee and Migrant Integration\)](#). Current practice here consists mainly of consultation and information activities that are very often ad-hoc. Our key challenge in the coming period is therefore to move from the *'doing for'* stage, and onto using more structured and equal participatory and co-creation methods (*'doing with'* and *'doing together'*) situated further 'up' the Share ladder.

### 1. Address the specific challenges for rural participation...

The specific challenges for participation in rural territories are very often linked to the more general challenges for rural areas in the EU, including transport and mobility, digital connectivity and isolation.

To institutionalise and systematise participation for integration in rural territories at all levels of governance, we must collectively ensure:

- **Rural policymaking, funding** and associated **training and capacity-building** address the specific participation challenges for rural territories.
- Local communities, newcomers and grassroots civil society organisations are involved in **monitoring the rural proofing mechanism** envisioned in the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.
- Availability and accessibility of **sustained and dedicated resources for participation** in EU rural areas.
- Strong **institutional commitments** and actions for participation, within policymaking and practice at all levels of governance.
- **Mainstreaming** of participation for refugees, migrants and local communities across policy sectors relevant to integration, using structures and mechanisms that respond to their specific participation challenges and capacities.

### 2. Recognise that participation is a long-term process...

Newcomers and local community members do not have unlimited time to dedicate to participatory work. Conflicting schedules, mobility constraints and digital exclusion preventing online participation are some of the **biggest challenges** for the meaningful participation of refugees and migrants in specific projects, including in rural areas.

These challenges call for more intensive and ongoing outreach and coalition-building. The diverse and broad nature of integration stakeholders also calls for creative and continued efforts to ensure participation is inclusive, meaningful and sustainable.

### 3. Ensure inclusive territories for all...

The participation of **all newcomers within a territory**, regardless of status, ensures that the full extent of local expertise and experience is harnessed for the benefit of integration and wider inclusion at the local level. In the longer term, broad participation builds stronger and more resilient communities of the kind articulated for the EU's rural areas in the *Long-Term Vision* (see above) for their development.

Integration does not only begin when a secure legal status is received. Early inclusion of newcomers with less secure or no legal status has a positive impact for later integration, by building knowledge and confidence, and providing pathways to access more secure legal status and attendant rights through regularisation, employment and study.

Local and regional participatory actions for integration can and must reflect their communities to the fullest extent possible, by including all newcomer groups in the scope of their work regardless of legal status. For rural areas this

work should proactively seek to engage more temporal or vulnerable migrant groups, such as asylum seekers, seasonal migrant workers, undocumented persons, victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children.

#### 4. Make use of existing successful approaches and practice...

While participation is a relatively new area of work in the context of integration, much can be learned from practices and approaches that are already proven to be successful. While approaches must remain flexible and adaptable to the differing resources, challenges and opportunities across the EU's rural territories, it is crucial that stakeholders and practitioners can harness existing expertise to inform and refine future practice.

As demonstrated by our mapping and consultation work and the practices we profile at the conclusion of this policy brief, many examples of successful practice for participation for integration can be found across the EU. A more positive EU policy context means increasing attention is being paid to participation for integration, including documenting successful practices and approaches.

Rural communities also have developed several useful **participatory, place-based approaches** that could be harnessed for integration action. The [LEADER \("Links between actions of rural development"\)](#) approach, also profiled at the conclusion of this brief, is a valuable, long-standing framework for engaging communities in rural development, while the [European Rural Parliament](#) aims to enable rural communities to play a full and equal role in policymaking for rural territories.

Participatory practice in other areas of social policy can also provide useful best practice examples and inspiration for integration practice. Participatory practices in health and social care, local priority and budget-setting ('participatory democracy') and services for youth, for example, are often more well-established and developed than for integration.

#### 5. Make participation meaningful and effective, and be participatory from the start...

Effective participatory approaches for integration require strong and inclusive alliances and partnerships that are oriented around common aims and values. Participation must therefore begin by identifying common needs, aspirations, desires and opportunities, to validate common objectives and manage expectations. Those who are primarily affected and/or targeted by specific projects must be **involved from the outset**, having a voice throughout the process from conception to final evaluation.

