

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are grateful to the U.S. Mission to the European Union for invaluable input and for funding the project, and to the conference co-organisers—the Canadian Mission to the European Union and the European Economic and Social Committee—for their creative ideas and logistical organisation.

The authors would also like to thank Migration Policy Institute (MPI) colleagues Meghan Benton, Michelle Mittelstadt, and Lena Kainz for their helpful comments and feedback, and Jae June Lee for his research assistance and organisation throughout the process.

And they thank the European Economic and Social Committee for the conference photos used throughout this report.

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Suggested citation: Patuzzi, Liam and Alexandra Embiricos. 2018. *Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion Conference Report: Maintaining momentum and creating lasting change*. Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe.

INTRODUCTION

The conference 'Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion: Maintaining Momentum and Creating Lasting Change' took place in Brussels on 16 and 17 November 2017, and this conference report summarises the key discussions and findings. During the two-day event, which followed up on the 'Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion' seminar that occurred in September 2016, more than 30 speakers and 200 participants from all over Europe, the United States, and Canada came together to discuss how social innovation, driven by pioneering initiatives, may serve to foster the inclusion of refugees in host countries' social communities and labour markets. While integration of refugees and migrants has traditionally been under the purview of governments and nongovernmental organisations, non-traditional actors—from tech start-ups to social enterprises and refugee entrepreneurs—have been building models that ultimately aim to be sustainable and scalable. Two years on from the surge in migrant and asylum seeker arrivals of 2015-16, initiatives working to support refugee reception and inclusion are now striving to mature beyond pockets of good practice to contribute to large-scale change. This conference brought together public officials, business leaders, service designers, social entrepreneurs, civil-society organisations, academics, and refugee entrepreneurs to consider how to speed this structural change and ultimately support the social and economic inclusion of refugees.

The conference was organised by the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI Europe) in cooperation with the U.S. Mission to the European Union, the Canadian Mission to the European Union, and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). It was funded by the U.S. Mission to the European Union.



In three plenary sessions, speakers and participants reflected on the progress made in the field of social innovation for refugee inclusion and explored the dilemmas and opportunities that growing social initiatives encounter include

navigating bureaucracy and public funding systems to begin operating at scale, becoming financially self-sustainable, and addressing social challenges that are still underexplored, such as how to measure the successful social, as well as economic, integration of refugees. Participants discussed the challenges they face as they seek to scale up best practices and bring them from niche to mainstream. The workshop sessions explored a range of issues of great topical value to refugee inclusion, but that are often underexplored: new approaches to financing social innovation, welcoming refugees into small and rural communities, improving the visibility of refugees' skills, engaging employers in the training and hiring of refugees, and fostering refugee entrepreneurship as a channel to social and economic integration. In all these domains there is tremendous experimentation in how new solutions and partnerships can solve long-standing challenges.

This report provides an overview of the conference sessions, highlights the main threads of discussion, and summarises the central messages and key takeaways.



Conference Multimedia Tools

Podcasts of the conference proceedings and Powerpoint presentations can be accessed online at:

www.migrationpolicy.org/si4ri

Links to the appropriate podcasts according to each session are provided throughout this report.

DAY 1, 16 NOVEMBER 2017

Welcoming remarks

At the start of the conference, the participants were welcomed by high-level representatives of the organising institutions. **Adam Shub**, Chargé d’Affaires of the U.S. Mission to the European Union, stressed that work means more to refugees than just receiving a pay cheque, as it is a central condition for self-reliance and social inclusion. **Daniel Costello**, Ambassador of Canada to the European Union, reminded the audience of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s statement that diversity is a fact while inclusion is a choice, and one that requires ideas, resources, and commitment. **Elizabeth Collett**, Founding Director of MPI Europe, argued that social innovation, if adequately supported, can become a tool for systemic change and stressed that it is important to identify sustainable funding models able to adapt to changing—and possibly constraining—political environments. **Cristian Pirvulescu**, President of the Permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration of the EESC, highlighted refugee inclusion as one of the major global issues of our time and offered insight into his institution’s manifold activities in this field.

Listen to the podcast:

<http://migrationpolicy.podbean.com/e/welcoming-remarks-opening-speech-panel-session-how-the-field-has-matured-a-progress-report-one-year-on/>

Opening speech: From Syria with Love

Yara Al Adib, entrepreneur and founder of ‘From Syria with Love’, addressed the plenary room with personal insights into her family’s journey from Damascus to Europe, recounting how she took the leap to becoming the founder of a popular Belgian catering service that employs and empowers newly arrived Syrian refugee women. Starting out with a food stand in one of

Antwerp’s street markets, ‘From Syria with Love’ has grown into a multifaceted catering enterprise, delivering delicacies to weddings and events and offering cooking workshops. Most importantly, this initiative activates the skills of a group—middle-aged mothers and housewives—who often struggle to enter the labour market, providing them dignity, a sense of purpose, and numerous opportunities to interact with the host society. For Al Adib, this initiative is about more than just making a living: it is a way of tapping the entrepreneurial potential of Syrians settling into their new homes and promoting mutual understanding and refugees’ inclusion into European society, while expressing solidarity with the homes they were forced to flee. ‘At least now, we are remembering Syria in a positive way’, she said.



