

“COMMUNITIES” OF PRACTICE

How do we make integration practice in Europe?

Examples of Austria, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a normal act of living being in which human beings or animals move from one place to another. This activity takes place on a daily basis for various reasons and with various consequences, which have different with socio-economic and political aspects.

Before going more deeply into the topic, it seems necessary to point out that this research is an effort by an international partnership among five civil society organisations active in the field of integration - coming from Austria, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia. The partnership was established around an EU AMIF (asylum, migration, integration) funded project WELCOMM - *Supporting integration of third country nationals through developing learning and collaboration tools to build welcoming and inclusive communities*, which developed different [tools](#)¹ to facilitate the process of integration of third country nationals - providing online information, training seminars, and linking the expert and the community of practice. Developing such tools certainly puts one (who is in the position of “the first country” national) in a certain power position towards the ones defined as “third country nationals”. Do we accept it as such or do we use the funding mechanism to question and challenge it?

¹ <https://welcomm-europe.eu/info-for-refugees/>



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As a consortium, we believe that the EU requires to hold a debate on its approach towards integration model, meaning to take into consideration the perspective of “third country nationals” living within its territory. European Commission defines third country nationals as “any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union [right to free movement](#)², as defined in Art. 2(5) of the [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/399 \(Schengen Borders Code\)](#)”³. EU has historically received “third country nationals” and many of them have entered the category of “EU citizens - first country nationals”. This experience and perspective is an important aspect that can’t be put aside. This research aims at show-casing the words, the worlds and the thoughts of migrants and refugees living in EU countries. Within our research we have focused on active migrant initiatives, working to create an inclusive intercultural society. We selected these examples based on the following selection criteria: Currently active, had ongoing activities, including migrants and refugees but also members of domestic population, gathers communities through social activities, aims at empowering the migrants and refugees, has an agenda for the future. Furthermore, we included initiatives that were ad-hoc project activities, as well as “activity” of an NGO - like legal aid providers, vocational training organisers, and business.

If we look closer, there are several positive examples and good practices that are being implemented at local level and in small communities, where the social dynamics allow different actors to act creatively in the field of integration. The countries of our research, Austria, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia, have different degrees of experience with regards to the integration process; however, their shared historical and cultural background, as neighbours, offers a great potential for knowledge transfer and sharing of experience. While Italy and Austria, as larger countries and “older” members of the EU, which can rely on decades of experience with reception and integration of refugees and migrants from various cultural backgrounds, Croatia and Slovenia have only recently been faced with the challenge of receiving and integrating refugees and migrants. Even though, in recent history, both Croatia and Slovenia experienced forced displacement of people due to war,

² https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/right-free-movement_en

³ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/third-country-national_en



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integration challenges - although present, were not as pronounced as in the recent political crisis around the influx of refugees and migrants. Other geographical specificities need to be taken into account. Keeping in mind the EU priorities, the fact that Italy and Croatia are border countries of the EU implies that, especially in the case of Croatia, a major part of national and European financial efforts focus on border management and surveillance⁴.

Within this study, we are focusing on existing integration initiatives – the ones created by refugees and migrants themselves, and also those initiated by receiving society members. Integration cannot be done only by migrants, or “natives”; integration is a two-way process which requires the active participation of old and new members of the society. Successful integration requires constant dialogue and creating new solutions that make living together easy and enjoyable.

The positive concept of integration as a two-way process, can be put into practice only if, as a first step, we look critically at our society’s limits and challenges, asking ourselves questions and posing serious challenges to our national and international schemes. An example is the necessity to put in question the concept of integration as such: Is it possible to have a conversation about integration in Europe, when we are witnessing that the primary element of it, namely the access to the territory, is being denied? Can we imagine to speak of a European integration system, when violence on the borders and push backs are perpetrated by the border security of various Member States, under the pressure of European Union policies and priorities. Heavy criticism comes from the very main actors involved in the integration process - refugees and migrants. Nowadays, it is almost impossible to enter a European country and even if one manages to do so, it is incredibly difficult to enter the system. Moreover, too often volunteers and organizations, instead of Member States and Institutions, a great responsibility for the integration of third country nationals/migrant and refugees. In fact, many services and existential needs are supplied by collectives, volunteers and small organizations, that often do not have the capacity to reach the people in need.

⁴ https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-6884_en.htm



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EU CONTEXT

If we take a broader look at the European context⁵ and the current situation of migrants and refugees, we notice a negative shift in the EU priorities. Rather than integration, numerous institutions are focused on the success of doubtful structures such as hotspots in Italy and respect of Dublin Regulation, with all its weaknesses and contradictions. On the other hand, efforts are made with the Resettlement program, a mechanism that offers a safe and legal path to the EU for people in need of international protection. Under the new EU Resettlement Scheme, 20 EU Member States have pledged more than 50,000 resettlements to take place by the end of October 2019. As of March 2019, over 24,000 of these resettlements have materialized. The resettlement program is neither innovative nor an exclusive solution. In fact, there are also other actors that are providing a legal and safe path to Europe. One example is the so-called “Humanitarian corridors”, implemented by the Community of Sant'Egidio with the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy and the Tavola Valdese - a completely self-financed pilot project⁶.