There is a danger that participatory activities can become symbolic exercises only, in particular the consultation and information actions described in the first 'doing for' level of the [Share Ladder for Participation \(Refugee and Migrant Integration\)](#). Consultation, for example, is not meaningful unless participants are informed of its outcomes in terms of decision-making. Ad-hoc calls for the participation of refugees and migrants, such as inviting individuals to speak at conferences to share their testimony, can be valuable. But they often do not lead to meaningful participation because there is a lack of dedicated spaces and adequate tools for participation. Moreover, overreliance on the same group of stakeholders can also limit the effectiveness of this and other participatory approaches.

We urge all stakeholders to avoid 'participation for participation's sake', and ensure that all participatory action (regardless of where they are situated on the ladder) is underpinned by strong and equal partnerships and relationships. All stakeholders must ask themselves how they can institutionally and systematically involve refugees, migrants and local community members in a sustainable and meaningful way.

#### 6. Include training and capacity-building for participation...

It is essential that all integration stakeholders, particularly newcomers, can participate in articulating a vision for their local community and for specific projects and initiatives developed and implemented there. Depending on the specific initiative, some stakeholder groups may require **opportunities to develop or reinforce certain skills or knowledge** in order to participate in a meaningful and equitable way. Inclusion through training and capacity building for all stakeholders also promotes equitable relationships within projects, and this should be anticipated when planning participatory approaches. Planning must also take account of the budgetary resources required to ensure that training and capacity-building are ongoing, and underpin longer term commitments to embedding and mainstreaming participatory approaches.

## 7. Pilot and evaluate new approaches...

Participatory approaches are a relatively new area of practice in the context of newcomers' integration. For smaller and rural communities in the EU, whose role as key integration actors has come about only fairly recently, the opportunity to pilot new approaches is central in determining what works (or doesn't) for their specific territorial contexts.

In order that they be refined and improved, local stakeholders must be able to **test new approaches through pilot actions and initiatives**. Policy and decision-makers must ensure **accessible funding frameworks** that support the testing of new approaches at the local level, and recall that pilot actions do not always need to be innovative but can also include implementing best practice models from other EU regions in different territorial and community contexts.

**Effective monitoring and evaluation** frameworks are also crucial for the full value of pilot actions to be harnessed in support of better integration programming and policymaking at the local level, and that successful practice can be communicated to stakeholders across national territories and EU countries. Ensuring the results of pilot actions are disseminated relies on strong multistakeholder and multilevel cooperation for integration at local, regional, national and EU levels.

## Participation in action: profiling participatory practice for integration across the EU

It is crucial that all integration stakeholders can access best practice examples and resources to build and improve their participatory practice. With this in mind, we present below profiles of successful participatory approaches and practices that we have encountered in the course of our mapping, consultation and collaboration across the Share Network since 2020.

The examples we include demonstrate how structured participatory approaches can be implemented across policy and decision-making, governance and direct action for integration and inclusion. They illustrate how our recommendations for participation for integration in EU rural territories can be realised in practice, and all can be situated at the *'doing with'* or *'doing together'* levels of the Share participation ladder.

In addition to hoping to inform and inspire current and future practice for participation for integration, we offer these examples to celebrate the strong commitment of all those involved in growing participatory practice in our communities across the EU.

### ***Advocacy, experience sharing, governance and decision-making***



#### **The LEADER rural development approach for integration**

[LEADER](#) ("[Links between actions of rural development](#)") is a local development method within EU funding that engages local stakeholders (from the public and private sector, and civil society) in the development of their rural areas through designing place-based strategies, implementing actions and making decisions on resource allocation.

It is implemented by approximately 3000 [Local Action Groups](#) bringing together public, private and civil society stakeholders within specific rural territories, under the national and regional [Rural Development Programmes](#) of each EU Member State supported by the [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development](#).