First Plenary Session: A progress report, one year on

The first plenary session, chaired by **Tamim Nashed**, Policy Officer on Refugee Inclusion at the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), provided a chance to reflect on the developments and achievements in the field of social innovation for refugee inclusion that have occurred since last year's seminar.

Eric Young, founder of the Social Projects Studio, argued that to achieve real innovation we must begin with an awareness that disruptive social change is truly possible: it is proved by history. For it to arise, however, certain preconditions need to be fulfilled. On the one hand, we need to expand our understanding of innovation from the material to the social, as something that builds bonds between individuals and communities. Looking at refugee inclusion through a social capital lens, Young highlighted that, while the benefits of diversity in the long run are tremendous, we should not ignore that there can be short-term costs to social cohesion—and addressing these is precisely where innovation is required. Ambition and a clear definition of purpose are key: Young encouraged the social sector not to shy away from 'moonshot innovation', which entails high risks but also great potential for disruptive change and new value creation. 'Systemic change is not simply a matter of scaling innovation up from the grassroots level': the goal must be a paradigmatic change in the quality of what we are doing, rather than a gradual change in the details. The private sector's approach to innovation—that is, looking at the bigger picture and investing heavily in research and development (R&D)—can offer inspiration for ways to tackle complex problems and create social value. Finally, Eric highlighted the salience of social capital to facilitate the smooth inclusion of newcomers into society. It is not so much a challenge as an opportunity, he said, to 'make the 21st century a time when diversity thrives'.



Dr. Jan Schröder @JanWSchroeder · 16 nov. ✓

EricYoung: systemic change is more than 'just' scaling up grassroots projects. #socinn needs investment in high purpose & need capacity to work on complexity. Need investment in R&D. #si4ri

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Mireia Nadal Chiva, head of community development at the ReDI School for Digital Integration, engaged the audience in thinking about how progress is defined in social innovation for refugee inclusion and what benchmarks can be used to measure it. Young initiatives often move in uncharted territory and do not always have full clarity regarding their purpose and overall goals. Lacking the capacity and experience to develop in-depth data collection and evaluation tools, they often struggle to measure their own impact, particularly at times of rapid growth. In discussing the work of ReDI she also highlighted the synergies between integration and co-creation (working not just *for* refugees, but *with* refugees). As Nadal Chiva showed a photo of Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Dr. Priscilla Chan, speaking to two ReDI students, she said, 'We see a billionaire talking to a refugee, but we could also see two nerds with a shared interest and a passion in tech'. She highlighted ReDI's potential to become a platform where these kinds of conversations and shifts in narrative happen routinely. Nadal Chiva listed three factors of success for social innovations: First, being smarter at using data to scale up what works and improve what does not. Second, improving collaboration between organisations working on similar goals, to share best practices and foster mutual growth. Finally, using a business model that supports long-term sustainability while staying true to the initiative's original mission and objectives.

Luisa Seiler, co-founder and Director of SINGA Deutschland, reiterated the value of co-creation in generating social capital for inclusion, drawing from her organisation's work connecting newcomers and locals to design new projects together. Seiler expressed optimism that grassroots projects can drive profound innovation: they often have more freedom to experiment, take risks, and generate smart approaches to known challenges. Scaling successful models can happen in different ways: some organisations have the resources to scale on their own; others may join forces with a larger partner that allows them to widen their reach. Another promising approach is the creation of smart networks with a non-hierarchical structure, a clearly defined impact goal, and an efficient distribution of tasks and responsibilities between partners. But for small-scale successes to be replicated, it is essential to promote a fruitful dialogue and common ground between grassroots workers and policymakers. The project 'Comme à la maison' in France, in which local families open their homes to newcomers for 3–12 months, has proven successful in bringing together old and new community members and strengthening mutual understanding. While the initiative began as a small pilot with 50 families in 2015, over 12,000 people in France have since signed up to provide housing to refugees in need, prompting the French Ministry of Housing to acknowledge the project's success not only in the realm of facilitating social integration, but also in saving the French state roughly 100 million euros annually.

Second Plenary Session: Business, not as usual

The second plenary session, chaired by **Irini Pari** from the EESC, focused on the role of the private sector in refugee inclusion.

Pastora Valero, Vice President of Government Affairs at Cisco, used examples from the realm of education and health care to reflect on the added value the private sector can bring in terms of innovation, leveraging the power of technology, in-house know-how, transnational networks, and employee engagement. Recognising that innovation cannot simply be dictated top-down, Cisco has partnered with a number of nongovernmental organisations and companies at the local level and has supported its employees in realising their own projects to support refugees. One example is the Networking Academy, which provides 35,000 refugees with personalised curricula, focusing on information technology (IT) skills. Another example, the Refugee Response Centre, initiated by a Cisco employee and partners in the port of Hamburg, employs technology to translate medical problems for doctors who are treating refugees. A total of ten shipping containers were transformed into health-care stations equipped with WiFi and videoconferencing tools. With the push of a button, refugee patients were given access to real-time translators in 50 different languages. Approximately 20,000 patients have received treatment in such containers to date, with plans of exporting this model to other regions of the world by drawing on a community of donors working in partnership with private businesses.

