

How To Co-design Integration Strategies with Migrants and Other Stakeholders

A resource for cities and regions



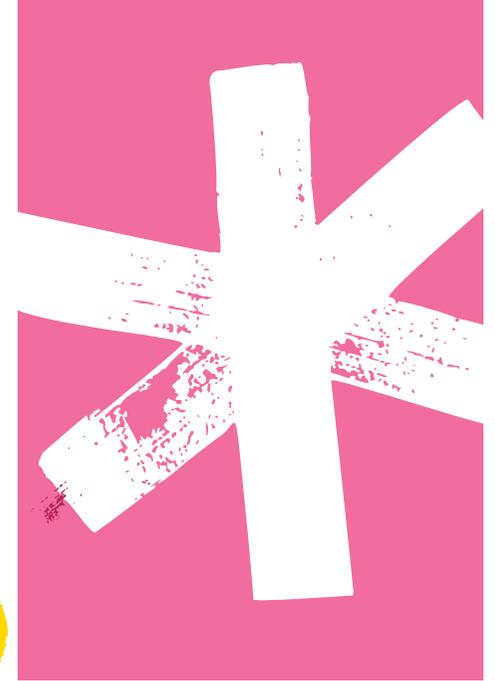
1. Introducing this guide

What is the purpose of this guide?

[This guide](#) shares learnings from the AMIF-funded project [UNITES](#) (Urban Integration Strategies through co-design) involving migrant integration practitioners across Europe. The UNITES project set out to:

- ❑ improve integration outcomes and increase participation by co-designing integration strategies with stakeholders, citizens and vulnerable migrants;
- ❑ train integration practitioners in managing co-design processes through various forms of learning and exchange of good practices, and
- ❑ raise awareness of the advantages of a “whole-of-society approach” to integration.¹

Led by [Eurocities](#), eight cities (Athens, Bologna, Düsseldorf, Grenoble Alpes Métropole, Oulu, Prague, Zagreb and Zaragoza), two migrant organisations, [UNITEE](#) and [New Women Connectors](#), and learning partner [MigrationWork](#) formed a community of practice to support each city as they introduced co-design to their local integration strategies. To inform the work, good practices in this field were identified during a research phase. This how-to guide was developed alongside a [Massive Open Online Course](#) available to practitioners wishing to use co-design approaches in order to make their integration strategies more participatory and inclusive.



1. We understand integration as a dynamic process that takes place locally, in cities, villages and communities, in the context of migration. It means equal access for all residents to all the spheres of activity which together enable the city to develop and flourish. When places do not “integrate” and where structural inequalities are allowed to become entrenched, they may eventually cause a place to fall apart as a social and economic entity, i.e. to dis-integrate. Striving for integration therefore matters to a whole city and not just to those in marginalised neighbourhoods or new communities. Ultimately, an integrating city will reap the benefits of the dynamic change brought about by immigration.



Who is this guide for?

- Anybody who is developing or thinking about developing a strategy to integrate migrants into their city, town or region and seeking to do so with the participation of migrants themselves throughout the process.
 - those just starting to think about developing an integration strategy and those well along the path;
 - cities that have recently received migrants and those that have been shaped by migration over decades or centuries;
 - small cities and big cities, with or without funding and other resources, cities with all types of migrants; large or small numbers of migrants, long-term and transient migrants, refugees and others;
- Migrants and established residents who want to encourage their city to involve them in developing integration strategies and need to show them how to do so;
- Those with a stake in migrant integration who want to explore how their city could improve by involving migrant residents.²

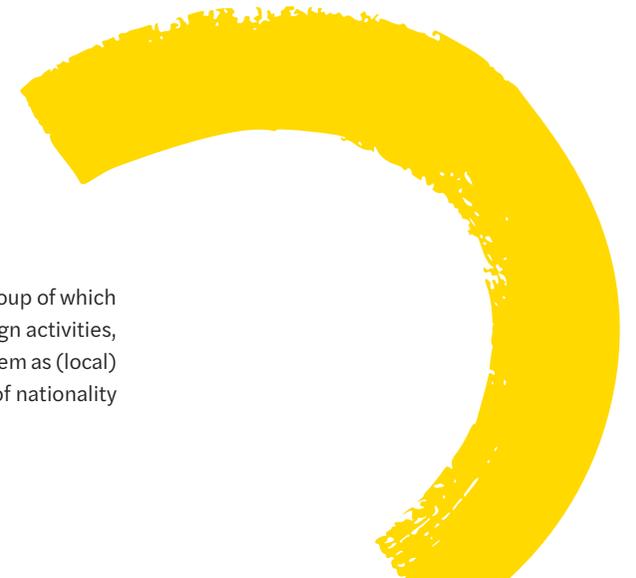
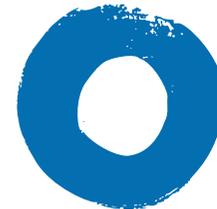
What will you find in this guide?

The guide provides a short introduction to co-design and then provides guidance on:

1. What an integration strategy is and how to use co-design in the various stages of the strategy
2. How to coordinate with stakeholders
3. Co-design methods that can be used
4. How to tap into unheard voices and reach vulnerable groups

Each chapter includes information on how to take the relevant steps, as well as indicating what does and does not work. In addition, real-life examples are provided from cities within or beyond the scope of the UNITES project.

At the end of the guide you will find further useful resources, including the UNITES benchmark of key success factors for co-designing integration strategies. You can use that benchmark to assess which criteria your city already fulfils and areas in which it could improve its use of co-design.



2. We have chosen to use the word “residents” to refer to the population of a city (a sub-group of which are its migrant residents) to denote all people that could potentially be involved in co-design activities, regardless of their nationality or residence status. As many cities do, we could also refer to them as (local) citizens to stress the fact that belonging to the city is linked to residing there, regardless of nationality or residence status.

What is co-design?

In public policies, co-design is a “**design-led process, involving creative and participatory principles and tools to engage different kinds of people and knowledge in public problem-solving**” ([Blomkamp 2018](#)).

What makes co-design special and innovative is

- ▣ its iterative, dynamic **process** that combines open phases of inspiration and discovery with “narrower” phases of experimentation and prototyping
- ▣ its egalitarian **principles** – namely that everybody can and should participate in the design process on an equal footing, contributing their different perspectives and experiences;
- ▣ the use of creative and practical **tools**, which aim to generate deep input from all persons involved.

Accordingly, use of co-design implies deep participation and goes beyond merely informing or consulting people. It means enabling people to participate on an equal footing and place their own experiences at the centre of the process. The hierarchy between ordinary people, those commonly referred to as experts and the official authorities is dissolved. Power is shared to ensure that as many relevant perspectives as possible are involved.

You may also have come across the similar terms of co-creation and co-production. While co-design usually focuses on the policymaking stage, involving definition of the problem and planning, co-production is more about policy implementation and co-creation encompasses all stages. We have found that in practice, especially when dealing with the multi-faceted process of migrant integration, co-design often leads to co-production: partners continue working together to deliver the strategy after it has been drawn up.

Although it is typically applied on a small scale, co-design can also be used for migrant integration strategies. We will give many examples of how to do so in the following chapters. But first, let us understand co-design better.



What is the origin of co-design?

Co-design builds on fields preceding co-design, such as neighbourhood renewal or health and psychiatric care, where those concerned demanded to have a say. Sometimes participatory approaches came about in response to citizen discontent with technocratic and paternalistic planning. In other cases they were introduced because public support needed to be secured for potentially unpopular or controversial measures.

Co-design also draws on alternative research methods such as Participatory Action Research and its claim that research had to be done with and not just about marginalised communities, and that it had to build on their knowledge from the outset when defining research problems.

Why should a city use co-design when developing its migrant integration strategy?