The transnational LEADER cooperation project "[Immigrant Integration in Rural Areas](#)" was established by the international LEADER-Network in response to the large-scale arrival of refugees into the EU from 2015. Implemented by 16 partners in rural territories in Austria, Germany, Finland and Sweden, the programme aimed to share knowledge and exchange successful practices on refugee and migrant integration, and to identify specific ways in which migration can generate added value for rural territories. The programme created local networks of integration actors, supported pilot actions for integration in participating regions and facilitated transnational knowledge and practice-sharing on integration in rural communities.




#### **The Greek Forum of Refugees: structuring participation across Greek territories**

The [Greek Forum of Refugees](#) is a refugee-led organisation created in 2010 by refugee communities to address the challenges of integration in Greece. It obtained official recognition in 2012, and works on four core priority areas of refugee community development, women's empowerment, advocacy and sports for integration.

In Greece, each municipality must establish an Immigrant and Refugee Integration Council to facilitate the participation of immigrants and refugees who live permanently in the municipal area. Participation in Integration Councils is restricted to communities that are officially recognised and constituted under Greek law.

The Greek Forum of Refugees assists refugee communities across Greece to navigate the process for acquiring official community recognition, thereby creating participants for Immigrant and Refugee Integration Councils in the municipalities in which they live. This in turn activates the establishment of new Integration Councils by municipalities in which refugees have become eligible to participate, and broadens the membership of existing Councils to include more newcomer communities.





## Integration councils in German municipalities

Many German municipalities have installed [integration councils](#) to foster the political participation of immigrants. While larger cities have been forerunners, a number of rural areas are currently also setting up councils to incorporate their increasingly diverse inhabitants in their local governance systems.

Due to local autonomy, there is a broad variety of forms, structures and competences of integration councils. Integration councils can be established either at the county level or at the level of individual municipalities that form part of a county. While mainly being advisory bodies with limited decision-making power, some councils are more closely connected to the city or county council. This provides them with the right to information from local public bodies and to engage in virtually all local policies that touch upon the rights and interests of immigrants. In some municipalities, council members are directly elected. While this shall increase democratic legitimacy, it poses questions regarding the definition of the electorate, in particular if the council does not focus exclusively on foreign nationals but shall represent the more elusive group of “immigrants”. Therefore, other municipalities have decided to appoint experts, both with and without a migration background, as members of their integration council.

## Academy for Refugee Participation: a French government initiative for refugee participation

The [Academy for Refugee Participation](#) is a partnership initiative of the French Interministerial Delegation for Refugee Integration (Diair), the French institute for international relations (IFRI) and UNHCR.

The programme aims to ensure that refugees can actively take part in decision-making processes related to integration, and focuses on refugee participation on the boards of national civil society organisations working with refugees, grantmaking committees for foundations and philanthropic organisations, state funding selection committees at national and regional level and consultative committees and bodies.

12 Academy Laureates were selected from an initial 235 applications: six men and six women aged 20-55, from nine different countries and living in regions across the national territory of France. The first nine months of the Academy programme provided monthly discussion and capacity-building in areas such as public speaking, state and philanthropic funding, civil society organisations in France, board meetings and EU funds.

Through the Academy, Laureates have participated in public and philanthropic selection committees, high level meetings with state representatives, debates and roundtable discussions and the annual French meeting on refugee integration. From September 2021, Laureates have been able to join the boards of organisations with decision-making power relating to integration in France.

## Refugees seeking access at the table: R-SEAT

[Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table \(R-SEAT\)](#) is an international initiative that aims for refugees to play a major role within the central decision-making bodies of the global refugee regime, such as the Executive Committee of the UNHCR (ExCom).

R-SEAT co-designs mechanisms to amplify refugee leadership and increase the participation of refugees in international state delegations. Its key mission is to secure commitments from 20 ExCom Member States to formalise refugee participation in their respective national delegations by 2023.

Building on the lessons learned from efforts to engage refugees in the [Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement \(ATCR\)](#) process, R-SEAT recruits refugees according to skills and experiences that will be of use in the international refugee protection arena. It matches participating refugees with mentors drawn from professionals working at international level, using refugee participant interests to find a suitable mentor. It also works to boost global refugee leadership by connecting refugee leaders with relevant stakeholders including policymakers, foundations and other civil society organisations.