Listen to the podcast:

<http://migrationpolicy.podbean.com/e/conference-social-innovation-for-refugee-inclusion-panel-ii-business-not-as-usual-private-sector-innovation-for-refugee-inclusion/>

Justina Spencer, Manager of Global Corporate Responsibility, Deloitte, argued for the need to sync bottom-up and top-down approaches in more effective ways. She mentioned examples from Deloitte and its partners, which together have started a plethora of local impact projects in over 20 countries, including fundraising, volunteering, and providing internships to refugees. *FuturesHub*, an innovative technology solution which aims to connect refugees with education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities in host countries, is currently in its final stages of development. In collaboration with Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre, Deloitte recently published a study shedding light on the economic potential of Syrian refugees living in Europe and the challenges they face as they seek employment, including language barriers, a lack of skills recognition, and institutional disincentives where financial and material support from governments or NGOs could disincentivise refugees from taking up employment. Overall, Spencer said, making it easier for businesses to hire refugees—for example, by making information on their skill levels and talents more transparent—will be key to facilitating their economic inclusion. Smartphones may play a crucial role in this regard, as this technology is widely accessible to refugees but still underutilised in efforts to match them with jobs or other support they may need.

Samuel Engblom, Policy Director at the TCO Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees, a trade union, stressed that it is necessary to recognise the great diversity of refugees entering European labour markets and to conduct more detailed analysis of their profiles to gain a better understanding of individual integration trajectories. Assessing and utilising newcomers' skills from the beginning is crucial and should not be put on hold by rigid language requirements or cumbersome qualification recognition procedures. To make integration pathways more flexible and time efficient, for example, refugees could be offered professionally relevant courses in their mother tongue, at least upon arrival. Engblom emphasised the pivotal role of trade unions in innovating refugee support: as guarantors of wage and labour standards, they can provide legitimacy to new partnerships and approaches; with their in-depth knowledge of the labour market and employers' needs, they can contribute

to the design of effective models; and they can help protect newcomers by making them more aware of labour rights.



Kavita Brahmhatt co-founded the nongovernmental organisation Action Emploi Réfugiés almost two years ago in Paris with the aim of matching refugees with suitable work opportunities in the French labour market. Brahmhatt argued for the importance of tapping into locals' social and professional networks to support refugees' initial integration into work. Using Facebook as a platform for matching refugees' skills with local employers' needs, Action Emploi Réfugiés managed to connect 150 refugees to jobs within one year. The project has supported newcomers across all skill levels, and not only the best qualified—for example, Brahmhatt mentioned jobs in agriculture. Having gathered extensive data on refugees' aspirations and skills, she said that now was the time to consolidate the project before thinking about scaling. There are strong informal barriers that keep refugees from gaining access to the labour market, as most jobs are accessible only through personal networks. By strengthening newcomers' social capital, civil society can help them become more self-sufficient. Action Emploi Réfugiés is evolving from an online portal to an in-person service, in the form of a one-stop shop for assessing refugees' skills.

DAY 2, 17 NOVEMBER 2017

Refugees as agents of innovation

The second day began with a conversation between social entrepreneur and co-founder of DaliliNow.com, **Maher Ismaail**, who fled the civil war in Syria and later built an app to help refugees integrate into society and daily life in Germany, and *Guardian* staff journalist **Saeed Kamali Dehghan**, named Journalist of the Year in Britain by the Foreign Press Association in 2010. Ismaail drew on his personal experience as a refugee navigating the various stages of life in Europe to create the information service platform DaliliNow.com (*dalili* means 'my guide' in Arabic). He found that there was a lack of clear information provided to newcomers at the various stages of the asylum process, from the early phases of reception to navigating the complex German bureaucratic system. DaliliNow.com aims to tackle this barrier by providing a search engine for resources that may be useful to refugees in Germany, such as information on host-country customs and language-training opportunities. Ismaail emphasised that inclusion is a two-way process of mutual acceptance and that civil society plays an important role in building both professional and social networks for newcomers. Finally, he spelled out the benefits of involving refugees as key consultants and partners in rethinking successful inclusion, rather than relegating newcomers to the sidelines and falling prey to tokenism.

Listen to the podcast

<http://migrationpolicy.podbean.com/e/conference-social-innovation-for-refugee-inclusion-opening-session-day-ii-refugees-as-agents-of-innovation/>

maher ismaail Retweetade



Josie Le Blond @josieleblond · 17 nov. ▾

Inclusion goes both ways: Locals and newcomers must accept each other as they are, says Syrian entrepreneur @MaherIsmaail co-founder of @DaliliNow search engine for newcomer services. #SI4RI

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Workshop 1: New approaches to financing social innovation

This workshop, chaired by **Giuseppe Iuliano** from the EESC, brought together experts from the private sector and the European Commission to explore new ways of financing the growing number of social projects supporting refugee inclusion. Speakers and participants explored flexible financing models that do not stifle innovation but enable it to thrive.

Chris Clements drew on his experience as the Director of UK-based Social Finance, a leader in the field of financing social projects, to explain one of the most promising emerging project-financing mechanisms: social impact bonds (SIBs). These bonds operate on a 'payment by results' basis. Initiatives (often delivered by a social enterprise or nonprofit, but funded by private-sector investment) design, pilot, and deliver outcomes to the public sector, which only repays private investors if initiatives achieve their results. This enables the public sector to save resources by outsourcing, while simultaneously allowing projects more room for experimentation in how to address social challenges. Essentially a public-private partnership, SIBs can help scale innovation for integration by providing working capital to nongovernmental organisations. For refugee inclusion, a specific advantage of SIBs in comparison to government funding is that they make it easier to fund early intervention measures (because they allow public institutions to monetise future cost savings up front). Early support for refugee integration can avoid huge economic and social costs, including the long-term economic marginalisation of newcomers and their children. However, Clements noted a weakness of SIBs: their complexity makes them inappropriate for small interventions.

