

EC consultation on Integration and Inclusion

[Caritas Europa](#) is the Catholic network working with people of all faiths to end poverty and to promote the dignity of all people. Caritas Europa has 49 member organisations in 46 countries across the European continent, including in all Member States of the European Union and the vast majority of Council of Europe member countries.

We are also one of the seven regions of [Caritas Internationalis](#), which has 162 members operating in 200 countries/territories around the world. This is important to mention, as it signals our intention to not present Eurocentric solutions, but rather to consider a holistic approach with a global vision for the common good.

We believe that people and the environment, not profits, should be at the heart of all policies. We oppose all kinds of exclusion and support all initiatives that promote sustainable development that benefit everyone and enable all people to find a meaningful role to play in society. We also believe in the importance of dialogue as a tool for building trust in relation to fostering inclusive societies.

Caritas Europa is not a one-issue organisation, which enables us to understand, contextualise and draw links across different policy areas, and the topic of this consultation overlaps with migration policies, social and labour market policies, and aging and health care policies, among others.

This means from the start that the different EC DGs and national ministries will also need to be collaborating to ensure, following its adoption, the successful implementation and monitoring of the EU comprehensive Action Plan on integration and inclusion for 2021-2024.

We would expect the comprehensive Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion to:

- Put people at the centre of all policies.
- Participation is essential. According to the [new encyclical](#), Pope Francis argues that migrants “ought to be ‘agents in their own redemption’”. No one will ever openly deny that they are human beings, yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human. For Christians, this way of thinking and acting is unacceptable, since it sets certain political preferences above deep convictions of our faith: the inalienable dignity of each human person regardless of origin, race or religion, and the supreme law of fraternal love”. It should go without saying that institutions should actively seek migrants and refugees to be at the table when deciding relevant solutions and policies that affect them, holding governments to account. In this regard, empowering migrants to contribute is vital. The EC expert migrant group is a good start in this process, but more is needed and careful attention and empowering capacities will be needed to mobilise and make the best use of this expert group. In addition, all governments and political representatives should serve as a role model for society and enterprises to try and live up to so fostering migrant participation should be mainstreamed.
- Address the rampant discrimination affecting third country nationals.
- Reinforce adequate income (quality jobs with fair living wages and adequate minimum income and social protection income support).
- Ensure availability, accessibility, affordability, and adequacy of key public and essential services (public health and care services, education, training and lifelong learning and social, affordable

housing) – this is particularly important considering the consequences of COVID19 on the lives of third country nationals.

- Improve monitoring and implementation of rights through EU soft instruments e.g. European Semester and EU funds. Part of a healthy and fair system of migration management is to ensure that everyone who is legally in the EU can participate in and contribute to the well-being, prosperity and cohesion of European societies.

Some of the main challenges hindering the successful integration and inclusion of migrants observed by Caritas Europa in our daily interactions with migrants throughout Europe is related to the many hardships migrants face in terms of dealing with the cultural, structural and economic barriers that hinder their capacity to fully participate in the receiving communities. Due to a lack of space in the consultation for question 2, we include the following points below:

Many migrants do not have the same opportunities in **the education system** or on the labour market as mainstream EU nationals. Many are pushed into the shadow economy, which restricts their opportunities even more and often leads to further discrimination, exploitation and abuse.

When it comes to labour market inclusion, evidence shows that legislation and restrictive attitudes sometimes hamper migrants from entering the labour market at an early stage. Third country nationals often find themselves in an even worse starting position than EU nationals when it comes to **employment, housing, health, education and participation in public life**. For migrants, the first source of social welfare - the labour market - is either not existing (for example, for those who don't get a work permit) or is providing only little social protection because work offers for migrants are often in the 3D (dirty, dangerous and demanding) sectors, are unstable and badly paid; the second source of social welfare, all the more needy if the first one is lacking - the family - is for migrants either non-existent (for example, because the family stays in the country of origin relying on the help of the migrant rather than being in the position to support him/her), or bears only little means because of the precarious situation; the third source then, the welfare state should shoulder a maximum of support, regarding the failure of the other two sources.

If relying on the third source of social welfare, migrants tend to only get minimum support, if any at all. They are often **excluded from minimum income schemes**, especially as third country nationals; as asylum seekers, they often get little more than in kind support and as irregular migrants or rejected asylum seekers, they are normally excluded from everything. The system is not functioning properly for migrants and most are not taken into account. Societal, economic and demographic transformations and changes only add to these poor conditions. Thus, migrants are at high risk of poverty with diverging regional experiences across Europe depending on the antipoverty measures in place in countries and whether migrants (with all the legal differentiations) are included in these social protection measures or not.

In response to question 24 of the EC consultation on Integration and Inclusion, please find the following promising practices of successful partnership/cooperation in the field of integration and social inclusion of migrants.