Involving a wide range of people and experiences in developing a migrant integration strategy – or indeed any other strategy or service – takes more effort than just working with people from the city council or a few select NGO representatives. So why do it? Here is a list of arguments for using co-design:

- Involving the people concerned in the design of a strategy will allow it to meet their needs more effectively.
- In crisis situations in particular, tapping into the knowledge of community members is invaluable to understand quickly what is going on and what is needed.
- Co-design further reinforces democratic participation and shows that people's experiences are taken seriously, which is important when facing pressure from media or politicians delegitimising migrants in our society.
- Co-design methods bring citizens together to exchange their views and experience a shared sense of citizenship.
- Co-design provides an opportunity to show that migrants are active participants in shaping new communities rather than passive “beneficiaries”.

These arguments can help you make the case to colleagues or politicians for co-design. The principles in question are also enjoying growing political support: both the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) and the EU [Action plan on Integration and Inclusion](#) recommend that public authorities involve migrants and migrant organisations in the design of policies that concern them.



2. How to apply co-design when developing integration strategies across the policy cycle

What is a strategic approach to migrant integration?

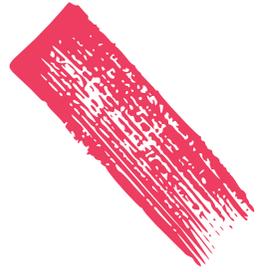
A strategic approach to migrant integration

- Defines the values involved and any constraints or limitations to integration when developing the relevant measures
- Looks to the medium and long term
- Includes all relevant areas of the city's competencies
- Gathers information to understand context and needs
- Defines actions and the resources needed for their implementation
- Is agreed at the appropriate political and administrative levels
- Supports coordination between a range of actors and stakeholders
- Envisages and supports crisis responses, including mechanisms to learn from those for continuous improvement of the strategy.

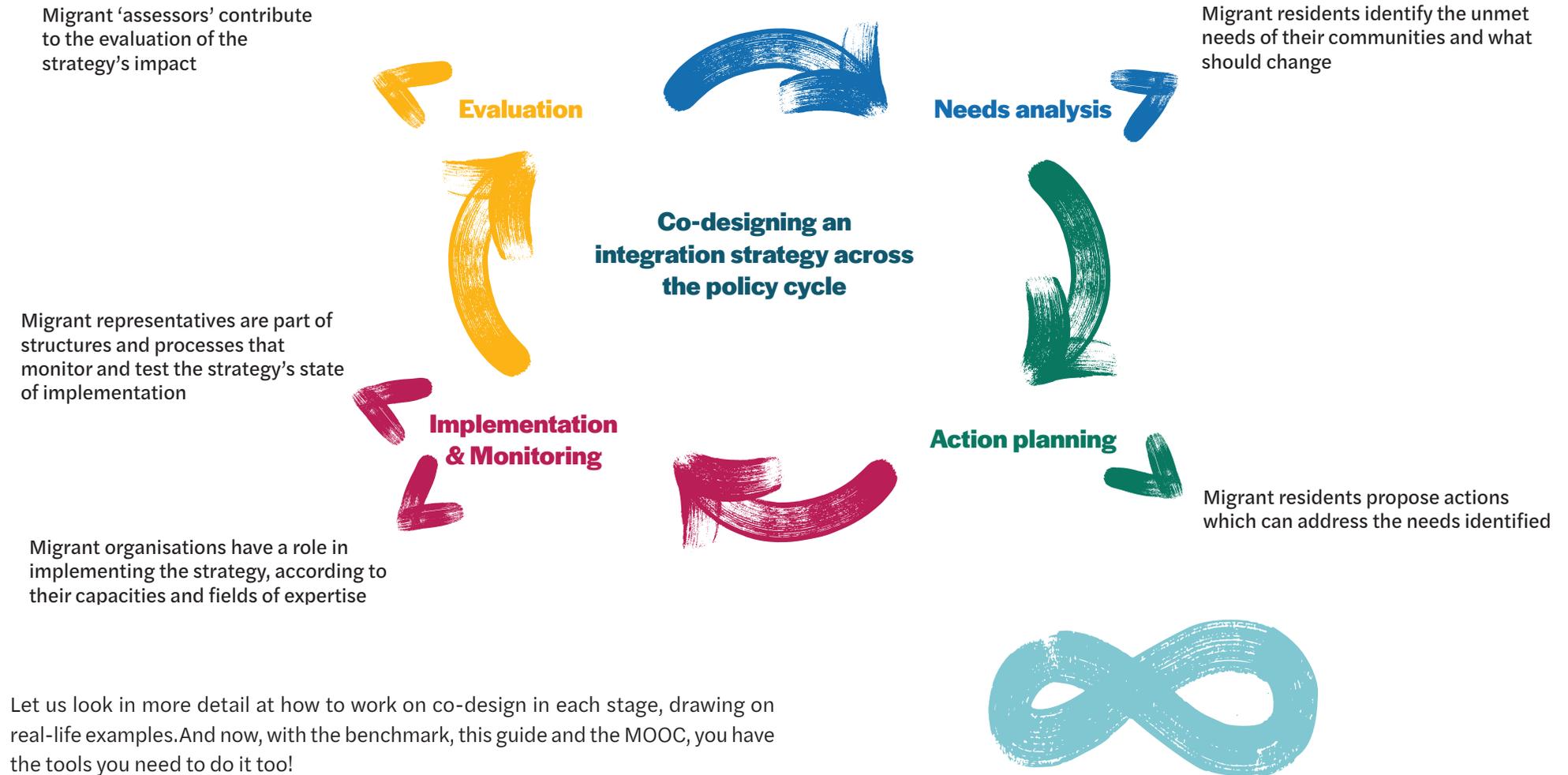


EU-funded [Connection project](#) wrote a comprehensive [Guide to Creating Strategic Approaches to Migrant Integration](#). You can read it alongside this guide if you would like to learn more about how to develop an integration strategy. In this guide, however, we will focus on how to incorporate co-design into such processes.

How to co-design an integration strategy across the policy cycle



There are four stages to developing any strategy – including an integration strategy – that should be applied throughout the policy cycle, namely: needs assessment, action planning, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation and co-design.



Stage 1 Needs assessment

The first step is to identify the needs of migrant communities and what should change. The needs assessment should be objective, inclusive and focused on the challenges, barriers and inequalities migrants face. There are various ways of engaging migrant communities when assessing their needs, for example through surveys, open dialogues or in workshops involving migrant representatives or associations.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE Mapping migrant trajectories upon arrival in Nantes

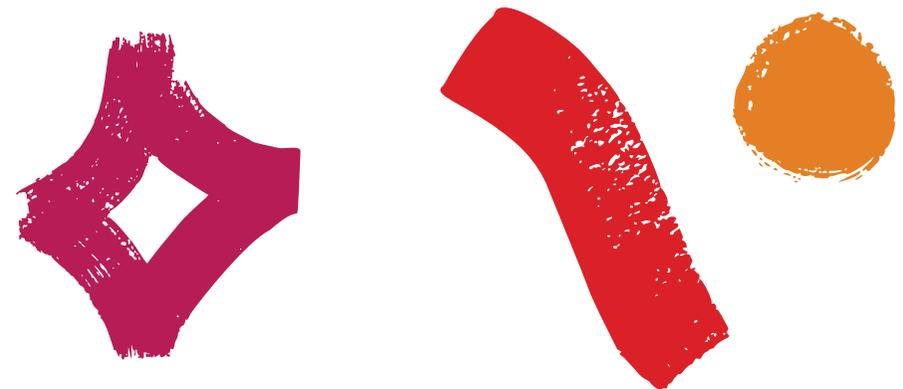
In 2011, the French city of Nantes commissioned its migrant council, the Conseil Nantais de Citoyenneté des Étrangers (CNCE), to provide input into its reception policies. As part of its mandate, the CNCE mapped the life trajectories of the city's migrants in the first years after their arrival, along with the information and support needs arising from those trajectories. In 2013, that led to a reception guide with recommendations for action. The CNCE's role was complemented by workshops and surveys of user experiences to better understand user needs. The CNCE also played a role in revising the city's guide to information and advice services for newly arrived migrants. The most recent edition, produced in 2019, is a practical [72-page directory of Nantes services and amenities](#).

