How to support the social inclusion of migrants and asylum seekers

Economic migrants have become one of the cornerstones of today’s rural economies. Some come from within the EU itself, some are legal migrants from third countries, others are undocumented migrants. Their rights and conditions vary according to their status, but in many of the main European centres of agricultural production, they have become essential for filling the hardest, worst paid and most precarious jobs in farming and other sectors.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last year, economic migrants have been joined by over one million asylum seekers from the war torn countries around Europe. Their rights and prospects are again different as they are usually not allowed to work until their request for asylum has been granted. Both the time this takes and the chances of success vary considerable across Europe. While they wait, large numbers of people are being housed in refugee centres in rural areas across Europe. In some Swedish villages the arrival of asylum seekers has not only reversed a long term trend of rural population decline but has outnumbered the resident population (see image below).

The presence of both types of “newcomers” to rural areas – the economic migrants and the asylum seekers – presents major challenges and opportunities for rural areas.

The challenges of migration in rural areas

The biggest risk is the creation of rural ghettos which, together with insensitively designed policies, can provoke a backlash among the resident population. But the opportunities are equally large – to harness the economic energy and skills of the newcomers, to breathed new life into local schools and services, and to cross fertilise and enrich local culture.

Economic migrants and asylum seekers differ enormously in their needs, skills, aspirations and cultural back grounds.

The first challenge is to create safe spaces and opportunities for exchange, mutual understanding and trust. This is essential for encouraging a welcoming attitude among the local population.

A second challenge is to break down certain gaps and barriers such as information about legal rights, language training and the recognition of skills and qualifications.

Thirdly, the possibility of earning an independent living is vital for integration. There are many good examples of projects providing personalised training, mentoring and placement pathways. These can be quite effective as migrants are often the most enterprising and motivated members of their own communities.

Finally, depending on their particular circumstances, migrants can be excluded from a complex range of necessities such as housing, health care, education, social services and so on. Personalised and joined up approaches to these multiple causes of deprivation are essential.

On 1 January 2014, the number of people living in the EU-28 who were citizens of non-member countries was 19.6 million while the number of people living in the EU-28 who had been born outside of the EU was 33.5 million.

Eurostat
The contribution of LEADER to social inclusion of migrants and asylum seekers

A variety of LEADER projects have supported the social inclusion of ‘newcomers’ through activities that range from socio-cultural integration to initiatives with a longer-term perspective seeking to integrate them into the labour market.

✔ Intercultural activities to promote integration

The first step towards social inclusion of immigrants is their integration in the host society and culture. There are two issues associated with this: a) their difficulty to understand and operate within a socio-cultural context that is often vastly different from their own; b) the resilience of the host population in EU countries to accept and welcome them.

There is evidence of several LEADER projects that give emphasis to this by promoting activities which aim at a mutual acceptance and understanding of different cultures. LEADER aims to help newcomers integrate in the rural EU society often very different from their country of origin.

An innovative project is found in Finland where an ‘integration coordinator’ acts as an interface between immigrants and the local community.

LEADER has also supported a variety of cultural activities which prove to be effective in bringing together newcomers and the local population. They include sports and cultural activities and the set-up of leisure spaces where all cultures can meet, exchange and integrate.

The ‘integration coordinator’ in Punkalaidun (Finland)

The municipality of Punkalaidun in Southwest Finland hired an integration coordinator who started solving everyday problems of the newcomers, help them access the municipal and other public services such as schools, jobs and health care. Furthermore, the integration coordinator put the immigrants in contact with local residents through sport clubs, village development associations, church, businesses and other public, private and third sector operators. A variety of activities were organised to contribute to the integration of immigrants: picking up blueberries, playing football, agricultural work, dancing and other hobbies.

Meeting-place among the baking trays (Sweden)

The goal of the project Bröd i Bergslagen (Bread in Bergslagen) is to create new meeting-places for Swedes and people who were born abroad. Baking together in old, wood-heated ovens has turned out to be an excellent way to interact. The activities include transferring knowledge about how to restore and maintain old ovens; baking together; holding courses on baking special kinds of bread. The bread is sold at local food markets and fairs.