At Caritas Europa, we created our **online toolkit: “Recipe Book for integration”**, in which we focus on addressing the cultural barriers commonly identified by migrants in Europe by engaging **the local community and migrants and fostering opportunities for their joint contribution and recognition for the common good**. In our online toolkit, we present different inspirational experiences from the local level, which show **initiatives for intercultural encounters, even with limited resources**, that can help create a trusting relationship in a community. These initiatives build synergies between local citizens, stakeholders, employers, service providers, migrants and others involved in integration and help address biases and everyday practices that result in distancing migrants from local community members and hindering their social and economic inclusion. These initiatives further foster inclusive participation and the **empowerment of migrants and receiving communities alike**. We refer to these as **“recipes for integration”**, as they are intentionally presented in a very simple manner. They are genuine and easy to replicate in other countries. The aim is to encourage others to read these recipes for integration, to carry them out and to even add in a few more “ingredients” or variables so that they fit each national context or local reality.

One such **Recipe is the cooking atelier**

- In France, Caritas set up a cooking atelier (in Hauts-De-Seine), which takes place once a week and promotes socialisation between migrants and residents through convivial moments of cooking together and exchanging recipes.
- It emphasises the important role that intercultural exchange plays for overcoming barriers to migrant inclusion in receiving communities.
- We remove the fear factor of the unknown by getting to know migrants on a personal basis.
- We work with communities to change thinking and to contribute to a positive, constructive narrative about migrants, recognising their many contributions.
- Approximately 400 ateliers were organised over a 5 year period, starting in 2011.
- According to one participant from Algeria: *“This atelier allows us to acclimatise to the European way of life, to speak French and to move on confidently in our lives.”*

Another Recipe is the **refugee at home programme**

- An initiative that Caritas has spread throughout Italy. Italian host families and individuals share their lives with refugees and asylum seekers for a period of 6 to 9 months.
- The project helps migrants to reach autonomy and gives residents the opportunity to enjoy the experience of solidarity and cultural sharing.
- Caritas values and enables every person to speak for him/herself. It is vital not to dismiss people’s real lived-experiences. So we endeavour to create an environment whereby all are enabled and encouraged to participate in the community, and their contributions to social and cultural life are also acknowledged and valued.
- Between 2013 and 2017 about 1,000 people had been hosted through this programme.

Another Recipe – “Refugee come **dine with me**”

- An initiative that Caritas Salford organised as a pilot project together with Revive UK and local parishioners.

- First, they inspired local people in community parishes to volunteer to invite refugee families for a meal in their home.
- The aim was to make refugees feel welcome, and through dialogue, for the local people to learn more about the lives of others in their community.
- Uniting families together through the sharing of a common meal aided in mutual understanding.
- This same notion of community also led to the development of a **community sponsorship** model in the UK.
- This further led to the collaboration between Caritas Europa and ICMC Europe in the SHARE project, funded under AMIF, in which we supported the spread of community sponsorship schemes across Europe and produced [a publication](#) on different models.
- The main outcome was that small, local communities and volunteers are the powerhouse behind community sponsorship as sponsors support refugees in their reception and integration paths and introduce them to social networks. By fostering human encounters and breaking communication barriers between people coming from different backgrounds, community sponsorships can be a catalyst for creating more tolerant and inclusive societies, even in small municipalities with little tradition of having received refugees before.

Recipe - living libraries

- Living libraries aim at creating spaces of encounter between the community and anyone suffering from any kind of prejudice. In this case, a refugee acts as a “living book”.
- In this role, the migrant can share his/her own stories, experiences, and culture with the “readers” from the local community.
- This is a special, low threshold event set-up to cope with stereotypes and prejudices by fostering dialogue and gradually working to build trust.
- Talking about each other’s lives helps to overcome intercultural barriers, fears and prejudices by getting to know each other as individuals on an equal level.
- We engage migrants as mentors or cultural mediators, which has proven an added value not only for their well-being, but also for that of the community. In general a lot can be achieved by empowering and allowing migrants to participate actively in society and in strengthening their engagement in migrant associations.
- We address the negative media portrayal of migrants

In the realm of our [MIND \(Migration. Interconnectedness. Development\) project](#), we sought to foster political engagement towards addressing the drivers of forced migration and investing in and recognising migrants and refugees as development actors. Each summer we carried out the [#whatishome campaign](#). In the past summer, the concept was ‘Show the Gap’ and aimed to raise awareness on the ways in which migrants and refugees have a positive impact on the development of their country of origin and of their country of destination. We posted various stories of migrants and refugees who have come to Europe, infographics about migration and how migrants contribute to society, facts about famous immigrants,

interviews with refugees and those working on migration, and other interactive posts, all still available via our social media threads.