Stage 2 Action planning

Once needs have been identified, the city authority, together with migrant residents and other stakeholders, should move to designing and planning the measures that need to be taken in order to address those needs. That may include hosting citizens' dialogues or assemblies, for instance. A final action plan will connect measures with clear objectives, define who is responsible for each measure, allocate resources and timetable the measures.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE São Paulo and its first Municipal Plan of Policies for Immigrants

The City of São Paulo, Brazil, defined measures for its first [Municipal Plan of Policies for Immigrants \(2021-2024\)](#) together with the Municipal Council of Immigrants (MCI). Created in 2017, the Council is equally divided between a) representatives of the public authority and b) immigrants' groups, associations and individuals. A series of workshops and three days of debate and deliberation led to 80 final action proposals with goals, indicators and a timeframe.



Stage 3 Implementation and monitoring

Implementation of the strategy may involve a wide range of stakeholders based on their capacities and fields of expertise. Migrant representatives should be involved in monitoring and testing implementation of the strategy throughout its duration and report on it to allow for corrections to be made where needed.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE

Liverpool and its welcoming city approach

The city of Liverpool, United Kingdom, developed its “[Our Liverpool](#)” strategy to fulfil its pledge made in 2013 to become a [City of Sanctuary](#). It mainstreamed a welcoming city approach across all council areas and then wrote a strategy, which was driven by mixed working groups (city and NGO/migrant representatives) on topics including education, language and housing. After the strategy came to an end in 2022, the process of developing a new strategy drew on what the city had learnt about migrant engagement and co-production. The original scope of “Our Liverpool”, which focused mostly on refugees and asylum seekers, was adjusted to encompass the emergence of a large group of vulnerable EU citizens following Brexit. A migrant group was set up to advise on and monitor the work of the subgroups working on the various topics of the strategy. The original strategy envisaged a formal Migrant Council that fed into the subgroups. However, representatives of the migrant group were found to be more influential where they were directly present in all thematic subgroups. One of many measures designed with the participation of migrants was training on the asylum system for council staff in partnership with the group Refugee Women Connect.

Stage 4 Evaluation

The final stage in the policy cycle is the evaluation of the strategy to find out whether or not it has achieved what it set out to do. Participatory evaluations provide both those delivering and those being affected by it with a moment to reflect on whether it has worked for them and how they might wish to shift and change it in the future. Involving migrants in evaluations provides accountability and gives a fuller and more accurate account of progress and potential developments needed.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE

Bologna and its participatory review of the education services

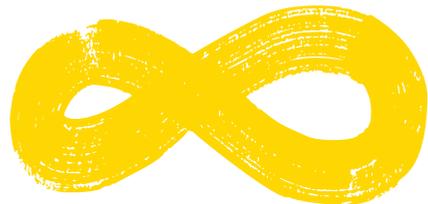
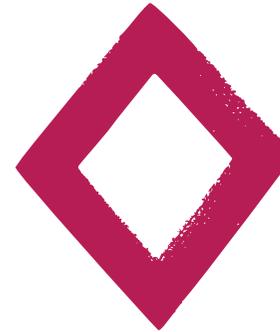
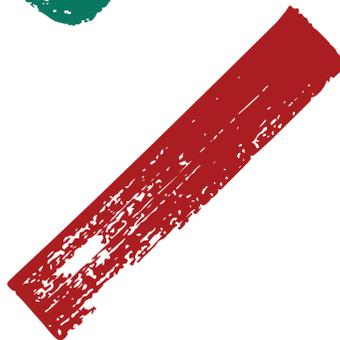
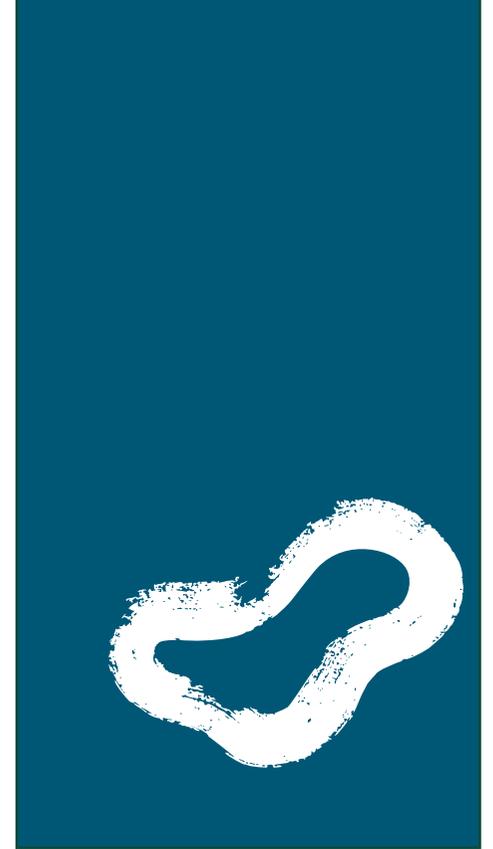
In 2018, the Italian city of Bologna adopted a Local Action Plan – which was updated in 2021 and 2023 – to promote non-discriminatory and human rights-based administrative approaches to new residents. To review and strengthen the work of its city departments and services in the effort to meet the goals of that action plan, the city established an Audit Panel including residents of Bologna with a migrant background to conduct a pilot participatory review of the city’s education services. Meetings were conducted and a range of outreach methods were used to enable migrants to give their feedback on the services in question. Based on the data collected, the Audit Panel’s recommendations on how to improve the contribution of the education services to the city’s diversity and equality goals will be ready at the end of 2024.

You can hear more from the actors involved in the review in [this video](#).



A checklist: co-designing integration strategies across the policy cycle means

- Recognising migrant residents as experts based on their personal experiences, with such experiences considered to be equally valid as technical or formally recognised knowledge.
- Ensuring deep and meaningful involvement beyond mere consultation.
- Using co-design approaches over the whole policy cycle of the integration strategy, from the initial needs analysis to implementation and evaluation.
- When it is difficult, for practical reasons, to involve ordinary residents on a day-to-day basis, organisation of one-off meetings to give them the opportunity to be informed about what is going on.



3. Co-designing with stakeholders

What is a stakeholder?

A stakeholder is a person or organisation with an interest or concern (stake) in a decision, in our case the city integration strategy and the measures taken to implement it. Here are some stakeholders that may be relevant to a migrant integration strategy and the concerns they may have.



Primary school teacher

“The children I teach need to know they belong here, I am worried their families have sometimes been harassed or exploited. And I need support to get them settled into school and flourishing.”



Local charitable foundation

“We help people in need in our city. We want to help these new arrivals. But where can we be most effective in doing that? Which organisation should we fund?”



Community leader

“I am worried that our administration just seems to be reacting to things. Where is the plan? Why aren't they sharing it with us?”



Faith leader

“We want to make our city a welcoming place. I've got 20 people who say they want to help these new communities but no idea of where to send them or what they can do.”



Emergency response coordinator

“Every time we have a new group of unexpected arrivals we mobilise to receive them, get all the stakeholders involved, sort it all out. But then they move on, we go back to what we were doing before, and then have to start all over again next time.”



Mayor

“Central government tells us we should develop a strategy, but I need to know how to bring the residents along with me on that, I'm worried they may feel that migrants are getting special treatment. And where will we get the resources?”



Local business

“It's great that these people have arrived, we are desperately short of staff in my business. Do any of them have qualifications? Can I recruit them? Can I get help to do that and support them if they are new to our systems and ideas of people management?”



Migrant community leader

“Our people have rights but they don't know them or understand how to enforce them. And we want to be involved in planning and monitoring services for them: nothing about us without us.”



Volunteer organiser

“We will need training for our volunteers on who these new people are and any issues that might come up if we work with them. And we need to know what services there are for them and how to refer to them.”