In terms of statistical trends, in 2018, there were 664,480 applications for international protection in EU countries, with Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan being the three main countries of origin, constituting more than a quarter of all applicants (27%) in 2018. In terms of decisions issued in 2018, EU+ countries issued 601,525 decisions in the first instance, and the majority of decisions (61%) were negative, not granting any protection. Approximately 234,220 decisions were positive; of which, the majority granted refugee status, and a smaller proportion subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection.

These are not mere numbers for statistical analysis these are individuals that have put their trust in the EU, its institutions and its people, in order to find a safe place to live and start a new life. This is why we believe that it is crucial that migrants and refugees, as well as their representatives have a voice. The European Commission partially moved in this direction with the establishment of the European Migrant Advisory Board (EMAB). *Ask the people*, a consultation organized by the aforementioned Board is a highly innovative entity,

⁵ European context is here intended not as an economical-political notion, but geographical.

⁶ <https://www.santegidio.org/pageID/30112/langID/en/HUMANITARIAN-CORRIDORS.html>



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composed by migrants and refugees consultants and advisors. *Ask the people* works to increase the participation of immigrants and refugees in different policy-making processes, which affect their fundamental rights. Based on their research, there is room for improvements concerning integration: in fact, most respondents stated that they experienced discrimination and were highly dissatisfied with the integration services provided in their host country. Based on these results, the EMAB recommendations focus on the urge for governments to prioritize language learning to facilitate social and economic integration and to provide multilingual information to increase access to public services.

AUSTRIA

“According to the final results of Statistics Austria, 8, 858,775 people lived in Austria as of 1st January 2019. Compared to the beginning of 2018, this represents an increase of 36,508 inhabitants (+0.41%)”⁷. Statistical Yearbook on Migration and Integration for 2019 states that more than two million people in Austria have a migration background, that is 23.3 percent of the total population. The top 10 nations⁸ living in Austria are come from Germany (192, 426), Serbia (121, 348), Turkey (117, 231), Romania (112, 684), Bosnia and Herzegovina (95, 839), Hungary (82, 712), Croatia (79, 999), Poland (63, 429), Syria (49, 813), and Afghanistan (44, 420).

Current sentiments in Austria are predominantly negative towards arriving refugee and migrant. The welcoming culture that was shaped amid the influx of refugees in 2015 has shifted and turned to a somewhat hostile perception of these population. This perception was perpetuated to a great extent by the rhetoric of parts of the former Austrian government by presenting absurd pictures in the [media](#). Migrants and refugees

⁷ Statistik Austria, 21st May 2019,

https://www.statistik.at/web_en/statistics/PeopleSociety/population/population_change_by_demographic_characteristics/120935.html

⁸ Migration und Integration (2019), Statistik Austria, Wien, p. 29

http://www.statistik.at/web_de/services/publikationen/2/index.html?includePage=detailedView§ionName=Bevölkerung&pubId=579



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are marginalized, and there are many cases of Dublin return to the first country of entry to the EU (Croatia mostly). Civil society organisations that provide most of the support to the refugees and migrants, are losing funds because of the government budget cuts - there are less language courses and integration activities. Also, the migration process but also support to migrants are being criminalised - like in many other countries.

Zhanuya is Vienna-based association aimed at intercultural parental education and social support at different levels. It takes part in organizing the annual "From Kabul to Vienna" festival which includes sport and cultural events, in cooperation with the [New Start Cultural Association](#). The association assists in the integration of Farsi-speaking refugees by pairing them with volunteers through the [Quadam be quadam - ankommen in Wien](#) initiative. It conducts workshops and discussions on sex education in accordance with the WHO standards.

African Cultural Union Wien is a community formed around the basic idea of creating a cultural platform for African, Caribbean, Afro-Latin and Afro-American dance and music traditions with the aim of promoting communication and cultural exchange. African artists find here support to promote direct communication with the public. They are particularly interested in the integration and exchange among different cultures.

The AFCU was founded in 2003 in Austria with headquarters in Vienna. The organization has hosted at least one [workshop](#) in cooperation with Austrian Red Cross volunteers for persons with refugee or migrant backgrounds. In late 2018 it organized an [exhibition](#) of African art. Tony Coker from Nigeria is chairman.

Gourmet Feasts – African Catering Service (Vienna) is a boutique food service enterprise that delivers the unique essence of African Cuisine. Phebe Ndam is the author of two cookbooks and has been teaching African cooking and workshops since 1992. African catering service combines authentic traditional and contemporary cuisines of Africa and reflects the diversity of the continent's people and cultures. With its wide variety of options and styles, each event showcases the diverse culinary delights of African food. Apart from catering services, the Gourmet Feasts also offers African Food Events at a restaurant (The Restaurant Experience), cooking classes for Children and Adults, cooking workshops, party service- food delivery and African food tours at local markets and food shops as well as cookbooks.