Promising Caritas Practices related to anti-poverty measures:

- Caritas **Greece** runs Caritas social centres, offering social services and facilitating and supporting access to public social programmes and benefits. Beneficiaries receive information and referrals to cover basic needs, advice and guidance on their (legal) rights. Additional services are available including job counselling, financial counselling, psychological support, language courses, daily hot meals, etc. The results show a significantly improving access to state programmes and benefits.
- Caritas **Italiana** runs a project ‘Orientation to Citizenship Income’ (*Reddito di cittadinanza*). Caritas counselling services give information and orientation on how to apply for the national minimum income. Generally, people with low cultural and social capital have problems and difficulties in accessing the Italian welfare system. As a result, a growing number of Caritas beneficiaries has accessed the minimum income. Success of the initiative lies in the cooperation between municipalities and Caritas services for social communication and information.
- Our online toolkit publication (<https://www.caritas.eu/prepare-community-encounter/>) that focuses on promising practices

Promising Caritas Practices related to community sponsorship:

Caritas Europa and ICMC Europe produced the **publication**, “[Fostering community sponsorships across Europe](#)”, that analyses the emergence of community sponsorship schemes in Europe. (Three main approaches to community sponsorship in Europe since 2013, which include:

- sponsorships linked to extended family reunification in Germany, Ireland and France;
- humanitarian corridors in Italy, France, and Belgium relying on the issuance of a humanitarian visa;
- and resettlement based community sponsorships in the UK, Germany and Ireland which rely on referrals from UNHCR.)

Private sponsorship programmes **combine safe and legal access with tailor-made integration support, offered by local volunteer groups**. Sponsorship programmes, if well designed, can thus offer an important complementary pathway with places in addition to traditional resettlement, while also **enhancing a local welcome and diversity**.

The publication describes four case studies of Ethiopian and Syrian families who arrived in small towns and municipalities in Belgium, France, Italy and the UK, which provide testimony as to how community sponsorships **can transform people’s lives**. (Refugees and local communities transformed). **Small, local communities and volunteers** are the powerhouse behind community sponsorship: sponsors support refugees in their reception and integration paths and introduce them to their social network. By fostering human encounters and breaking communication barriers between people coming from different backgrounds, community sponsorships can be a catalyst for creating more tolerant and inclusive societies, even in small municipalities with little tradition of having received refugees before.

Volunteers and local communities are motivated to participate in private sponsorships and this shows an added-value for all:

- Desire to increase the number of protection places and facilitate the integration process
- Strong signal to policy makers for more welcoming migration policies

- Changing the negative narrative around migration by fostering human encounter within local communities
- Positive impacts on refugee integration and on the communities themselves:
 - Smoother integration: facilitated through individualised support and introduction to a welcoming social network
 - Communities enriched: new dynamics and wider community involvement (e.g. neighbours, friends, municipality)

Help develop local partnerships through multi-stakeholder engagement:

- An important part of preparing local communities involves **reaching out to a wide range of local actors** in order to inform, consult, and seek support where possible.
- It creates space for **new partnerships at local level, which can support refugee settlement** in the community by broadening the support and social network on which they rely. (Collaboration with **local authorities is important as an entry point for accessing public services** such as schooling, healthcare, social benefits),
- Sponsorships can ideally trigger a **‘ripple effect’ and lead to broader partnerships with local actors**, who were not initially involved.
- Similarly, relevant coordination platforms or community groups very likely already exist in receiving communities, and can provide a wealth of knowledge and resources. Diaspora groups, local organisations, trade unions, universities and small businesses can all provide new – often unexpected – opportunities and support

When it comes to community sponsorship schemes, we recommend that clear **objectives and targets for complementary pathways and resettlement** be established to enhance transparency, and ensure that community sponsorships complement and are in **addition to resettlement**. Likewise, the **partnership framework between civil society actors and the state** should also clearly define each actor’s roles and responsibilities, the duration of support, and the safeguarding mechanisms in place. **Enhanced transparency** is also needed in the criteria used to identify and select sponsored refugees. Importantly, these **programmes should complement**, rather than replace, state service provision and legal obligation. Finally, civil society must keep a central place in developing programmes and need to set up self-governance and coordination mechanisms to foster high quality and sustainable sponsorship programmes. Adequate funding and support must be provided by the governments and the EU to help civil society and small-size municipalities and rural areas build and strengthen durable reception and integration activities.

Example of sponsorship project in Benedetto, Italy:

Benevento (59,000 inhabitants) + 13 villages (under 5,000 inhabitants), Campania

- Labour and social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in areas subject to depopulation (villages with less than 5,000 inhabitants) – linked to “SPRAR system” [reception and inclusion system for refugees and asylum seekers] managed by local municipalities
 - Dual objective: support socio-economic inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers while revitalising villages impacted by depopulation
 - Activities: development of innovative social economy enterprises targeting both refugees/asylum seekers and the unemployed local population

- Encourage the establishment of community-based cooperatives run and staffed by both native population and asylum seekers/refugees alike.
- Create business incubator to help local cooperatives develop projects in agriculture, handicraft, tourism, welfare, commercial services and repair.
- Multi-sector project – stakeholders and partners include:
 - Local Caritas organisations and other CSOs
 - 13 local municipalities (with the support of the National Association of the Italian Municipalities – ANCI)
 - Local businesses
 - Local universities

They drafted a **Manifesto for Inclusion signed by more than 600 theorists and experts, pleading for municipalities to become welcoming communities**, by using social intelligence and careful governance of integration, and focusing on countering the ageing and depopulation phenomenon (cf. manifesto attached).