In this section, we will focus on the city council's coordination with actors who have a stake in the integration strategy **in their roles as practitioners, professionals or institutional representatives of public authorities and civil society**. Migrants and other city residents also have a stake in an integration strategy and should be involved in designing it, but for different reasons. It is their **right** to be involved as **citizens, tax-payers, residents and service users**. Their involvement also requires different methods and needs more preparation – which is why we will talk about such methods separately in the following chapter. It is important, however, to ensure that all stakeholders involved understand the importance of involving migrants fully in co-design.

Co-designing integration strategies with **practitioners, professionals or institutional representatives** marks a shift from understanding integration as a cross-sectoral task of various city departments (such as housing, health, employment, education) to a **whole-of-society approach** that understands integration as a shared task between the council and civil society. However, it is important to keep in mind that working with civil society does not make coordination across sectors and levels of government obsolete.

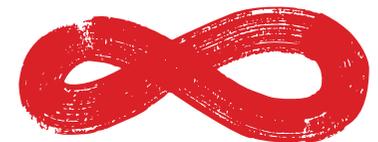
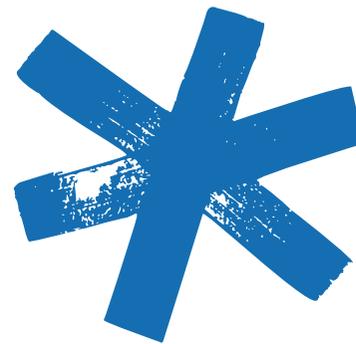
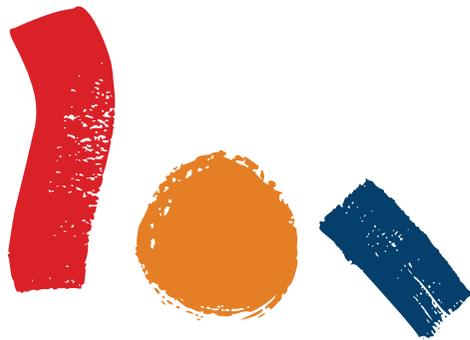
How to choose stakeholders

Which stakeholders to involve in your integration strategy depends heavily on the focus of your strategy and on your local context. You can think about the relevance of stakeholders by asking questions such as:

- Are they **already involved** in implementing parts of the integration strategy, e.g. as service providers?
- Do they show a strong **interest** in becoming part of the strategy?
- Are they **able to affect** the outcomes of the strategy because of the power they have?
- Do they have relevant **knowledge** to improve the strategy?

If your answer to any of the questions above for a given stakeholder is “yes”, you should try to involve them. However, the more influential stakeholders might need some convincing. It is therefore important to line up the arguments in favour of their involvement before approaching them!

The [URBACT](#) programme has developed tools to help you decide which stakeholders to work with, namely [stakeholder maps](#) to order stakeholders by sector and a [power-interest matrix](#) to think about whom to involve.



Real life examples of stakeholder coordination bodies

Here are a few models of stakeholder coordination that UNITES partners found inspiring.

Fuenlabrada Mesa por la Convivencia (Coexistence Board)

The “Mesa por la Convivencia” in Fuenlabrada, a city of more than 200,000 inhabitants on the outskirts of Madrid, Spain, is a stakeholder body that started, two decades ago, as a grass-roots initiative of migrant and cultural minority groups, parents’ associations, neighbourhood associations and the local LGBT organisation to promote intercultural relations.

When the “Mesa” became a formal association in 2020, it set up a formal cooperation agreement with the city council. Through an annual work plan, jointly decided by the Mesa and Council, it delivers services, such as interventions in schools and annual policy laboratories, where city council members and officers meet with civil society organisations to discuss current topics related to migration and interculturality. Past laboratories were held on themes such as the “second generation”, women, work and “the city of full rights”. The discussions and decisions from the laboratory are published and go to the City Council. The Mesa also participates in learning projects side by side with the city council. As part of the EU-funded CAMUS project, the Mesa was responsible for piloting audits of local services to detect and eliminate structural discrimination.

You can hear more about the council from Javier Bokesa Abia, one of the people active in development of the Mesa and now the city councillor responsible for participation and external relations, in [this video](#).

Grenoble Alpes Métropole’s refugee council “Agora”

Grenoble Alpes Métropole (GAM), a French intermunicipal body, has about 450,000 inhabitants, of whom an estimated 2,000 are Geneva Convention refugees and a further 2,000 have fled Ukraine.

As part of the UNITES project, GAM decided to give a stronger voice to refugees through a participatory body made up of refugees of various origins called AGORA. AGORA’s main objective is to provide a channel for refugees to have a say in policies that concern them, such as evaluating the services and projects that target refugees or getting involved in design of the “house of hospitality”, a flagship project that Grenoble is currently planning.

Organisations involved in GAM’s refugee reception policies jointly developed Agora’s model and recruited refugees to become members of the new council. The 12 members received training in public speaking and on the local policy context. They can also receive linguistic support whenever necessary.

Listen to some of the actors involved in Agora in [this video](#).

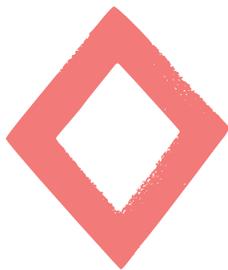


Yorkshire and Humber Integration Strategy and Forum

In 2021, Migration Yorkshire, a local authority-led regional partnership, established the [Yorkshire and Humber Refugee Integration Forum \(“YHRIF”\)](#) to oversee implementation of the region’s brand-new [refugee integration strategy and action plan](#). In that process, Migration Yorkshire engaged more than 250 stakeholders through a series of workshops with a thematic and regional focus, online-questionnaires in five languages and refugee participation networks.

As of January 2023, the Forum’s [membership](#) comprised 36 individuals, including a representative of refugee-led community groups and five experts by experience from participation networks, as well as representatives of national and local government services, such as schools, libraries, employment services, the police, trade unions and NGOs providing assistance to refugees. The Forum is co-chaired by Migration Yorkshire’s Refugee Participation Officer and a representative of Bradford City Council. A secretariat and other ongoing support to the Forum is provided by Migration Yorkshire. The Forum has four thematic meetings per year on topics such as social integration/social interaction, refugee entrepreneurship and health & wellbeing.

Listen to the Stakeholder Forum chairs introducing themselves and discussing social integration [here](#) and [here](#).



Making stakeholder engagement work: a checklist

- ❑ A stakeholder body should have a **clear, long-term mandate** from the city council that gives the group the authority to act, and a clear purpose, e.g. a role in co-designing measures and overseeing implementation of the integration strategy.
- ❑ A stakeholder body should have a special focus on **migrant-led organisations**³ and/or community leaders. Their involvement also strengthens trust between the municipality and those communities.
- ❑ If a stakeholder body resembles a debating club with **no clear mandate or purpose**, people will soon get frustrated and consider participating a waste of time.
- ❑ A stakeholder body needs a **good moderator or facilitator**. Having a **political representative** attend or chair stakeholder body meetings can be a way to show that the group matters to the city council. Moderation is also important to address conflicts and competition.
- ❑ If the body is too big to work together efficiently, it is helpful to set up permanent **working groups** on various topics, as has been done at the [Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee Issues](#).
- ❑ A stakeholder body needs **resources** to manage its day-to-day affairs efficiently, such as a secretariat financed by the city.
- ❑ Where there are separate arrangements for co-design with migrant residents (see next chapter), the relationship between those needs to be clearly defined from the outset and regularly reviewed.
- ❑ Stakeholders need to be encouraged to think long term, BUT may not be willing or able to make a long-term commitment. They may be encouraged by having arrangements for regular **reviews of membership** and managing turnover.

3. Organisations that are created and steered by migrants themselves

4. A toolbox for co-design with migrant residents

Having addressed how to work with stakeholders representing institutions in the previous chapter, we will now move onto the question of how to co-design with migrants and other interested residents whose needs, experiences and hopes an integration strategy should respond to.