Carolina Gario, Policy Officer at the European Commission's Directorate General (DG) for Growth, noted how prizes and competitions play an important role in encouraging innovative social projects, by providing prestigious platforms and other attractive opportunities to consolidate and expand their work. She described social innovation as a 'win-win' scenario that allows stakeholders to tackle societal challenges by finding beneficial solutions for host and refugee populations alike, and then went on to outline some of the winning projects of the 2016 European Social Innovation Competition, which focused on bright ideas to support refugees and migrants. These ranged from school mentoring schemes in Turkey to the use of virtual reality tools that place participants in the shoes of vulnerable groups, including refugees, in order to foster empathy.

Anna Krzyżanowska, Head of Unit, coordination with the EIB Group, EBRD and IFIs at the European Commission's DG for Economic and Financial Affairs, highlighted how the European Union can adapt existing funding instruments to target the needs of refugees more effectively and innovatively. She assessed existing approaches to financing, such as social impact funds and bonds, microcredit, social incubation facilities, and social business angels, and acknowledged that traditional European grants often do not support early-stage initiatives.



Workshop 2: Welcoming refugees into small and rural communities

Chair **Meghan Benton**, a Senior Policy Analyst with the Migration Policy Institute, introduced the session by noting that, despite their importance, stories from local communities are often left out of the mainstream discourse on migrant integration. She went on to discuss the challenges and opportunities of refugee inclusion encountered in rural communities and small cities. Many such places have turned into promising laboratories of social cohesion, responding proactively, pragmatically, resiliently, and unconventionally to the arrival of newcomers.

Christina Pope explained Welcoming America's mission to build more inclusive communities in the United States, through a national network which connects local governments and nonprofit organisations providing services to migrants and refugees. As smaller municipalities in the United States often face resource constraints and infrastructure limitations, community-based

organisations—many of which were formed by migrants—play an increasingly important role in filling gaps in the delivery of social services. However, challenges occur when groups work on integration activities in isolation, as local actors often struggle to connect to national networks for support. The disconnect between initiatives in different regions means that many refugees who have the much-needed skills required by the labour market—for example, in the agricultural sector—may miss employment opportunities due to a lack of information. Welcoming America offers platforms for the exchange of best practices and fosters connections between governments and nonprofits. Moreover, it publishes welcoming standards which include information on policies and practices on the ground as well as ideas on how to involve host communities in the reception and integration of newcomers. A recent example is the Neighbourhood Development Center in Minnesota, which empowers entrepreneurs, many of them migrants and refugees, to revive shrinking rural communities.

Magdalena Böhm discussed the SHARE Network, a project launched in 2012 which brings together European regional and local authorities and their civil-society partners involved in refugee resettlement, protection, and integration. In small municipalities with ageing populations and little experience with diversity, Böhm noted, newly arrived refugees tend to attract much attention due to their ‘high visibility’. Additionally, the sheer scale of new arrivals may pose difficulties for integration. To that end, SHARE supports a ‘soft landing’ for refugees that prepares local host communities and supports a whole-of-society approach to integration. Over the next few years, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) will facilitate this soft landing by designing workshops and seminars and publishing information materials for host communities.

Kerstin Carlsson discussed the project ‘Step by Step’, developed in eight rural municipalities in Sweden that have received large numbers of refugees. The commitment and willingness of local populations to help welcome refugees prompted cooperation among local actors—from politicians to nonprofit organisations—to shorten the time it takes for refugees to enter work and community life. Examples include one-on-one mentoring and opportunities to network and connect. Carlsson noted how, for a young unaccompanied Afghan boy, connecting with local children his age in a football club can be just as important as accessing education to promote a sustainable connection with the host community.

Workshop 3: Improving the visibility of refugees’ skills

Chaired by **Inga Heemink**, Acting Office Director of the Bureau of Population at the U.S. Department of State, this workshop tackled the question of how to improve the visibility of refugees’ skills and the recognition of previous professional credentials to ease integration into the labour markets of destination countries.

Alisha Molter described her experience with Network IQ—a German project initiated in 2005 by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social affairs to improve the economic integration of adult migrants, with a particular focus on credential recognition. Among various challenges, she noted that asylum seekers are a highly heterogeneous group in terms of nationality, language, age, and education level, making the establishment of a standard assessment procedure a daunting exercise. Current methods to validate the vocational training of asylum seekers in the absence of diplomas and certificates are costly and time consuming. However, innovative solutions are being created, including a multiday competence assessment process and an early intervention that seeks to profile refugees’ language-training needs and job skills.

Kavita Brahmhatt, co-founder of Action Emploi Réfugiés, spoke of her attempt to make refugees’ competencies visible to the French job market. Specifically, the initiative tries to tailor its offerings to the needs of refugees with different levels of agency and skills, for example, by

offering job boards for those who do not need much assistance and headhunting services for those who require more support. Aside from the challenges faced by newcomers, such as a lack of language skills and the consequences of trauma, employers are also confronted with a number of structural hurdles to hiring refugees, such as limited incentives, complex legal frameworks, and a lack of information about opportunities and risks. In many cases, there is a geographical mismatch between where refugees live and areas where there is a high demand for labour. Finally, accessing jobs is a challenge for newcomers with few networks: possibly up to 70 per cent of jobs are in the *marché caché*, or not publicly advertised.