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Total monthly asylum applications in the EEA (2009–September 2015)


Integrating refugees in Bad Berleburg (Germany)

The LEADER project sets up a central accommodation facility for refugees in the region (Bad Berleburg). Since 2014 around 5,000 people were housed. The actions carried out for refugees and other marginalised groups include round tables, international and youth cafes and an ‘integration bus’. With this new project, the city wants to strengthen the welcome culture, establish efficient coordination, help the administration and use the potential of the refugees.

Integration support for asylum seekers in selected EU countries in 2015 or latest available year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support measures</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language training</td>
<td>EL*, DK, EE, FI, DE, IT, LU, PL, SI, ES, NLI*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education combined with long-term language training</td>
<td>BE, EL, IT, LU, PT, ES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills assessment</td>
<td>BE, FI*** (just planned), DE, PT, ES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic education</td>
<td>AT**** (in Vienna only), BE, DK, PT, ES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job-related training</td>
<td>EE***** EL*, PT, ES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not systematic; ** Provided by volunteers only; *** Just planned; **** in Vienna only; ***** After 6 months access to regular labour market services. Source: OECD, 2016, http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/klara-foti---eurofound-project-on-refugee-crisis.pdf
✓ **Pathways to employment**

Social inclusion is more effective when immigrants are able to access employment, (including self-employment). There are several factors that help accelerate economic integration, including higher levels of human capital (language ability, education and work experience), ethnic ties and solidarity (e.g. having relatives in the host country) and access to active labour market measures for immigrants.

Family reunification is a common phenomenon and immigrants tend to arrive where they have links (family, relatives, friends). Although such ethnic ties may facilitate integration through the so-called ‘bonding capital’, there is also a danger that they remain enclosed to their small community, thus limiting the development of the necessary ‘bridging capital’ which is a condition that facilitates economic integration.

LEADER builds on these challenges by contributing to enhance the levels of human capital through language learning and skills development (e.g. the RIKK project, the Växjö education initiative) as well as through more active labour market support including guidance and coaching on self-employment and business start-up, with a view to facilitate the economic integration of immigrants (GrowBiz project, Borlänge farm links project).

**Development of inter-cultural skills (the RIKK project) in Austria**

The project aims at fostering intercultural learning in nurseries, schools and in the business sector in some Upper Austrian Leader regions. Intercultural skills are developed to improve the interaction of people with different backgrounds in the interest of the local population. RIKK provides a platform for networking and initiates concrete working groups and support projects in different fields.

The Växjö education initiative in Sweden

A local economic association introduced a training programme with the aim to improve the skills through offering training in fields linked to labour market needs. A seven-month support programme for newcomers combined training in agriculture, forestry, livestock management, gardening and Swedish language studies. These topics were driven by the demand for labour in the countryside which was mainly for animal keepers and clearance work in forests. LEADER has therefore made possible the provision of education to newcomers, linked to labour market needs, as a pathway towards their labour market and social inclusion.

**GrowBiz Leader project in Scotland, UK**

The project provides community-based enterprise support in rural Perthshire in Scotland. It has a number of clients from a variety of Eastern European and other countries who have come to the area initially for agricultural work. GrowBiz works with a local project, the Minority Communities Hub, to offer guidance on self-employment and business start-up and a range of enterprise coaching, advice, mentoring and peer group activity to any immigrants or refugees who are interested in enterprise. This has resulted in several successful businesses run locally by ‘new Scots’.

**The Borlänge farm links project in Sweden**

The project is based on linking skills with labour market needs in the agricultural sector. It addressed newcomers (immigrants and refugees) from Somalia, Iraq, Kosovo, Chechnya and Azerbaijan. Close cooperation with farmers was necessary in order to identify their needs and motivate them to hire newcomers. To achieve this, the project involved the Swedish Public Employment Service (PES) and the Federation of Swedish farmers.

**Points for further reflection**

- How to build bridges and promote a welcoming culture among the local population? How to encourage local actors to engage in integration?
- How to correctly identify the key gaps and needs of different migrant communities?
- How to ensure Leader strategies and projects can respond to the evolving needs of newcomers with sufficient flexibility?
- What can LAGs do by themselves and how can they work in a more joined up way with other agencies and funds?