We will present co-design tools that have proven successful in the field of integration and tips on how to engage with migrant residents. In the following section, we will then discuss how to ensure that you involve the full range of migrant residents and pay particular attention to vulnerable groups.

TOOL Forum Theatre (also known as “theatre of the oppressed”)

What is it? A form of theatre that exposes social problems and explores possible solutions in interaction with the audience.

When to use it? It can be a powerful way to feed into a needs analysis to identify key challenges being faced by particular migrant groups.

What does it consist of? The audience is shown a short play in which a central character encounters a form of oppression or obstacle which s/he is unable to overcome. Following the performance, members of the audience can come up on stage and suggest alternative ways in which the protagonist could have acted, creating a kind of theatrical debate.

Advantages: It is a great way to work with socially excluded and disempowered groups, as it provides a meaningful way to express their problems in depth. Its playful format can appeal to people who are not comfortable with reading documents or participating in workshops.

Challenges: Specialist skills are required to oversee the creation of a powerful and meaningful play. Moreover, you should be aware that it might take some time to progress from the forum theatre to specific action proposals for your city strategy.

Example: **Govan & Craigton Integration Network – Forum Theatre Group** in collaboration with The Unfinished Picture Project

The [group](#) was set up in Glasgow in 2011 to devise forum theatre to promote dialogue on the issues that many of the migrant members faced. They did a piece called “The Roundabout” on “the tedious and circular nature of being stuck in an asylum process in which access to services is limited and individuals have little control over their fate”, focusing on a family navigating the bureaucratic process. The play also evoked many wider issues related to being a newcomer, such as questions of “integration” and the role of communities as potentially welcoming or hostile environments, media reporting and giving something back to communities, of sharing skills, strengths and stories.

The Glasgow experience shows how forum theatre can identify needs quite specifically and inform new steps.



TOOL Citizens' Dialogues

What is it? In-depth engagement and dialogue with local residents that helps identify common ground and mutually beneficial solutions to complex problems.

When to use it? For needs analysis and action planning when you are facing complex problems that create divisions among the local population.

What does it consist of? A series of activities (mainly conducted through interviews, focus groups and workshops) to engage in conversation with the population.

Advantages: It has the potential to overcome barriers and prejudice through interaction; it works well in fields likely to be regarded as controversial or where the facts are contested; it ensures a balanced approach to decision-making, allowing all voices to be heard.

Challenges: It is a fairly long process which requires trust building and the creation of safe spaces where people with opposing views are willing to exchange their opinions; it is reliant on the skills of a facilitator or mediator, which can make it expensive.

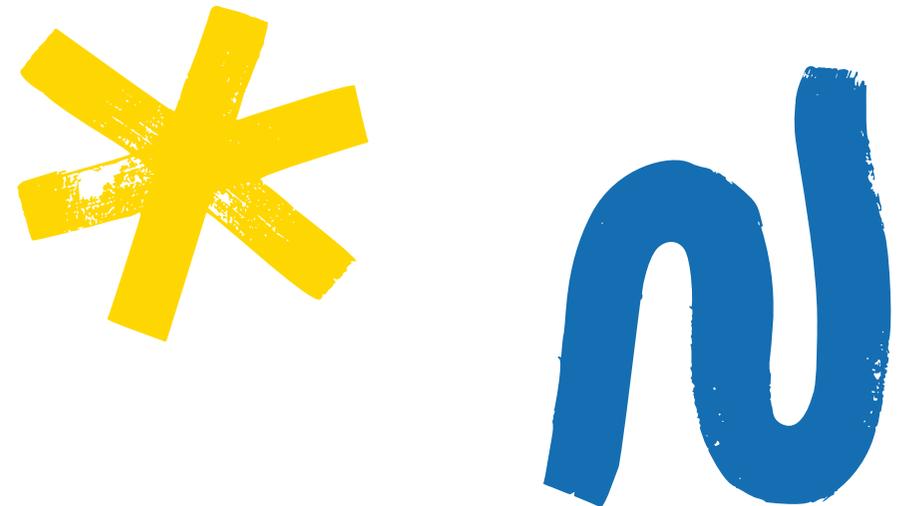
Example: Citizens' dialogues in Mörsil, Sweden

Mörsil, a small village in north Sweden, ran a pilot "citizen dialogue" focused on social integration and how residents want to live alongside one another. The objective was to strengthen collective capacity, increase understanding and interaction between various communities, increase active participation and engagement in the local community, and for the municipality to get a better understanding of the capabilities of Mörsil as a community.

In total, seventy citizens (8% of the population) were interviewed, as well as municipality staff and local politicians. Some were recruited via local community groups, while others were recruited using the language skills of municipal staff to reach out to speakers of Arabic and Somali; in addition, interpreters were used if required. People were interviewed in their homes, workplaces, outside the supermarket, in school, during working hours and in the evening and at weekends.

The answers were collated into seven topics outlined in a "perspective report". Four dialogue meetings/workshops involving citizens (including migrants) and an external facilitator were then organised. Those events advanced three practical citizen-led projects to increase community cohesion. The participants in the citizen dialogues filled in a feedback form after the final meeting. The survey results showed that participants had felt heard, had been able to voice their opinions and had the sense that they had been able to contribute to change.

You can read more about it [here](#) (in Swedish).



TOOL

Community researchers

What is it? Individuals are given training to conduct research in their own community.

When to use it? Great at the needs analysis and evaluation policy stages.

What does it consist of? Training individuals from specific migrant communities to engage in research activities that investigate issues affecting their own communities.

Advantages: Community researchers often have lived experiences, cultural knowledge and social ties, allowing them to connect closely with participants and gather more authentic insights.

Challenges: Providing adequate training to community researchers can be time-consuming and resource-intensive; community researchers may introduce bias due to their personal experiences.

Example: Düsseldorf “Community Connectors”

As part of the EU-funded UNITES project, Düsseldorf set up a pilot group of “community connectors” whose mission is to gather the views, needs and opinions of migrants living in the city with the aim of gaining new insights that can inform policies.

A pilot group of volunteer community connectors were recruited following an open call. They were trained on topics such as political organisation of the city, community outreach and social research methods. The first assignment of the community connectors was to research migrants’ views on the city’s advisory services. In parallel with that, they were encouraged to grow their network and identify more migrant residents who would like to join the group to build bridges, in particular to the city’s most vulnerable migrant residents.

In the longer term, the community connectors will play a role in updating the integration strategy and making the city’s coordination structures more efficient. In doing so, both the city and the new community connectors will have to be careful not to overstretch expectations – the community connectors are unpaid volunteers.

You can hear more about the community connectors in [this video](#).



TOOL

Mystery shoppers

What is it? A way of auditing services with the involvement of trained user volunteers. They pretend to be ordinary service users but provide feedback on their experiences and can therefore be described as “undercover” evaluators.

When to use it? Great at the monitoring and evaluation policy stage, as the compiled results can give you a clearer idea of how service users experience a particular service, such as offices for migration advice.

What does it consist of? A mystery shopping exercise is conducted using migrants who are trained and pose as service users in typical interactions with staff. Participants should be current or potential users of the service in question. They should be adequately prepared for and supported in their “undercover” task and adequately compensated for their time and effort.

Advantages: It is a powerful way of gathering the perspective of the actual beneficiaries/clients of a service.

Challenges: Mystery shoppers need to be well prepared and supported in order to do their job.

Example: Mystery shopping in London, United Kingdom

The provision of quality immigration advice is key to migrants being able to regularise their status and live fulfilled, productive and healthy lives. Toynbee Hall, an organisation working in the East End of London was aware that there was very variable provision of immigration advice and support to people facing poverty or destitution across the borough and wanted to map that to inform a future strategy for improvement.

To find out about experiences of receiving immigration advice across the borough, a team of six community researchers were recruited to help with “mystery shopping”. They were all migrants themselves who were recruited through open advert via a variety of channels – by advertising in local community and not-for-profit groups, as well as through posters and online networks. They were trained on the aim of the evaluation, research ethics and research techniques.