Ludwijn Braams is the Managing Director of L&D Support Germany, an international psychological consulting company that uses behavioural measurements to assess competencies and match them with different job profiles. He presented an example of how the soft skills and hidden talents of refugees can be measured using an online questionnaire that looks at psychological indicators such as emotional stability, work approach, learning styles, and stressors. When the questionnaire's results for refugees were compared with those for long-term unemployed natives, refugees showed great resilience, equal to or exceeding the native unemployed, and a greater willingness to change and find employment (65 per cent compared with 33.9 per cent for long-term unemployed respondents). This alternative approach to competence assessment can complement traditional recognition procedures, especially when refugees lack documentary proof of their qualifications or have low levels of education.

Workshop 4: Employer engagement—innovative approaches to training and hiring refugees

Chaired by **Laurent Aujean**, Policy Officer at the Unit for Legal Migration and Integration at the European Commission's DG Home, this workshop explored the role of employers in ensuring refugees' successful labour market integration; the motivations, options, and dilemmas employers face when hiring refugees; and ways that policymakers can create better conditions to leverage private-sector engagement.

Listen to the podcast

<http://migrationpolicy.podbean.com/e/conference-social-innovation-for-refugee-inclusion-workshop-employer-engagement-innovative-approaches-to-training-and-hiring-refugees/>

The Executive Director of Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), **Sayre Nyce**, argued that labour mobility be recognised as an additional durable solution for displaced refugees. TBB's aim is to fill the global skills gap in the international labour market by connecting refugees currently residing in Jordan and Lebanon with employers in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. Over 10,000 refugees have so far listed their skills and previous professional experience in TBB's online talent catalogue, which interested employers can access. Detailed data are critical to corporate success. Nyce listed several motivations employers may have for hiring refugees, apart from corporate social responsibility (CSR), such as access to a hidden talent pool, a diversification of the workforce, and the high retention rate of hired refugees. She also emphasised the importance of standardised testing to facilitate employers' recognition of refugee qualifications. For example, TBB partnered with the British Council to facilitate use of the International English Language Testing System. In the future, TBB hopes to broaden its outreach by including other destination countries as well as more countries of first asylum, and making its talent catalogue available in languages other than English and Arabic.

Peter O'Sullivan, Resettlement Officer at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR's) Bureau for Europe, pointed out that many employers are keen on hiring refugees but often lack detailed knowledge of legal employment conditions or how foreign credentials may translate into domestic qualifications. The challenges of small and medium enterprises,

however, are very different from those encountered by larger international corporations; hence different types of employer support are required. Over the past year, UNHCR, in cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, has initiated dialogues with employers in various European cities to identify challenges and best practices in order to develop an action plan (to be published in 2018) engaging employers, trade unions, and refugees themselves. O’Sullivan noted that refugees’ employment should not be considered in isolation, but alongside other integration dimensions, such as acquiring language skills, establishing social ties, and finding housing. Moreover, he emphasised that the goal should not be to just prepare refugees to enter the workplace, but also to prepare the workplace for refugees. Cities play an instrumental role in refugees’ integration into work, especially since restrictive political rhetoric on the national stage may not necessarily translate to the local level.



Lena Kainz @lena_e_kainz · 17 nov. ▾

Its not just about preparing the refugee for the work place, but also about preparing the workplace for the refugee, says Peter O'Sullivan of @unhcr #SI4RI @EU_EESC

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Mustafa Alroomi, Web Developer, and **Askim Kintziger**, Innovation Consultant at Cronos Groep in Belgium, shared their experiences of refugees’ labour market integration on a practical level. Having come from Syria to Belgium as a refugee, Alroomi talked about his training at Cronos Groep—a group of companies working in the area of new technologies and innovative sectors—and the crucial role his professional colleagues played in facilitating his integration into Belgian society by providing general support and building friendships. As Kintziger pointed out, Cronos Groep recognises that many refugees have great professional potential but often lack opportunities to act on and develop it. She spoke about Cronos’s efforts to develop refugees’ skills by offering JavaScript courses alongside Dutch lessons, so participants have the chance to develop their professional qualifications alongside their language skills.

Workshop 5: Refugee entrepreneurship—a fast lane into work?

Chaired by Associate Policy Analyst **Liam Patuzzi** from the Migration Policy Institute Europe, the workshop explored the potential of entrepreneurship to fast-track the social and economic inclusion of refugees into the labour markets of host states.

Mireia Nadal Chiva, Head of Community Development at the ReDI School for Digital Integration, highlighted the benefits of equipping newcomers with technical skills in the digital economy to accelerate integration into the German labour market. While refugees in Europe struggle to find employment for several years after their arrival, there is unmet demand for skills in the IT sector, and it is precisely this mismatch that the ReDI School tries to tackle with its catalogue of courses. Quite successfully: over 15 per cent of ReDI alumni go on to employment in the IT sector, while others undertake internships and higher education, or become entrepreneurs. Although ReDI is not a business incubator, many students have shown interest in setting up a business and 6 per cent have gone on to create their own start-up companies. Bringing together a sense of responsibility for refugee communities, the desire to contribute to the host society, strong transnational ties, and highly developed digital skills, many of these tech entrepreneurs become agents of social innovation as well as empowering role models for other refugees. Challenges for newcomer entrepreneurs in Germany remain, but the strong professional networks fostered by the ReDI School play an important role in their success by connecting newcomers with potential business partners, sponsors, and investors.