## PartecipAzione: supporting sustainable migrant and refugee-led organisations in Italy

The participation of migrant and refugee-led organisations (MRCOs) can play a central role in transforming local communities. They provide a framework for migrants and refugees to articulate their needs and aspirations, thus driving better policymaking and programme design, and a structure by which migrant and refugee communities can implement services and assistance and become more self-sufficient. MRCOs can however struggle to access the networks and resources available to other community-based associations, presenting severe challenges for their overall sustainability.

The [PartecipAzione](#) programme supports MRCOs in Italy to address these challenges. Launched in early 2018 by humanitarian organisation [Intersos](#) in collaboration with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), PartecipAzione aims to strengthen the skills of MRCOs and community organisations that promote refugee participation and adopt a participatory approach. Each year, the programme assists 10 MRCOs selected via a national call for proposals, providing training and capacity-building, one-off funding assistance to establish a new integration project focused on participation, and facilitated networking at regional and national level.

PartecipAzione adopts a territorial approach, in which participating MRCOs receive support and guidance from territorial Liaison Officers to define their proposed activities, prioritise resources, implement a project and monitor and report on the results. Participating MRCOs are able to consolidate their role within their community, acquire new skills and knowledge, and build networks and partnerships with other MRCOs and relevant institutional stakeholders in Italy.




## New Women Connectors: advocacy for sustainable and gender-sensitive changes in EU policy and practice, led by migrants and refugees

Established in March 2019, [New Women Connectors](#) (NWC) is an EU-wide advocacy platform founded and led by migrant and refugee women.


NWC's brings together 'new women' members from a range of national, cultural, linguistic, educational and professional backgrounds to map their challenges, recommend solutions and become changemakers. This work aims to create systemic change in policy and practice that ensures communities from migration backgrounds, especially women, can access protection and services, make the best use of their skills and capacities and achieve their aspirations.

Since its establishment, NWC has supported more than 1,400 new women in the EU to come together and share their experiences and opinions on topics including integration, racism, domestic violence, transphobia and the plight of LGBTIQ+ women and girls. In 2019-20, NWC hosted or co-hosted 19 online and offline events in eight languages, engaging feminist activists and community leaders across 28 countries.

NWC also works to ensure that the voices of new women are present in EU policy debates and discussions. During the public consultation preceding the launch of the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027), NWC worked with Oxfam to hold two rounds of consultation on EU integration priorities with migrant and refugee women, using its community leadership, access and knowledge to support better policy development at EU level.



## Actions for integration and inclusion




### MigraCOOP: Harnessing migration to tackle rural population decline in Spain

Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, rural territories in the interior of Spain have been experiencing consistent population decline. The problem is so acute that it has given rise to [España Vacía](#) ('Empty Spain'), a political movement that campaigns for economic and social policies that better address territorial inequality.

[MigraCOOP](#) was established by the Foundation for Cooperation and the Promotion of Cooperativism at [Fevecta](#), a Valencia-based organisation that promotes cooperativism and supports the establishment of work cooperatives. Migracoop aims to match migrants with rural territories with the desire and capacity to host them, and provides support for their integration and settlement by providing training, building local integration networks and partnerships, establishing cooperatives and supporting entrepreneurship.

To date Migracoop has engaged 185 municipalities, signed five municipality collaboration agreements and established six cooperatives in interior Spanish territories.




### Cultivating welcome in rural France: Tero Loko

Rural depopulation is increasingly affecting many smaller, rural communities in France, including the municipality of Notre-Dame-de-l'Osier, a rural village of 500 inhabitants in the department of Isère in South-East France. At the same time, refugees living in more urban areas in France face common challenges to progressing their integration, including finding secure housing and employment.