With the help of the lead evaluators, they drew up scenarios where they posed as migrants with genuine immigration issues and arranged preliminary interviews or discussions with immigration advice providers. They found that the immigration advice offered in the East of London was generally difficult to navigate for migrants and that free legal advice had become increasingly rare following cuts to the legal aid programme. Community researchers also found significant variation in the quality of immigration advice, including advisors encouraging clients to pursue hopeless cases, not informing clients about advice options which they could access elsewhere for free, and incorrect advice which could result in catastrophic outcomes for clients if followed. They also uncovered examples of professional ethics being violated. The resulting [report](#) was widely distributed and quoted.



For many co-design methods, **digital tools** such as online surveys, dedicated apps for citizen participation and platforms for virtual workshops may allow for wider participation and generate quicker feedback and lower logistical costs than in-person events. However, the use of digital tools come with challenges related to accessibility, privacy and usability. Not all migrants have equal access to the internet, smartphones or computers (and even when they do, they might need training on how to use such tools effectively). That may exclude those who are already marginalised, reinforcing existing inequalities. There may also be data privacy and security concerns that might limit participation, e.g. for migrants with a precarious status. Digital tools can be used in parallel with non-digital forms of co-design to reap their benefits without excluding anybody.

The methods we have presented here are only a starting point. There are comprehensive co-design toolboxes, such as the one by the UK-based charity [Involve](#), where you can find further inspiration.

Tips on using co-design tools with migrants and other local residents

Co-design processes should be **intentional and action-oriented**. It is important to be clear why you are applying such processes and what results you expect.

- ▣ What are you seeking their input on?
- ▣ Why are you asking them to take part and what is their role?
- ▣ What are the expected outcomes?
- ▣ How will they be kept updated about outcomes and how can they continue to provide input?

City residents should be placed at the centre of the process.

- ▣ Identify those who can provide insight into lived everyday experiences in your policy area.
- ▣ Find out whose voices have not been heard and proactively invite marginalised groups in order to promote access, support engagement and ensure better representation and diversity (more on this in the next chapter).
- ▣ Map out who can offer perspectives that could transform existing paradigms and assumptions.

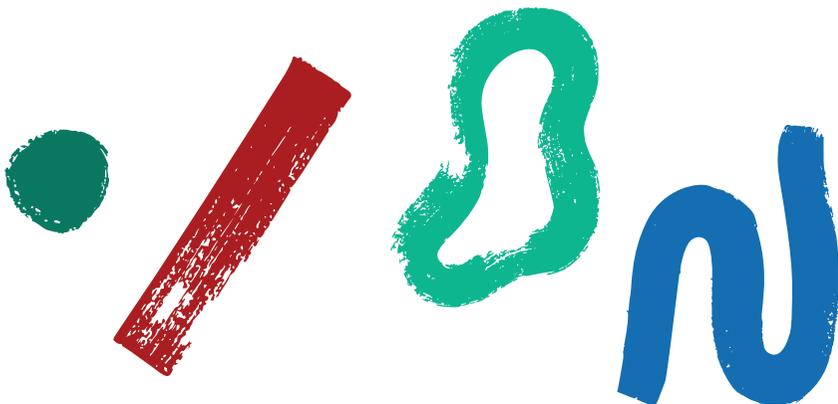


Choose co-design methods that **enable sustained engagement and build relationships and skills**.

- ▣ One-off engagement (like taking part in a survey) is good.
- ▣ Repeated engagement (like being a member of a consultative forum) is better.
- ▣ Sustained long-term engagement is best – it allows for active participation and develops relationships with the city and its communities, as well as across groups.
- ▣ Design participation spaces collaboratively, because that not only ensures maximum accessibility but also changes the power dynamics and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility.
- ▣ Ask the right questions: make them open-ended and think about how you can encourage innovative and unexpected responses. Keep them relevant and respect people's time and commitment.

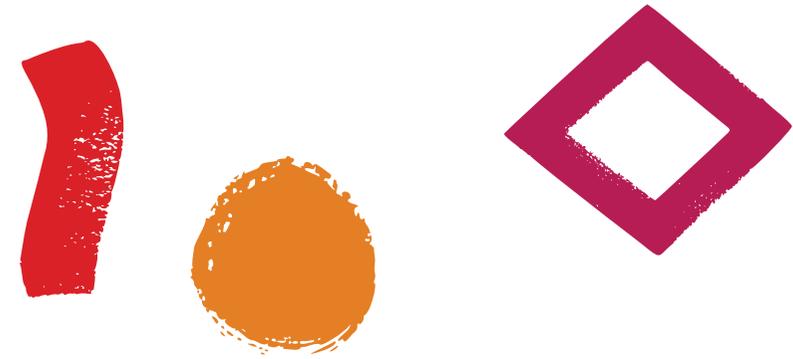
Reach for the stars but know your limitations.

- ▣ Manage the expectations of all partners.
- ▣ Aim for an iterative approach that tries to be reflexive, learning the lessons on each “lap”.
- ▣ Start small, perhaps run a pilot and make sure you absorb feedback so you can incorporate the lessons learnt.



5. Outreach - hearing the unheard voices

In this final section, we will look at how your city can get residents involved who typically do not participate. At first glance, many co-design activities seem to tick that box in that they engage the wider target group they intend to reach, such as migrants or neighbourhood residents. On closer inspection, however, you might notice that some people are missing – because they are too busy focusing on getting by, because they did not get the information in the first place or because their social or cultural background makes them feel uncomfortable about participating in the activities you are running.



How should you approach outreach? Understanding and overcoming barriers to participation

There are a number of reasons why migrants may find it hard to make their voice heard in co-design activities. More often than not several of those reasons come together in one person, i.e. the reasons intersect.

Practical reasons: Arriving in a city and orienting yourself to a completely new culture, system and set of norms takes time. Under such circumstances, a person may not feel like prioritising being part of a co-design consultative group! That is particularly true for those who have only just arrived.

Legal status: Migrants who have not yet resolved their legal status will typically be more cautious in engaging with public authorities out of fear of deportation. They will also be less likely to participate for practical reasons because their access to formal support will be more limited.

Cultural and social biases: Migrants with certain profiles might be easier to engage with than others as they are closer to the dominant culture in your city. They might be more present in public spaces or more familiar with your city's way of consulting with people. City council workers might have biases and stereotypes that prevent them from “seeing” or engaging with certain groups in the first place.

Language barriers: Language barriers and the cost involved in translation of materials and engagement methods can also be a factor. If a city has significant populations of more than 100 nationalities, that can present challenges in terms of engagement.

Gender barriers: Female migrants may struggle to get their voices heard:

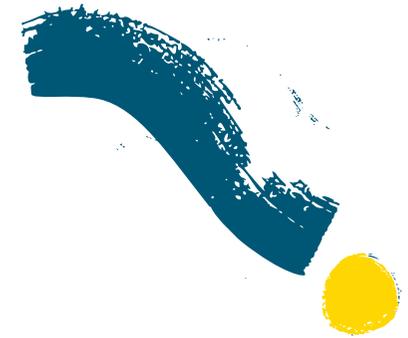
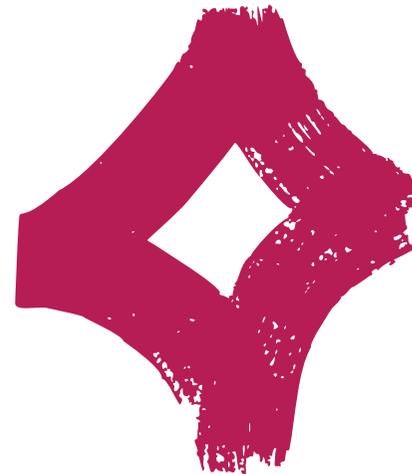
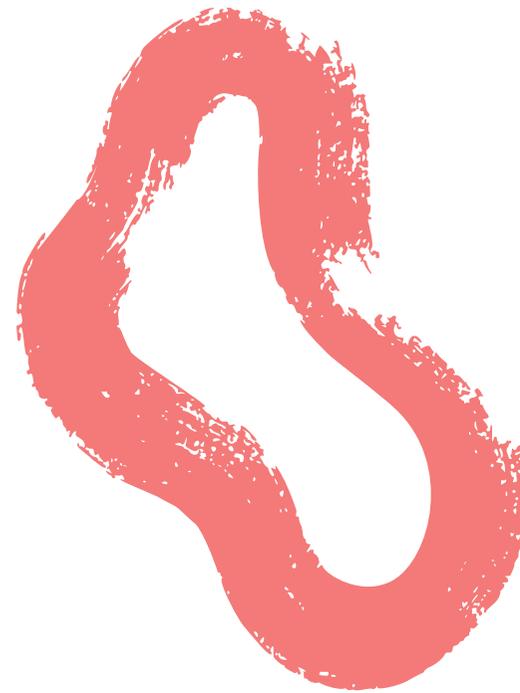
- ▣ They may not be encouraged, or sometimes even allowed, to put forward their views.
- ▣ Community organisations may be dominated by men who do not understand or accept that women may have different and important perspectives.
- ▣ Care duties may slow down integration processes, such as language acquisition and reduce available time to engage. That is true of the whole population, but may hit newcomers harder.
- ▣ Migration trajectories may affect women's capacity to participate – e.g. more frequent experience of trauma, or family reunification processes initiated by men that may lead to women playing a more passive role due to their later arrival.

Sexual orientation: LGBTQI+ migrants may find themselves outside the support networks of those from their own countries or region due to their gender identity. They may have fled because of persecution related to their sexual orientation and therefore have learnt to “keep quiet” as a survival mechanism.

Disability: Migrants with disabilities face the same kinds of challenges as disabled people everywhere, including access issues. They may also, however, not know what their rights are in terms of support for people with disabilities that would allow them to participate or how they can seek help. There may be cultural barriers to understanding and/or identifying some forms of mental health issues and neurodivergence.

Age: Both old and young migrants may find themselves excluded from processes. Older migrants without community ties may not have the language skills or knowledge to help them participate. Younger migrants may find themselves excluded or ignored within community structures or feel that their experiences are different and not taken into consideration.

Take such barriers into account when planning and advertising co-design activities and go beyond the “migrant” vs non-migrant categories to understand how they intersect in people differing as to gender, class, disability, residence status etc. Some of those barriers can be overcome by following the tips below on how to organise co-design events and how to reach people in the first place.



Top tips for outreach to unheard groups from those who have done it

Go to where people are, rather than expecting them to come to you. Finding out where people are and going there is essential. Outreach to places where you are more likely to find women – for example, at the school gate – can yield much better results than setting up a meeting in the Town Hall. Health and education services are often helpful intersection points for many citizens, including migrants. The same is true of community and neighbourhood spaces, where migrants may be engaged at the local level.

Use a simple and clear communication style. Avoid jargon and be consistent and transparent in the way you communicate. Explain in plain language what the process is all about and what is in it for the participants.

Use different ways to reach people. Not all people enjoy talking and discussing with others. Sometimes they may want to give their view remotely, or to a single interviewer, or in writing, maybe anonymously. If you engage with people in a range of ways, you will also be able to tap into a broader variety of voices.

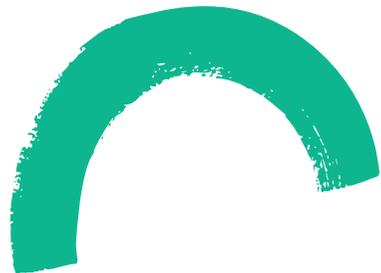
Get trusted ambassadors on your side. Getting social centres and voluntary and community groups involved in gathering information, and potentially also recruiting community researchers, can provide you with their “stamp of approval”. As trusted bodies, they can then encourage others to engage.

Use social media intelligently. Rather than assuming that everybody is going to be checking the municipality’s social media account, find out what social media different migrant groups use and check regularly as to how those can be best used to “spread the word” and encourage people to give their view.



Think about the right space and time: Collaboratively design participation spaces that are inviting and accommodating for marginalised groups. Watch [this video by Razan Ismail from New Women Connectors](#), which gives some top tips on how spaces can undermine open dialogue and how you can counteract that.

Allow people to bring their children or provide childcare. If you encourage people to bring their children, make sure to have facilities, food and distractions for them. If you provide childcare, make sure it is culturally appropriate, that carers speak relevant languages and that parents are aware of that. Do not assume that childcare is only needed for women. Consider whether providing childcare may also be another opportunity to hear different voices: theirs! Children can be asked sensitively about their priorities, concerns and dreams for life in the city and can respond, draw their ideas or tell a story about them.



Real life examples of outreach

The following examples show how two UNITES partners managed to hear the voices of people they had not managed to involve previously.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE

Zaragoza: analysis of unmet needs from the migrant perspective

As part of the Eurocities UNITES project, the Spanish city of Zaragoza invited migrants to speak about things that should be improved in the new edition of the city's Intercultural Plan. In previous plans, the integration team held workshops with stakeholders from NGOs and other city departments. This time it wanted to hear from migrants directly and invited both newcomers and established migrant residents of various nationalities to a workshop that introduced the integration strategy. The team then had migrants speak about their views on areas in which the city could do a better job. The event was held in a "world-café" format.

The participants were reached through the city's cultural and service hub "Casa de las Culturas" (House of Cultures). They therefore included people being assisted with their family reunification procedure, for instance. The workshop was held in a friendly space and participants could come with their children. City council workers were present in each world-café circle and took notes about the things that still need improvement in Zaragoza.

Hear more about Zaragoza's experiences in [this video](#).

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE

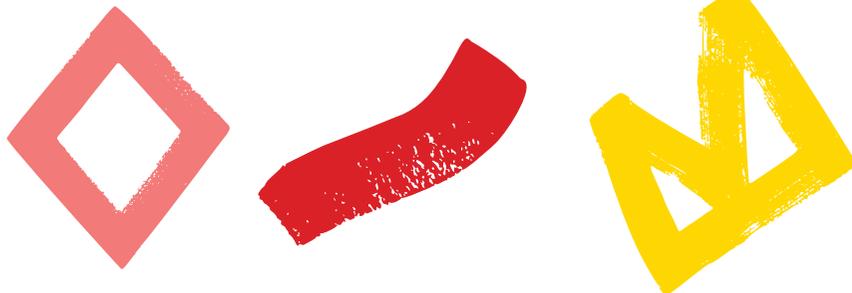
Oulu - Ukrainian Community survey

More than 500 Ukrainian war refugees arrived in the Finnish city of Oulu and 1,500 in the region, the largest number of migrants that the city and surrounding area had ever received. Like many other cities in Europe, the city needed to find ways to adapt its current support to that new experience. Once immediate needs had been addressed, the key question was how to adapt the city's integration services to the Ukrainians' specific situation and status.

The state offered municipalities the possibility to take over support for Ukrainians if they registered with the local integration services. However, many Ukrainians had not done so as they had not understood what the city could offer and feared they would lose support. The city of Oulu decided to strengthen its ties with Ukrainian refugees and understand their situation, aspirations and needs better. It hired a Ukrainian outreach worker to gather information from the community through a survey (on paper and online) and focus groups, using the UNITES project resources. The outreach worker met Ukrainians in a variety of places, such as a help centre, the Ukrainian choir, hobby fairs, the city's multicultural centre, through a Facebook group and at the city's employment and integration services.

More than 100 people responded to the survey. The city learned that 60% of them wanted to stay in Oulu, but many lacked correct information about what registering with the city would imply for them and thought they would lose support. The survey also showed that isolation and lack of opportunities for interaction were a major problem. In addition, Finnish language skills were a major barrier given that two-thirds lacked them. The information gathered will be discussed with integration practitioners and fed into the new city integration strategy with the intention of adapting it to that new target group.