Maher Ismaail, a Syrian graduate of the ReDI School and start-up entrepreneur in Berlin, recounted his positive experience with the very practical, hands-on type of education that ReDI offers. At the same time, he highlighted a number of factors that place obstacles in the way of would-be refugee entrepreneurs, ranging from lengthy bureaucracy to difficulties accessing funding, uncertainty regarding legal status and right to remain, or networks. While organisations such as ReDI do a great deal to help overcome some of these challenges, their capacity to solve structural problems such as administrative processes and access to capital is limited; such problems require government intervention. Early-stage financing of entrepreneurial initiatives in particular remains a core problem, although one that is not specific to refugees. After all, Ismaail pointed out, while refugee entrepreneurs may have some specific needs, they are an integral part of the local ecosystem, not a stand-alone group.

Clarelisa Camilleri presented Fostering Inclusive Incubation & Acceleration (FIBIA), a project launched by the European Business and Innovation Centres Network to make incubators and accelerators in Europe more inclusive of vulnerable and underrepresented groups, including refugee entrepreneurs. The project, which is still at an early stage, creates peer review partnerships between mainstream incubators and accelerators on the one hand, and business support programmes with an inclusive mandate on the other. The sharing of experiences will be used to develop a benchmarking system, which will in turn help identify potential barriers and how to remove them. As Camilleri stressed, inclusion should not be the focus of only selected incubators. Rather, it should be a defining feature of the entire industry, thus allowing vulnerable populations to benefit from the highly developed services of business incubators and accelerators in Europe. Encouraging exchange between different actors is crucial, not only within communities but also across borders: to that end, FIBIA is active in seven countries including the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany.

 Talent Beyond Bound. Retweetade



Justina Spencer @JustinaAdlyte · 16 nov. ✓

Are we creating policies and preparing refugees with the skills they need for the challenges today, or those of tomorrow? Great question from @migrationliz
[#RefugeeInclusion](#) [#SI4RI](#)

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Final Plenary Session: Unlocking the potential of innovation for lasting change



Chaired by **Elizabeth Collett**, Director of the Migration Policy Institute Europe, the final plenary session brought together representatives from the Canadian government, the European Commission, and civil society (from both sides of the Atlantic). The panel and the audience discussed how different stakeholders should contribute, both top-down and bottom-up, to creating a fertile environment in which social innovation can thrive. They also discussed how experimentation and change starting at the

grassroots level can encourage governments to think more broadly and creatively about the services they provide and their approach to the challenges of newcomers' integration.

Ben Mason, Betterplace Lab's Project Lead on Digital Innovation around Refugees and Migration, stressed that innovation is about learning how to do things we cannot yet do. As an attentive observer of tech-related refugee inclusion efforts, he noted that many innovative approaches have been developed and tried in the past few years, but most are not yet reaching their full potential. He had three key recommendations for governments to create systemic conditions for innovation to emerge and move from niche to mainstream. First, by acknowledging refugee entrepreneurship and employability, governments can help change the narrative on refugees, replacing the image of passive recipients with the reality of active contributors. Second, breaking down rigid departmental silos would help address the complex, multi-layered, and interlinked challenges of refugees' integration. Finally, it is key that funding be made more flexible and tailored to the realm of social innovation, where there needs to be room for trial and error.

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David Manicom, Assistant Deputy Minister at Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada, discussed ways for governments to nurture rather than stifle innovative approaches to the societal challenge of inclusion. Referencing previous speaker Yara Al Adib, who talked about how refugees develop resilience in the face of trauma ('warrior muscles'), he called for governments to embed dignity at every stage of the integration journey: newcomers do not ask for charity, but rather for the opportunity to offer something to their host communities. To promote this agency and resilience, governments can, for example, fund entrepreneurial incubators for refugees. Governments should keep encouraging successful experiences at the local level, often led by civil society (examples include city neighbourhoods learning to harness diversity as an engine of social cohesion) while promoting smart networks to ensure that these local experiences are exchanged. These activities may ultimately enable governments to create 'warrior muscles' as well, as they strive to foster refugee inclusion and create the right conditions for diverse societies to thrive.

Laura Corrado, Head of Unit, of Legal Migration and Integration at the European Commission's DG HOME, referred to the planning of the next EU multiannual financial framework as an opportunity to increase not only the quantity, but also the flexibility, of funding for refugee

inclusion, so that it can be quickly allocated where it is most needed. Corrado called for a mainstreaming approach to funding and suggested that migrant and refugee integration, rather than being confined to small dedicated funds, should be included in large structural funds as a cross-cutting priority. She then mentioned several of the European Commission's initiatives to improve the exchange of knowledge between national and local authorities, to showcase employers' efforts to hire refugees, and to strengthen cooperation between government and social partners. Inclusion, Corrado emphasised, is crucial for societies' cohesion in the long run. While governments and EU institutions are usually not where good practices originate, they can do a great deal to create a fertile environment for bright ideas to thrive, by providing financial resources and platforms for dialogue.