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Kasumama (Moorbad Harbach, AUS) is a voluntary association that organizes the family-friendly “KASUMAMA Afrika Festival” in the Lower Austria every year in July. For five days over 5.000 visitors come every year to be part of an intercultural dialogue, and enjoy its international music programme as well as its art and culture events which are the main target of the festival. Since 1997, the members of the association and numerous volunteers have been organizing school projects, school partnerships and for more than 10 years the five-day KASUMAMA Africa Festival, which has been steadily expanding in recent years

The manifold programme, which ranges from concerts, dances, and workshops to lectures and discussions, offers insights into African cultures and traditions beyond stereotypes. Creative workshops with African artists, entertaining theater and dance shows, exciting cinema from Africa and rousing live concerts by international and local music groups give an insight into the cultural diversity of the African continent. They also have [FB page](#).

Radio Afrika TV is an Austrian association aiming to improve the African – European relations. Radio Afrika TV is an information and communication platform for the African audience in Austria, for the audience in Africa via the net, and for all people in Austria with an interest in Africa. Radio Afrika was first born as a radio in 1997, founded with the aim of connecting the African diaspora in Austria and providing fair information about the African continent. RATV underwent a major transition in 2015, and become itself a key actor in development projects in Africa. Today, RATV offers its journalistic, research and marketing expertise to support, promote, and develop projects related to the African continent in Austria – focusing on integration, the empowerment of the diaspora, racism and discrimination – and African countries – focusing on development. Through their project [“Pattenschhaft mittelmeer”](#) it intends to gather innovative business ideas and projects and find partners, and investors to support these projects.



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CROATIA

In the last census of 2011 Croatia had 4, 284, 889 inhabitants⁹, out of which 3, 874, 321 were Croats - 90,42 %. Other 9,58 % are members of ethnicities, where top five are: Serbs - 186, 633, Bosniaks - 31, 479, Italians - 17, 807, Albanians - 17,513, Roma - 16,975. However, in the last year we are witnessing a decrease in total population number. According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, “in the mid-2018 estimate, the Republic of Croatia had 4, 087, 843 inhabitants, out of which 1, 975, 052 were men and 2, 112, 791 women”¹⁰. Croatia was and still is a country of emigration - once due to the war and nowadays due to high unemployment.

As an EU member state, Croatia only recently become a country of arrival for asylum seekers, providing international protection to people in need. Even though, for most of the refugees, Croatia is predominantly a country of transit on their journey towards Western Europe, however, some have remained in Croatia. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Interior¹¹ until the end of 2018 Croatia has granted over 750 asylum seekers international protection status. However, according to unofficial data from civil society organisations¹² working with refugees - many of them have left Croatia due to poor integration conditions and opportunities. Most of the refugee population comes from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq.

Currently, Croatia does not have a migration policy/strategy, although it had developed one in the past for the period between 2007 - 2008¹³, and then another one for the period of 2013 - 2015¹⁴. Several reports by international organisations show poor integration practice for refugees and migrants. “There is a lack of comprehensive analysis of implementation of migration policies and no dedicated budget for developing and sustaining integration measures. No evaluation concerning the content or quality of implementation has

⁹ Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Croatia for 2018 (2019), Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Zagreb.

¹⁰ Population estimate of Republic of Croatia (2019), 2018 Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Zagreb.

¹¹ Statistics for persons granted with international protection up until 31.12.2018.

<https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocImages/statistika/2019/Tra%C5%BEitelj%20me%C4%91unarodne%20za%C5%A1tite%20u%202018%20godini/29-04-statistika-trazitelji-2018.pdf>

¹² Coordination for Integration

¹³ Croatia (2007), Migration Policy of the Republic of Croatia for 2007/2008 (*Migracijska politika RH za 2007/2008*), Official Gazette (*Narodne novine*) NN 83/2007.

¹⁴ Croatia (2013), Migration Policy of the Republic of Croatia for 2013 - 2015 (*Migracijska politika RH za 2013 - 2015*), Official Gazette (*Narodne novine*) NN 27/2013.



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been made to this date. In addition, no indicators have been used either in policy documents or reports on implementation of planned measures. Integration is not a prominent topic of public and political debates and is not high on the agenda of the political parties and relevant state authorities in Croatia, which is also one of the main barriers for further policy development.”¹⁵. Authors of the same publication observe the lack of public awareness about the presence of immigrants and refugees, as well as high levels of fear and hostility towards any immigrants, including refugees. “The combination of scarce media coverage and negative reporting on these topics is particularly problematic. Distorted and incomplete information about the context of arrival and transit of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, their background, as well as reasons and circumstances of their arrival to Croatia, greatly contributes to an increased xenophobia and creates a climate of hostility and misunderstanding.”¹⁶

