



UIA second Call for Proposals:

Policy trends from the proposals under the topic of integration of migrants and refugees



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Policy challenges

The arrival of large numbers of refugees in several parts of Europe has continued to be a key driver behind many of the proposals presented under the 2017 UIA call. What has distinguished this round from that of 2016 is that more proposals have been about defining next steps in order to move from emergency measures of refugee reception to setting out more sustainable solutions and approaches. For instance, several Italian cities have proposed measures that go beyond the temporary emergency housing funded by the Italian government's Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, by drawing on public housing and private rental. Others have thought about how to relieve the social isolation of refugees by organising cultural encounters or by working together with members of the host societies. In addition, many have considered how to get refugees into the labour market.

Many of the proposals explicitly address the deficits of national integration curricula and national policies more broadly: their negative "body language" and lack of commitment to welcoming refugees, their "one-size-fits-all" approach and lack of personalized support; or their bureaucratic setup, which leaves refugees waiting for a considerable time before they are even allowed to engage with their new societies. Projects have sought to get refugees "out of the limbo" and starting "integration from day one" or have looked to offer intense support to harness refugees' capacities and experience.

The main trend: work

In line with the desire to support immigrants and refugees as they take the "next steps" towards integration, around 75% of the proposals have been - at least partly - about getting immigrants and refugees into work. Behind this trend is the insight that in the current institutional setup it takes refugees quite a long time to enter the labour market and to become self-sufficient, even in the most comprehensive welfare states. But work is not only crucial for refugees; many cities see older generations of migrants, and even their children, struggling to acquire positions on the labour market that are comparable to that of natives.

Some cities have responded to this challenge with proposals that promote more personalized approaches to recognizing qualifications and providing training. Others have suggested setting up social enterprises and cooperatives to provide hands-on training while serving the community. Given the target group's sizable distance to the labour market, stepping-stones towards remunerated work have been proposed in the form of volunteering activities that often bring refugees and immigrants in contact with their native peers, and thereby foster active citizenship.

In a number of proposals local economic cluster strategies serve as a background for work-related activities: they have included reinvigorating traditional crafts, modernizing the agricultural or food-processing sector or setting up new clusters in the service economy that blend with professional training for immigrants and refugees. Training and employment-related activities also often link with the regeneration and "rebranding" of diverse neighbourhoods. Rather than being conceived as "immigrant-only" activities, many of the work-related proposals aim to mix immigrants with natives to build on the integrative capacity of the workplace.

Innovation in immigrant and refugee integration

Coming up with a clear example of innovation in the context of immigrant and refugee integration is a far from obvious task. What probably makes it particularly difficult to think about innovation in this area is the fact that integration policies tend to cut across many policy fields, such as education, employment or housing, each of which has its own institutional and innovation trajectories. Integrated

approaches in the form of one-stop shops or integrated strategies in themselves are not innovative - city councils have been doing this for decades now. At the same time, truly cross-sectoral approaches that re-combine sectoral policies in an original, evolutionary way, based on a thorough understanding of the needs of immigrants and refugees, are still a challenge for many cities, and can thereby add value to immigrant integration policies. Among the 2017 proposals, a handful convinced the evaluators that they really represented such an innovative approach to integration.

Other types of innovative project submitted in the 2017 round were driven by the ambition to empower refugees and immigrants to become protagonists in their new society instead of being mere welfare receivers. Such projects provide e.g. work opportunities for refugees in projects that address social needs of society at large. They typically break down immigrant policy silos and have a strong integrative potential, bringing together newcomers with established residents as actors within the project, and by making newcomers help solve wider social problems.

The technical quality of the proposals and the role of Urban Innovative Actions as a trigger for policy innovation

The overall quality of the proposals submitted under the topic of “integration of refugees and immigrants” was solid, although few managed to convince the referees that they were highly innovative. Some projects remained vague about the concrete challenges they addressed, and consequently struggled to explain the substance of their core solution and its impact. The external experts also felt that more often than not an innovative idea was watered down by too many additional components whose innovativeness and impact was not properly explained.

The 2017 round demonstrated a learning effect in that most of the cities that had already presented an immigration/refugee proposal in the 2016 UIA-round improved their proposals.

A striking feature of this second round of immigrant and refugee integration was that many proposals referred to the projects that had been selected in the first round. Some benchmarked themselves against these successful proposals, and others even proposed cooperation in the form of new cross-project UIA-initiatives. This suggests that over and above the funding of individual projects, the UIA can be a source of inspiration for cities and create policy impact