 **Canada in EU** @Canada2EU · 16 nov.
Canada believes that the successful integration of refugees benefits not only the refugees themselves but also our society as a whole. #SI4RI
Översätt från engelska



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Louisa Taylor, Director of Refugee 613 in Canada, a civil-society organisation coordinating the efforts of private, public, and community-based stakeholders in Ottawa to enhance refugees' access to key services and support, argued that besides fostering refugee inclusion through social innovation, there is the vital question of how to safeguard that a surge of societal engagement and willingness to contribute does not disappear over time. As immigration rates in Canada remain consistently high, Canadian stakeholders have invested in training and integration programmes in order to foster connections and a recognition that participating individuals are part of a bigger process, Taylor drew attention to the fact that private-sector funding is key, especially in the early stages of developing initiatives, as it tends to be less bureaucratic and more flexible than government funding.

CONCLUSIONS

This year's conference gathered key actors from across the spectrum of public, private, and civil-society stakeholders to continue the discussion started in 2016, spell out the main challenges social innovators have faced over the past year, and identify a direction of progress for the field. Two years after the 2015 migration 'crisis', which saw a massive surge of engagement and creativity around the societal challenges of welcoming and integrating refugees, the time is ripe to look inward; take stock of lessons, successes, and failures; and identify pathways for consolidation and improvement. Civil society has been taking the lead in

designing and testing new models and driving a whole-of-society approach to refugee inclusion, complementing the work of government actors who set the integration policy framework. At the same time, the private sector has increasingly taken responsibility, supporting existing initiatives, creating new projects, building partnerships and alliances with other stakeholders, and providing refugees with employment opportunities.

Young social initiatives, from start-ups co-created by refugees and locals to social enterprises supporting labour market integration, face common challenges as they grow and scale. These dilemmas range from finding a sustainable business model and securing funding, to a lack of professional knowledge, difficulties measuring a model's actual impact, and limited exchange and cooperation with similar organisations. These issues need to be further addressed before social innovation can truly move from niche to mainstream.

After initial growth spurts, many organisations are trying to consolidate and start thinking about how to expand beyond pockets of innovation to generate systemic and durable change in processes of refugee inclusion. But this requires a well-managed shift away from (largely) top-down models of assistance and towards grassroots engagement at the local level, empowering communities and creating new social value. This goal, however, can be achieved only if different sectors collaborate more and better. Governments have many options when encouraging civil society's innovation and engagement, for example, by creating prizes and competitions to showcase good practices, establishing flexible funding instruments that allow for trial and error, or fostering the exchange of local experiences in smart networks. The private sector can contribute by leveraging its sector-specific expertise; injecting capital into promising projects; and modelling an ambitious, systemic, and investment-heavy way to go about innovation.

Key recommendations

- ***Promote a risk-taking culture—but create systems for managing and learning from risk.*** Social innovation cannot be mandated from the top down, particularly in the area of diversity and inclusion, where opportunities for encounter on the ground are key. To thrive, it needs an institutional and political environment where failure is accepted and regarded as a chance to progress. Governments have different options as they seek to foster experimentation. They can loosen regulatory restrictions along the integration pathway—for instance, in the recognition of professional skills or access to vocational support—to allow for new models and for a more flexible sequencing of support. Or they can explore new financing methods, such as 'payment by results' and social impact bonds, which spread the risks of investing in social innovation among a number of public and private stakeholders. Such methods allow governments to invest in riskier models they would be unable to implement themselves—even as they promote more robust impact evaluation, encourage investments in early intervention, and liberate innovative projects from overly bureaucratic grant structures. But these innovative financing tools should be complemented by funding pots that support refugee-led or co-created social enterprises, which often face barriers to accessing capital.
- ***Improve dialogue between social innovators and governments.*** Small-scale successes at the grassroots level have the potential to inspire broader solutions. In some cases, they may even trigger systemic change by pushing governments to rethink their policies and refugee support services. For this to happen, however, effective dialogue and mutual trust between social innovators and policymakers are necessary. And this common ground is not always easy to create amid different perspectives, assumptions, values, and priorities. Government-funded prizes and competitions for innovative initiatives are one way of narrowing the gap, as they help define a shared

understanding of innovation, success, and goals. ‘Mediators’ who are familiar with both government and civil society often play a crucial role in fostering exchange and ensuring that grassroots successes do not remain under the radar. Both government and social initiatives could foster this mediation process by setting up exchanges and reciprocal visits to gain a better insight into each other’s work realities and constraints.

- ***Create the conditions for smart networks to flourish—but avoid too much dispersion.*** For many small innovative projects, ‘scaling’ in the traditional sense (increasing the organisations’ size) is not the best option: it requires considerable financial resources, risks curtailing their flexibility and reaction time, and may distort their original goals. But there is a leaner way to expand the impact of grassroots innovation: smart networks. Smart networks are nonhierarchical, flexible systems in which a diverse set of partners collaborate around a shared goal. For social innovators, these networks can provide a valuable pool of expertise and support, help them hone their objectives and activities vis-à-vis those of other actors, and create a space of trust in which further collaborations can easily arise. National governments, EU institutions, and private-sector actors could promote these networks—for example, by providing funding, technical assistance, and platforms for dialogue—but without constraining their autonomy. On the other hand, an excessive proliferation of networking opportunities also carries certain risks. Start-ups and social enterprises with limited resources may feel disoriented as to which events are most worth attending; as a result, they may end up focusing too much on communications at the expense of their other activities. Therefore, initiators of platforms for exchange should consider working together to minimise the burden on smaller operations. The Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion conference has the potential to become an annual appointment around which the community can organise itself.
- ***Promote peer support.*** Peer-support and mentoring programmes are a way for more established organisations to dedicate their knowledge to support younger social initiatives. In comparison to smart networks, such programmes are more hierarchical and may have a more selective focus in their support, targeting the specific needs of a young initiative (e.g., fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, recruiting, administration). This type of support can help promising projects clarify their objectives, consolidate their operations, identify a sustainable business model, and establish the strategic partnerships that can enable them to widen their reach and