Hear more about Oulu's work with the Ukrainian community [here](#).



Resources for further reading

The UNITES Benchmark for co-designing local integration strategies

This benchmark is offered as a guide to assessing local co-design practices for integration strategies, to help identify good practices and to consider further possibilities. Most cities will not have all factors present, and some factors may not be relevant to specific cities. However, this benchmark is meant to help you identify areas for improvement.

	Key Factors	Explanation
1	The city provides its political leadership to use of co-design in the city's migrant integration strategy.	<p>The city's political leadership (mayor, city council)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ has set out a positive, explicit vision of migration into the city■ makes a commitment to strive for integration and deliver the relevant integration strategy■ places migrant integration in a wider equality framework■ communicates clearly to all citizens and stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none">· the purpose of co-design processes in realising the city's vision of migration· outcomes of work to co-design and implement the strategy, through each of its stages.
2	The city has established a wider culture of participation, so that participatory methods and co-design are already standard practice.	<p>There is evidence of a previous commitment to co-design in the city and implementation of the relevant practices in other policy areas. Across the city authority and its service areas or user groups, beyond migrant integration, such methods are regularly applied to guide changes in service provision – with clear guidelines and support to ensure that they are inclusive.</p>

<p>3 This city initiative matches the definition of a migrant integration strategy.</p>	<p>The city has a full strategy for migrant integration in place that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ spans all or most service/functional areas relevant to migrants' lives □ specifies goals, with concrete actions to address each of them □ specifies the timeframe or term for implementing these measures in a specific sequence □ includes a budget for their implementation, identified (provisionally at least) by each stakeholder responsible for delivering those measures.
<p>4 The city provides channels through which migrants can help to shape its policies on integration issues, including the city's integration strategy, across all its stages of realisation. It ensures that they are representative and long-term.</p>	<p>Together with the city authority, migrant residents co-design the city's approach to integration - in particular its integration strategy - through structures or procedures that enable them to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ voice their needs, their potential contribution and what should change; □ work with the authority and other stakeholders to identify solutions, that is to create the strategy; □ take an oversight role through the rest of the policy cycle: monitoring delivery, testing impact and making a final assessment of the strategy. <p>A permanent, elected migrant assembly is one way of achieving this. Other options include surveys of migrant opinion; panels of migrant experts, and community researchers. Whichever method is chosen, the city aims to ensure that it is representative of the wider migrant population, so far as possible (taking into account KF 7 below on diversity) and long-term, lasting at least for the period of the integration strategy.</p> <p>The city offers migrants who take on such roles a specific package of support including training; administrative support; access to data; and financial remuneration.</p>
<p>5 Stakeholder engagement is consolidated and coordinated through a long-term structure.</p>	<p>A stakeholder steering body is set up by the city authority, chaired by Mayor or deputy, which will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ be set up to last for the period of the strategy, at least (and if possible permanently); □ has a clear mandate to oversee the implementation of the strategy; □ include all 'delivery' stakeholders - agencies with a role in implementing strategy actions, including other tiers of government where required – who will sign off the strategy within this steering body and coordinate their actions through it; □ include a strong migrant voice

-
- 6 **In seeking migrant participation in work on the integration strategy, the city ensures that this will cover the full diversity of migrant residents with their differing experiences and capacities, including vulnerable groups.**
- The city takes steps to enable its migrant population in all its diversity to participate meaningfully in this work, including those who might find it hardest to engage in co-design processes. This inclusive scope is achieved
- across **equalities categories**: different ethnic and national identities, gender identities, age groups, social background, legal status (including those with precarious status);
 - by focused outreach to **vulnerable groups** including women and children/unaccompanied young people;
 - by widely **promoting** the co-design process via social media and community organisations
 - by creating a **framework** to promote diversity and inclusion, offering for example:
 - training and technical support for migrant participants where possible, strengthening their contribution to co-design
 - adapting participation events to family needs: eg. timing and location, childcare
 - where feasible, payment for attending events
 - attendance at all such events by city representatives, as senior as possible
 - guidelines on conduct of participatory meetings for all user groups, published by the Mayor, to ensure all such events observe equalities principles and fair decision-making.
-
- 7 **The place of co-design work on migrant integration within the mainstream of city policy is confirmed by linking its participants with residents engaged in co-design for other strategic areas.**
- The city authority actively promotes and facilitates exchange between migrants involved as ‘co-designers’ on the integration strategy, and residents participating in the development of strategies in other service or functional areas of city life – for example strategies for older residents, for youth employment, gender equality, or ‘greening the city’.
- Where such exchange is feasible, the authority tells the public at large about it, recognising that it
- may reveal read-across or synergy between these different areas
 - helps to confirm to public opinion that work on migrant integration though co-design belongs in the mainstream of the city’s policy development.

Practical Guidance

Eurocities [How-to-Guide on Integration Strategies](#)

Developed as part of the EU-funded [Connection project](#), this publication provides comprehensive guidance for practitioners on setting up and developing a local integration strategy.

Eurocities [toolkit on engagement of migrant communities](#)

This toolkit from the [ImpleMentoring project](#) covers the engagement of migrant communities in local policymaking at a range of levels. In addition to this, there are other toolkits across several subject areas and there is useful material in most of them. They are stored on the Integrating Cities website at <https://integratingcities.eu/documents/> – do take a look!

SHARE network [10 principles of migrant and refugee participation](#)

The SHARE network supports regions, cities, towns and rural communities interested in welcoming refugees and migrants.

The **MILE project** (“Migrant Integration through Locally Designed Experiences”), co-funded by the European Migration and Asylum Fund, has published a series of [policy briefs](#) that provide guidance, resources and good practices for increasing migrant participation.

[Involve Resource Site](#)

Involve is a UK-based charity with a focus on public participation. Its website hosts a resource site and a methods toolkit on co-creation and participatory methods.

Key political agreements

[EU Action plan on Integration and Inclusion](#)

This action plan covers the period 2021-27 and outlines objectives and actions to be taken at EU, national, regional and local level to promote the integration of migrants. It argues that the participation of migrants in consultative and decision-making processes is key to ensuring that policies work. It:

- recommends member states involve migrants and migrant organisations in the design, implementation and evaluation of all integration and inclusion policies and programmes
- promotes multi-stakeholder cooperation for integration that involves migrants, refugees and host communities, especially at local level
- commits EU financing for measures that train national, regional and local authorities to involve migrants and migrant organisations in decision-making processes.

A Eurocities briefing on the action plan can be found [here](#).

[The Global Compact on Refugees](#)

The Global Compact on Refugees is the most important international agreement to shape a common response to forced migration. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018 as a “framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing” at international level, and provides a blueprint for governments, international organisations and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities get the support they need and that refugees can lead productive lives.

Principle 34 of the Compact promotes a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach, arguing that “responses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist. Relevant actors will, wherever possible, continue to develop and support consultative processes that enable refugees and host community members to assist in designing appropriate, accessible and inclusive responses.”

Examples of Training Resources for Migrants

There are an increasing number of training and mentorship programmes for refugees and other migrant groups that NGOs, governments and foundations have set up with the aim of increasing their role in the design of public policies. Here are a few examples:

Since 2021, the **French** government’s “[Académie pour la participation des personnes réfugiées](#)” promotes the involvement of refugees in decision-making processes. Each year, ten refugees are trained for a year and later participate in public management bodies, working groups and other decision-making structures.

The Immigrant Council of **Ireland** has set up a [Migrant and Refugee Leaders Network](#) that includes a peer support platform and Leadership Academy training for migrant and refugee leaders.

The [VOICES network](#) is a collective within the **British Red Cross** of refugees and people seeking asylum. VOICES Ambassadors are trained to share insights into what it is like to seek asylum in the UK and to influence policies from the perspective of experts by experience.



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