Integration was once the most important topic with regards to migration in Croatia, however, it changed in 2016 when a large number of people tried to cross the borders of Croatia and enter the EU - policies practiced at the border shifted ever since. Even though, no officials took responsibility for it - many refugees report¹⁷ violence and abuse at the hands of border security on Croatian borders. “Despite overwhelming evidence, including credible reports and video footage, of systematic and frequent violent pushbacks, Croatian authorities have denied any wrongdoing and maintained that their actions at their external borders have been within the bounds of national and European law and in line with current EU policy.”¹⁸

Currently, the biggest challenge for refugees is to enter Croatia and being able to apply for international protection. These are political conditions we referred to in the introduction of this research - conditions that have placed refugees on the edge of one country and do not allow them to move forward and live in security. Of course we need to discuss higher quality levels of integration policies, however, what is the use of these

¹⁵ Župarić-Iljić, D. et al. (2017) “Migrants and their Descendants: Social Inclusion and Participation in Society - Croatia, 2015”, FRANET, Vienna, p. 4.

¹⁶ Župarić-Iljić, D. et al. (2017) “Migrants and their Descendants: Social Inclusion and Participation in Society - Croatia, 2015”, FRANET, Vienna, p. 5.

¹⁷ Amnesty International (2019), “Pushed to the Edge”, London.

¹⁸ Amnesty International (2019), “Pushed to the Edge”, London, p. 17.



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policies if the very people who are meant to profit from them are not able to access them. Xenophobic and exclusive policies are on the run in the EU.

[The Choir Domaćigosti](#) was established in 2016 by amateur singers who wanted to contribute to musical and cultural variety of Croatian society by singing songs from various parts of the world. “The idea for the choir started brewing back in 2015, but it was in September 2016 that a few brave souls came together and founded the choir. Every member leaves a mark in her or his own way by contributing to the distinct musical expression of the choir and by choosing the repertoire. Some of us are professional musicians and some of are amateurs - but this distinction is not relevant at all for Domaćigosti. What we primarily value is the goodwill and energy to create and express music together and to share it with the world. Our choir director, Jovana Lukić, is a professional singer, musician and ethnomusicologist. We meet once a week for a two-hour rehearsal.”¹⁹

The initiative to establish the choir came out from the Centre for Peace Studies, an organisation that is working with refugees for over 16 years.

The name of the choir literally means “Homeguests” - it is one word that combines two with the intention of erasing the distinction between categories “home” and “guests”. “We want all those who are ‘guests’ in Croatia find their place under the sun in this country and feel ‘at home’. Beside that, we as native, for various reasons, feel ourselves as ‘guests’ in this society and time that we leave, and the choir is a place where through music, sharing and acceptance, we find our ‘tribe’”²⁰.

The main goal of the choir is to support the integration of refugees and other migrants in Croatia. Also, the choir is devoted to counter prejudice and xenophobia in Croatian society through intercultural exchange. Members of the choir (former and present) come from different countries: Afghanistan, Finland, Germany, Iran, Pakistan, Serbia, Syria, and Turkey.

¹⁹ https://web.facebook.com/pg/zbordomacigosti/about/?ref=page_internal

²⁰ https://web.facebook.com/pg/zbordomacigosti/about/?ref=page_internal



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One of the biggest challenges that the choir has to deal with on a daily basis is a constant risk of losing members who are refugees because of their unstable status in Croatia - connected to residence regulation and survival possibilities. In 2018, some of the members (refugees) had to leave Croatia, which affected the choir - energy and standard routine changed; some of the members who live in Croatia left the choir as a result.

Football club Zagreb 041 has been working and integrating refugees through sport activities and promoting the values of anti-racism and antifascism. Presently, the club has a senior men's team, senior women's team and a children's team. Players are both refugees and local youth.

Methods used and possibilities offered include the following: The aim is to bring football back to common people and fans, bring supporters back to football, and become the first genuine local community football club in Croatia, governed by supporters and sympathizers with a clear stance against modern football, and with a direct-democratic organizational model. The club fights corruption and clientelism on all levels, and all kinds of discrimination. Their message is that football is a sport of solidarity, fair competition, and respect for the opponent, a sport they love because of its simplicity and beauty. It is one of only a few clubs in Croatia with a very active women's team. Furthermore, the coach is a woman thus contributing to the promotion of diversity and inclusion and debunks the myth that football is just for men.

The goal is to enhance the level of inclusion, solidarity and provide a sense of security for refugees in order to achieve integration as a two-fold process and to promote positive values in sports and especially football. Priority is placed on promoting the direct engagement of refugees and host communities in order to achieve a two way integration model, which begins from the day a refugee arrives in the new host society. While the TCNs clearly have responsibilities to adapt to a host country's rules and values, the host society must also take steps to be welcoming and to offer support and opportunities that promote their integration.

Unfortunately, promoting integration is often neglected by the local and regional authorities, as this is not one of their core mandates. Therefore, this Club aims at encouraging, strengthening and inspiring local authorities and communities as well as other sports clubs and collectives to create an atmosphere of inclusion



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of refugees, social cohesion and to combat racism and xenophobia. Through this practice, they want to tackle —both sides of the coin||: Work on the implementation of refugees rights including their integration skills, but also work on value shift and behavioural changes in those parts of the population which are showing most antagonism towards migrants, especially towards those of other ethnicities.