impact. For more experienced organisations, the benefits lie in advancing their mission, being exposed to new ideas, expanding their networks, and learning more about their own strengths and weaknesses. Business incubators for refugees, in which established local entrepreneurs mentor early-stage projects, have highlighted the great potential of this approach.

- ***Nurture a rigorous evaluation culture—not a stifling one.*** Young social projects would profit greatly from collecting and analysing data on their work more systematically, to measure both the growth of their organisation and its social and economic impact. This would help them consolidate their achievements and pitch them to funders and partners, highlight gaps, and create more transparency and selectivity in the sector. With its resources and know-how, the private sector is well positioned to help social innovators professionalise their data collection and analysis efforts. Governments can create incentives to invest in monitoring by tying public funding to rigorous evaluation and reliable feedback on progress, as is the case in PBR. But strict evaluation requirements may well create a disadvantage for smaller, less professionalised fund receivers; they should be accompanied by guidance and tools to help grantees strengthen their evaluation capacity at a low cost. Another risk of PBR systems is that, by emphasising the measurement of outcomes, they may create distorted incentives: funded providers may prioritise developing professional monitoring structures over doing their actual work, or they may pick the target groups that promise the best outcomes over the more vulnerable and marginalised ('creaming'). Ultimately, promoting an evaluation culture across the board requires a mix of adjusting incentives, rewarding good practice, and providing support (either funding or training) to social enterprises, all while preventing overly strict evaluation requirements from absorbing too many resources and stifling/distorting social initiatives' core activities.
- ***Encourage high-value, rather than tokenistic, private-sector engagement.*** Businesses cannot solve the challenges of refugee inclusion single-handedly, but in coordination with others they can make an enormous contribution, offering funding, know-how, technology, infrastructure, and job opportunities. Moreover, private companies can help the social sector generate innovative solutions more systematically, by offering knowledge and support in building an effective R&D infrastructure. As companies around the world have become more sensitive to refugee inclusion, social innovators would be well advised to harness the private sector's commitment and explore collaborations. To this end, creating more comprehensive repositories of information on real-world business engagement in refugee inclusion would help clarify what types of partnerships are possible. Deloitte's and Cisco's experiences are cases in point, demonstrating how businesses can cooperate with academic institutions, civil-society, and international relief organisations in refugee inclusion. It is crucial to find forms of business engagement that offer a basis for long-term cooperation rather than one-off, window-dressing initiatives. The involvement of trade unions is key to providing legitimacy to these partnerships and ensuring they take account of labour standards and rights.
- ***Empower local communities and cultivate their trust.*** Social innovation for refugee inclusion usually emerges at the local level, since this is where people meet and the challenges and opportunities of diversity manifest themselves. Over the course of the 'refugee crisis', local communities in destination countries have continually proven their resilience and creativity in dealing with sudden changes in their social fabric. This has not only happened in major urban centres, but also in smaller towns and rural areas. In view of this, higher levels of government should put in place frameworks and tools to foster the locally owned design, implementation, and sharing

of responses. Initiatives such as Welcoming America or the EU Urban Agenda Partnership for Refugee Inclusion provide useful examples. For local initiatives to succeed, they must be integrated into a whole-of-society approach that not only targets newcomers but engages the entire host community. To foster trust, it is important to openly state potential challenges: in the short term, diversity can put a strain on local societies and produce social costs, but it will bring great benefits if adequately addressed—particularly to revitalise regions with declining economies and ageing populations.

- ***Change the narrative.*** In a concerted effort, all partners committed to social innovation for refugee inclusion should do more to change the public representation of refugees from victims to resilient agents of change. Fostering refugee (social) entrepreneurship, for example, by investing in an infrastructure of incubators and accelerators, is one way to contribute to this change of perception, as is collaborating with media to encourage more nuanced and balanced narratives. Ideally, such narratives would move away from the language of charity, which reflects a zero-sum-game logic and may ultimately feed public resentment, to one of opportunity—not only economic, but also in relation to creativity, trust, and cohesion.



Migration Policy Institute Europe, established in Brussels in 2011, is a non-profit, independent research institute that aims to provide a better understanding of migration in Europe and thus promote effective policymaking. Building upon the experience and resources of the Migration Policy Institute, which operates internationally, MPI Europe provides authoritative research and practical policy design to governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders who seek more effective management of immigration, immigrant integration, and asylum systems as well as successful outcomes for newcomers, families of immigrant background, and receiving communities throughout Europe. MPI Europe also provides a forum for the exchange of information on migration and immigrant integration practices within the European Union and Europe more generally.

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