In early 2019, the [Tero Loko](#) association selected Notre-Dame-de-l'Osier as the location for a new initiative that aims to address these two distinct but overlapping issues: rural marginalisation and limited solutions to facilitate the integration of refugees. The project provides both refugees and vulnerable, unemployed members of the receiving community with training and contracted employment in gardening and bread production, using organic methods. During the average 12-24 month period that beneficiaries spend with the project, they are also provided with on-site, self-contained accommodation for themselves and their family members.

Tero Loko welcomed an initial five participants in early 2019, and in 2022 is poised to fulfil its target of hosting 17 participants at the site. The vegetables and breads produced at the Tero Loko site are sold in local markets and to individual community members, generating an income that supports the future sustainability of the programme. Tero Loko actively supports refugee participation in the governance and management of the programme, and the initiative is [strongly supported by the municipality](#).





## Inclusive rural employment in Spain: SAVIA NUEVA

Created on 2010 by the Spanish civil society organisation Accem, [SAVIA NUEVA](#) provides training and support to access the labour market for migrants, refugees and others living in vulnerable situations Sierra Norte de Guadalajara, in the Spanish region of Castilla-La Mancha. The project focuses on economic sectors in the territory with significant recruitment needs, primarily including construction, commerce, gardening and personal care.

SAVIA NUEVA is an employment-focused social enterprise and the first social company of its kind in Castilla-La Mancha. Part of the company's profits are reinvested to strengthen and expand its scope of action, and early funding support from both the Regional Government of Castilla-la-Mancha (the 'Junta' programme) and private donors was crucial. The key future objectives are to continue to grow the company and, above all, make it autonomous and self-sustainable.

SAVIA NUEVA supported the successful labour market insertion of approximately [150 people since it was established](#). The company uses a strong multistakeholder approach to engage and collaborate with the business community in Sierra del Norte and supports both newcomers and eligible local residents, approaches that Accem has identified as key pillars of the project's success.

Find out about Accem's work and other good practices in Guadalajara in our June 2022 [Look & Learn Visit report](#)




## Refugee-led advocacy and awareness-raising: VOICES Network

The [VOICES Network](#) is made up of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from across the UK, who volunteer as VOICES Ambassadors to publicise the challenges affecting newcomers in the UK and advocate for change. VOICES Ambassadors work in three distinct ways in order to achieve three key priorities: changing minds (through media work), changing policy (through advocacy work), and improving practice (through service improvement).

VOICES Ambassadors have undertaken research, produced publications, created a podcast series, appeared in the media, spoken at online and in-person events and attended high-level political meetings.

The VOICES programme was established by the British Red Cross in early 2018, as part of the [AVAIL \(Amplifying the Voices of Asylum Seekers and Refugees for Integration and Life Skills\)](#) project to test participatory approaches for integration. From early 2020 the VOICES Network was restructured, and now operates as an independent network supported by participation officers based in Newport (Wales), Glasgow (Scotland) and Leeds (England), with some additional smaller local networks in other locations across the UK.




## Experts by Experience: Intercultural mediators at Caritas Internationalis

Refugees and migrants are 'experts by experience' who understand the cultures, obstacles and opportunities of newcomers, and have the language skills needed to communicate directly with them.

Caritas Internationalis has a long history of involving refugees as volunteer intercultural assistants, who worked alongside Caritas staff to provide newcomers with an informal introduction to life in Belgium. Seeing the value that intercultural assistants brought to the lives of those they work with, Caritas took the decision to professionalise the role and incorporate refugee experts into their staff team. Caritas continues to provide access to training and capacity-building opportunities for refugee mediators, as for all other staff.

Expert intercultural mediators are now embedded across Caritas projects, supporting newcomers, leading peer support activities in refugee languages and taking an active role in advocacy and communications. Some former volunteer mediators who did not move into this specific role have moved into other positions within Caritas, such as coaches, where their experience continues to be a vital tool to support refugees in Belgium.



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## The Share Network

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The Share Network is an inclusive network of local communities and actors engaged in the welcoming and inclusion of newcomers in Europe. Share promotes and fosters safe pathways to Europe for migrants and refugees as well as their integration. We support and connect local initiatives, share best practice, and raise the voice to communities to inspire action and policy change.



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