Living Atelier DK, is an independent, interdisciplinary, non-governmental and non-profit organization focused on support and cooperation with artists, inclusion of the public through and into art locally and internationally, and exploration and understanding of otherness. Identity, memory, ecology, equality, community and peace-building, are part of the themes whose exploration it's encouraged through art. "Living" means to develop, communicate, adapt oneself and the environment. "Atelier" is a creative space and "DK" refers to the initials of the surname of the artist and academic sculptor, Vera Dajht-Kralj, whose collection of artwork—her physical and creative heritage—represents the inspiration and the axle around which this collective bases it's activities. The collective is working on the [preservation](#) and [promotion](#) of Vera Dajht-Kralj's art and have several programs including the [Gallery DK](#), [No Borders Program](#), [Wandering Art Tea Academy](#), artist in residence and a time bank as a method of community exchange of services and knowledge based on time and trust.

The No Borders program includes several projects involving refugees, asylum seekers, people seeking subsidiary protection and the local community to work on community-building, exploration of identity, and healing through art. The No Border program has two main components:

1. No Borders, Integration of Art – Art of integration

The art project started in 2015 in part as a reaction to the backlash on the part of public opinion against refugees coming through Croatia. Misinformation in the media (including social media), fuels the atmosphere of fear and mistrust. The No Borders project is meant to answer directly to this atmosphere of fear to create one of greater understanding between different people. The collaborative art project involves artists and refugees, and seeks to reexamine questions of identity, prejudice and borders between people, within ourselves and the world in which we live. It also serves to enrich the creative artistic potential of each person.



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2. Women to Women Collective

The Women to Women collective uses art as a way to bring together women who want Croatia to be their home together with women for whom Croatia is already home, to facilitate the integration of women into a new ever-evolving community. Through workshops, gatherings and excursions, women share and gain skills, knowledge, and empowerment while building on a support network and shared values of mutual understanding, tolerance and embracing of diversity into a dynamic inclusionary society. The idea of the project is to create a safe, secure and intimate space for women to exchange ideas, problems, solutions or simply to spend time together by connection through womanhood that often take precedence over cultural biases projected or perceived. Providing a space, without men and children, can help to ease the burden of family duties while helping build strong ties in Croatia—from women to women—away from the stress and pressure of living in constrained spaces with an uncertain future in reference specifically to the women waiting for refugee status. It also provides intercultural exchange through community- and peace-building opportunities with a chance to improve their livelihood.

Similar to some other initiatives in Croatia, this collective is also facing difficulties with sustaining group work due to unstable status of people seeking international protection and the fact that many of them are leaving Croatia. It is a challenge, but the collective still strives and hopes that in the future they will be an example of women empowerment and refugee voice.



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ITALY

Italy is the sixth most populated country in Europe with a population of approximately 60 million. The notion of ethnic minority groups in Italy is connected to the language they speak. Hence, people speaking minority languages like Albanian, Croatian, French, Friulian, German, Greek, Ladin, Occitan, Provençal, Sardu, Slovene, and are considered minorities. The Roman and Sinti are considered separately. The presence of different ethnicities in Italy continues to the present day as Italy has transformed into an immigration country from 1970 onwards. Until then Italy was a country of strong emigration with about 13 million people who emigrated from 1880 to 1976.

In 2018, it was estimated that there are over 5 million foreign residents in Italy, which accounts for 8 percent of the total population. Their distribution over the Italian regions is unequal with 2.9 million residing in the North region, 1.3 millions in the Centre and 800, 000 in the South and the Islands. The largest group of migrants living in Italy come from Romania, Albania, North Africa, China, and Ukraine. The most numerous foreign communities in Sicily come from Romania, Tunisia, Morocco and Sri Lanka.

Regarding the arrivals via sea, the numbers dropped in 2018: 22, 518 by November 2018, which is 87,8 percent less compared to the same period in 2017 and 92,3 percent less compared to the same period in 2016. It's important to underline this data as in the Italian politicians often use the term "invasion" to negatively label the natural phenomenon of migration that characterise the society and human nature. The latest government decree "Immigration and security" (n. 113/2018) and the continuous comments of the interior Minister, Matteo Salvini, continue to foster immigration as a national emergency and linked primarily to problems of public order and national security. However, the statistical data provide us with a different story. The 2018 Report of the Leone Moressa Foundation states that the presence of foreigners in Italy not only contributes to maintaining the demographic but also the productive issue in a certain balance. These figures, which underline the positive aspects of migration, are not reflected as such in the public opinion: the majority of Italians (55 percent) believe that migrants do not contribute to the well-being of Italy and display a serious challenge. There is a tendency to confuse foreigners, undocumented migrants, refugees and asylum



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seekers. At the beginning of 2018, asylum seekers accommodated in first reception centers numbered about 180 thousand (0.3 percent of the population) while, as stated above, there are over 5 million foreigners (8.3 percent).

There are several organizations, initiatives and groups that are actively involved in supporting and creating welcoming environments for and with the newcomers. One of them is ARCI, that has numerous premises across the Italian peninsula. In Palermo, the capital of cultures, crossroads of the Mediterranean, a bridge between different worlds, [ARCI PORCOROSSO](#)²¹ resisted to the idea of Palermo as the door of a fortress Europe: experiences like Palermo Pride has made the citizens awaken proud of the identity of each of us in a colorful and enamored city, where the associations in the neighborhoods have worked and work so that no one is ever left behind, promoting the values of hospitality and solidarity. Through their "Sans-papiers" project, every day PORCOROSSO have activities aimed at supporting, informing and assisting the so-called "sans-papiers" (people lacking citizenship documents) in the path of knowledge and awareness of the rights they acquire, or should acquire, once they enter European territory, in order to be able to act as social actors within a very insidious and complex context. The principles that move the project's activities are based on the a-hierarchical structure that exists within an informal space that favors sociality and exchange, on trust in human relationships that tend to be created there and on mutual respect, on transversal approaches to the problems dealt with, on a policy of "doing together" aimed at identifying tools rather than providing direct benefits, so as to encourage critical thinking, autonomy and, therefore, freedom.

Another initiative that is present in Italy is [Arte Migrante](#)²², aimed at promoting inclusion through art. It welcomes students, migrants, homeless people, workers, unemployed, young people and elders. Arte Migrante was born in Bologna in October 2012 from an idea of Tommaso Carturan, a young Anthropology student, and other friends he met in Bologna. Over the years the group has grown and nowadays we can find many dynamic groups across Italy in more than 25 cities. Arte Migrante is an open space where everyone can express themselves, share food, create art (poem, verse...). Through the symbolic way of gathering in a circle,

²¹ <http://www.arciporcorosso.it/sans-papiers-en/>

²² <http://www.artemigrante.eu/> <https://web.facebook.com/ArteMigrantePalermo/>



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each individual has the opportunity to feel equal and experience the harmony of diversity, with the idea that everyone completes other and that we grow together.

Food is one of the best connecting tools for Integration. This is what [MOLTIVOLTI](http://moltivolti.org/en/)²³ does everyday in Palermo streets. Moltivolti was born in the historic Ballarò market, a melting pot of cultures, colors, flavors and scents that makes this place unique in the world. In 2014, a group of friends with different cultural, professional and social experiences, from 8 countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Gambia, Italy, Senegal, Spain, and Zambia, and gives life to a space designed and structured to offer dignity, citizenship and value from diversity. Moltivolti was born as a model of social enterprise based on the relation, a laboratory of representation of a new society in which the exchanges among the diversity are on the base of development. The project intimately connected with the neighborhood of Ballarò in Palermo, that grows in equilibrium with the colorful populated market from old and new citizens. Moltivolti is a restaurant with a Sicilian-ethnic and popular cuisine and a co-working space dedicated to the non-profit sector. Two different areas that live in synergy with another, the profit that supports non-profit activities but from which it draws the energy and meaning. From the integration to the interaction, the kitchen as a metaphor for a new recipe of domestic partnership and development support.

Human connection, equality and entertainment: where to find it, if not in sport? The [Afro-Naples United](https://www.afronapoli.it/)²⁴ is an Amateur Sports Association born with the intent to use the principle according to which sport can and must be, besides a simple physical discipline, also a vehicle for teaching social and ethical values, and also a method to break down racial taboos.

The project started in October 2009 by Antonio Gargiulo, Sow Hamath and Watt Samba Babaly, with the aim of combating discrimination and promoting equal coexistence between Neapolitans and migrants. Being part of a football team offers various opportunities for social learning and the development of transversal skills, regardless of the cultural background.

²³ <http://moltivolti.org/en/>

²⁴ <https://www.afronapoli.it/>



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The athletes come from Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia and live in the most populated neighborhoods of the historic center. Also young people from other European countries and continents (Asia and South America) have joined in recent years. The association has created two football teams, which participate in amateur, city and provincial tournaments, grouping together about 40 athletes.

Political representation and participation is the heart of a successful integration. The [Council of Cultures of the city of Palermo](#)²⁵, which combines participation in political and administrative life with the logic of equality and integration is a successful example. This concept takes shape in the Council of Cultures, where different representatives of different cultures in Palermo sit together and actively participate in the political life of the City.

SLOVENIA

Slovenia is a country where, out of its 2,066,880 inhabitants (January 2018), the majority are Slovenes (94.10 percent). The number of foreign nationals has been increasing in recent years, however, it remains quite low at 5.9 percent (January 2018). According to the statistics of the [International Organization of Migration](#), as of June 2019, almost 160,000 non-EU nationals had temporary or permanent residency status in Slovenia²⁶. Slovenia is home to two indigenous minorities – Italians (coastal towns and their hinterlands) and Hungarians (Prekmurje); there are also the Roma ethnic communities (Prekmurje, Dolenjska and Bela krajina).

The majority of foreigners are immigrants from the territories of the former Yugoslav republics – mainly Serbs and Croats (2 percent), followed by Bosnians and Albanians.

The main law on asylum in Slovenia is the International Protection Act, which is complemented by the Aliens Act, which contains rules on return procedures, residency rights, other rules pertaining to non-asylum-seeking migrants as well as on refugee rights, including family reunification. Since May 2017, the

²⁵ <https://www.comune.palermo.it/noticext.php?cat=1&id=18964>

²⁶ <https://www.iom.int/countries/slovenia>



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responsibility for international protection has been split between the civilian body of the Ministry of the Interior and the newly established government office (organizationally independent, not a part of any ministry).

Between October 2015 and March 2016, a total of 477,791 migrants and refugees entered Slovenia as part of the so-called Balkan Route, in the context of the largest displacement of people since the World War. The number of applications for international protection filed in Slovenia has since been increasing, with 1,476 asylum claims made throughout 2017 and over 1,800 asylum applications filed in the first half of 2019. The top five countries of origin of asylum seekers in the first six months of 2019 were Algeria, Morocco, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Thanks to the legal and research work of the local organization PIC - Legal centre for the protection of human rights and environment, refugees in the country have the possibility to access to tools to exercise and protect their rights and strengthening their position in the society.

In the last three years (2016—May 2018) 362 refugees were granted asylum status in Slovenia (756 altogether). They came mainly from Syria, Iraq, Iran and Eritrea and live in Ljubljana or Maribor (the second biggest city in Slovenia).

The civil society in Slovenia is rich with initiative and organizations that work with refugees, conduct research on the topic of migration, and together with newcomers create new realities and communities that positively contribute to an effective intercultural environment.

[SLOVENSKA FILANTROPIJA](https://www.filantropija.org/)²⁷ is a humanitarian organization with almost 30 years of experience in activities aimed at increasing the quality of life in the community and advocacy for the socially underprivileged population. The central activity of Slovene Philanthropy is the promotion of volunteering, through which we can all contribute to a better society, based on the respect of all people regardless of their personal or living circumstances. Slovenska Filantropija puts these values in practice through psychosocial and psychotherapeutic assistance and advocacy for various marginalized individuals and groups of migrants. In

²⁷ <https://www.filantropija.org/>



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addition to that, it organizes various activities to facilitate the integration of migrants into their new environment: familiarizing them with their local surroundings, organizations and institutions, with the customs of the majority population, assist them in dealing with paperwork, learning Slovenian, provide learning assistance, social, sporting and cultural activities as well as other forms of assistance with integration.

The association [ODNOS](#)²⁸, founded in 2006, aims at raising awareness about migration, attempting to shift the common perception of this phenomenon away from problem and threat. Its work is based on supporting the communities to live together and support each other.

[TERRA VERA](#)²⁹, is a grassroots organization, that works on the concept of integration, perceiving it as a creation of opportunities for interpersonal solidarity, care for the environment and ethical economy. Through its work, TERRA VERA fosters the development of human potential in the field of sustainable management, social inclusion of diverse groups and cultural and ethnic minorities. The main focus is to detect professional skills and connect them with artists, and designers in the country. All of this is made possible through non formal learning, social inclusion, media education, craft and ethical entrepreneurship. Through various methods, TERRA VERA encourages self-organization, use of local resources and sustainable management.

Another active group that is focusing on art and craft is "[NO-BORDER CRAFT](#)³⁰". The group's essential goal is to build a social network between local residents and migrant women, and an effort to strengthen and to implement the skills, experiences and courage of migrant women. The members meet around a large table in Social Center Rog and create different products using crochet: baskets, handbags, wraps for jars and bottles, carpets, bracelets. Children play, while the women drink tea and discuss the institutional racism of migration politics, deportations, slow asylum procedures, denied asylum applications, bad living conditions in asylum centers, the lack of access to public transport, lack of financial resources and the obstacles asylum seekers face when looking for apartments or work. The group started with a bazaar in Social Center Rog in December

²⁸ <http://odnos.si/>

²⁹ <https://www.terra-vera.org/our-mission>

³⁰ https://web.facebook.com/no.border.craft.community/?_rdc=1&_rdr



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2017, offered a space to socialize, to eat something nice and to strengthen the inspiration for actions against borders. After this successful experience, they decided to continue under the name *No Border Craft*. The initiative, based on sisterhood, antiracism and complicity, aims to bring women outside the camp to get to know each other and create products, selling them and giving money to women who live in camps.



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FINAL STATEMENT

In late December of 2017, the European Commission and the EU Social and Economic partners signed a '[European Partnership for Integration](#)', "laying down key principles and commitments to support and strengthen opportunities for refugees and migrants legally residing in the EU to integrate into the European labour market"³¹. One of the actions that came out of that partnership is the establishment of the European Migrant Advisory Board (EMAB) in March 2018 - a board that comprises of a diverse group of experts with migrant and refugee backgrounds. The board as such works on increasing the participation of migrants and refugees in different policy-making processes affecting migrants' access to rights. In 2019, it published a research titled [Ask the People](#) - a consultation, which was done between September and December 2018, consisted of 21 focus groups that engaged a total of 260 participants. "The results demonstrate that migrants and refugees have the experience and expertise to inform public debates and to ensure better policy making. Currently, experts who have experience as migrants and refugees are underrepresented in the decision-making processes."³² Integration is a two-way process - is a statement we often hear in discussion on integration, and as such is often defined in national policies; but do we really practice it as a two-way process? Who is being integrated and into what? How do we include social groups who are participating in the society but living on the margin of it?

"In order for EU and member state authorities to implement recommendations, the EU should involve them in 'structured participation', meaning that participation is not an add-on but rather a planned process from design to evaluation within existing structures and processes."³³ EMAB gives this as an overall recommendation for long-term, sustainable, constructive and inclusive policy that takes into consideration all aspects of society - no matter what their current values are, and shapes realities of the practice according to them.

³¹ https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-5352_en.htm

³² European Migrant Advisory Board (2019), "Ask the People", Brussels, p. 4.

³³ European Migrant Advisory Board (2019), "Ask the People", Brussels, p. 37.



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The value we promote within this text lies in the idea that migrants and refugees enrich and challenge our societies; and that society has to take that process seriously and work on it. We need to create spaces for exchange, have the capacity to understand “difficulties” no matter how hard they can be to experience and we need to act - not re-act!

Europe is a multicultural, intercultural continent and the current migrant situation is challenging Europe to resist racism and xenophobia. When speaking about integration and support - we also have to consider how we do that for each-other because every practice that excludes one person today, will exclude you tomorrow. This is currently visible in shrinking civic spaces and criminalization of solidarity.

We are not completely failing, if we start learning from each-other and act.

Integration has been discussed for a long time now and within different scope of individuals - from scholars to practitioners and politicians. Within these discussions, there are different opinions and approaches - one is provoking the other and theories develop. We, on the other hand, are practitioners and the perspective we discuss in this text comes from realities we live in - hoping they will enrich discussion and make changes for the better. “Integration should be conceptualised as a process that takes place between insiders and outsiders, which implies a relational understanding of integration.”³⁴. We need to reach that shift in the practice - and stop communicating that process of integration only applies to refugees, migrants “Third Country Nationals”. “Integration is to be located in the power relations between insiders and outsiders, who are both intrinsically part of the process. Integration provides information about the relationships between people, not about (the categories) of individuals.”³⁵

We believe in the necessity of articulating - needs of both sides (old and new citizens) for building solidarity. Through the articulation of need , personal relationships can arise and lead to the creation of mutual connection and understanding. However, “more integration does not necessarily equal more harmony, since

³⁴ Klarenbeek, L. M. (2019) Reconceptualising integration as a two-way process, *Migration Studies*, p.13

³⁵ Klarenbeek, L. M. (2019) Reconceptualising integration as a two-way process, *Migration Studies*, p.13



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changing power relations cause social frictions.”³⁶ All this should happen in local communities where everyday life happens and people create their realities together. It is crucial to initiate more events to exchange within local communities. Integration is meant for all citizens, even though funds are addressed for the “Integration of Third Country Nationals”. Integration funds can be used for the needs of all citizens, not only one group and some examples in practice show how it works - Italian cities of Riace and Palermo. In Riace the mayor has used integration money to relieve the city for all, while in Palermo integration was used to fight issue concerning the mafia. “In Palermo, integration is so good that Italians and migrants have the same problems. Anything that doesn't work doesn't work equally for both groups. We no longer have any service specifically designed for migrants, because when they solve their problems, migrants go to the same places as other citizens - they turn to the city administration. It is migrants who have taught Italian citizens the right to call the authorities for unemployment. When we talk about human rights, we are not talking individually about migrant, LGBT or other's rights, but about the whole society, the circle in which everyone must remain. If we tolerate that the rights of migrants can be attacked, then we also accept that tomorrow, someone may endanger the rights of any other group, such as women or ill people. National authorities first began to attack migrants, and subsequently organized a terrible congress in Verona where they attacked women's rights. A few years ago we warned about this and it turned out we were right. When we defended the rights of migrants, we actually defended our own rights.”³⁷.

³⁶ Klarenbeek, L. M. (2019) Reconceptualising integration as a two-way process, *Migration Studies*, p.14

³⁷ Adam Darawsh, Palermo deputy mayor for culture, authors translation from Croatian to English - https://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/braneci-prava-migranata-branimi-i-svoja-prava?fbclid=IwAR0FKP4XbwWlj-Ffi5UhH9Ivbwt2CAJ_Fu278nN_hEV4cu-DCBooX7nIDXc



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