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INTEGRA

LESSONS LEARNED

**INTEGRATION OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS THROUGH URBAN
PARTNERSHIPS - INTEGRA**

**SOFIA DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION
SOFIA, BULGARIA**

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the lessons learned document for INTEGRA is to capture the project's lessons learned in a formal report for use by other civil society organizations and stakeholders on similar future actions. The report may be used as part of new project planning for similar initiatives in order to determine what problems occurred and how those problems were handled and may be avoided in the future. Additionally, this document details what went well with the project and why, so that other organizations may capitalize on these experiences. This document will be formally communicated with project partners and published on the INTEGRA project website, and will become a part of the organizational assets and archives of Sofia Development Association.

The five-country project aimed to promote deeper mutual understanding between migrant communities and the host society, involving representatives of local governments, experts from civil society organizations, and third-country nationals (TCN). The project objectives centered on enhancing the capacity of local governments to develop and implement initiatives for increased participation of third-country nationals in social and cultural life through multi-stakeholder cooperation. The second main line of work involved city-to-city cooperation, dissemination and public awareness-raising. In this respect INTEGRA had a major impact on the communities involved, helping cities to take a more comprehensive approach to TCN integration – moving from separate migrant services to integrated approaches to social inclusion, participation and equal opportunities.

LESSONS LEARNED APPROACH

The lessons learned from INTEGRA are compiled from partner communications throughout the project lifecycle. These included a Dropbox file with all project documentation, ongoing project team self-evaluation surveys, periodic internal evaluation and monitoring reports, and feedback from stakeholders and project participants in project events. The lessons learned in this document are categorized by project knowledge area linked to the main project objectives. These knowledge areas consist of: project management, stakeholder engagement, development of resources and campaign materials, impact and evaluation of project activities. The document presents first the lessons learned related to process improvement, followed by key insights linked to the project thematic scope.

LESSONS LEARNED REGARDING PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

The following table lists the lessons learned related to project team coordination, resource management, and engagement of stakeholders.



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CATEGORY	What went well / Success factors	What didn't go well	Other learnings
Project team coordination	Online tools for team coordination ensured regular communication and constant access to all project documentation.	While convenient for transnational projects, virtual working spaces cannot replace face-to-face meetings and first-hand experiences of the local context.	It is important for partners to keep detailed paper/digital records to ensure smooth operations. Loss of key personnel is a major management risk and adequate mitigation measures must be in place before the project start. Alignment of organizational staff management procedures is critical, too.
Financial management	Requesting additional interim financial reports from partners to ensure budget expenditures comply with all applicable regulations.	Partners accounting practices need to be aligned from the start; regular meetings of financial managers must be planned as well.	Plan a longer face-to-face kick-off meeting to review financial matters and devise monitoring procedures.
Quality management	Periodic self-evaluation surveys and monitoring check lists have been very useful and disciplining; critical for implementing tasks as planned, achieving indicators and outputs, ensuring accountability and enhancing organizational capacity.	Keeping track of KPIs and updating them to reflect the local context and interim project achievements per partner organization.	A good way to achieve quality standards is to include measures for improvement proposed by the partners in the periodic monitoring reports.
Local stakeholder groups	Cooperation with stakeholders through formal mechanisms ensures engagement in project events and access to new partners.	More study visits / project events allowing exchange between stakeholders could have added to the capacity building aspect of the project.	Incentives for stakeholder engagement matter! Involve them in activities, invite them to study visits, introduce them to media...
Conducting public awareness campaigns	Good balance between formal and informal	Advanced planning needed for better	Joining forces with other local



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	activities, online and on-site events, managed through a shared online calendar.	synchronization of campaign events and concurrent transnational events.	organizations is important for pooling resources and improving reach. Better coordination and most efficient use of concertation events locally/nationally.
Creative tools	Multi-lingual creative tools and information materials support the participatory and interactive nature of project activities, and help engage with diverse target groups.	While having freedom to decide on the format of the creative tools is appreciated by the partners, it is also important to set common standards to be followed.	Make provisions to capitalize on new tech developments in visualization and media channels presence.
Sustainability	Investing efforts and resources to establish lasting partnerships with public bodies.	Ensuring that commitments made will be backed up with adequate financial and human resources.	Selecting partners / partner cities that are more comparable in size and challenges to maximize useful exchange and knowledge transfer.

THEMATIC SCOPE AND IMPACT

The key takeaways and highlights from INTEGRA as concerns the project main objectives and intervention models can be summed up as follows:

Improving city governance on integration issues of TCN

It is important for cities to seek policy coherence in addressing the multi-dimensional needs of, and opportunities for, migrants at the local level. INTEGRA demonstrated that successful integration management requires cities to develop migrant integration policies and actions in two streams, those that target institutions and those that target populations (both migrant and local populations).

Taking a territorial-based approach to integration

Integration measures need to take a place-based approach, adapted to the characteristics of the host communities as well as to those of migrants themselves. INTEGRA activities engaged people in their workplaces, in their neighborhoods and the schools to which they send their children, in the local supermarkets where they shop, and in the public spaces where they will spend their free time.

As one INTEGRA partner put it: *“I think, all partners do their best in order to follow the needs of each city in terms of communication with public, TCN and authorities.”*



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Capacity building for local authorities and support for migrant & civil society organizations

Transnational actions such as INTEGRA, which rely on and promote city-to-city networking, are instrumental for bringing out local authorities' potential and roles in the integration process: initiating or giving impetus to migrant integration initiatives; coordinating and facilitating integration measures; providing space for activities; helping mainstream institutions adapt so that they can serve migrant populations' needs on equal terms with the local population's needs.

While keywords such as cooperation and mutual learning have become staples in the project management jargon, they are critical methods for generating new and transferring knowledge and practices cross-border. INTEGRA partners shared:

“The personal meetings and close cooperation between the project partners were very helpful in establishing strong ties between the individual partners, which enabled new and fruitful cooperation beyond the INTEGRA project.”

“In terms of competence and usefulness, the project deliverables are of high quality, offering the perspectives of all partner countries and thus enhancing the capacity of partner institutions.”

Using local data and analyses to support integration policies

INTEGRA confirmed that research and data at local level are key to support local authorities in planning and prioritizing integration measures in a wide range of policy domains (education, housing, welfare, employment). Foresight scenarios and prognostic methods (such as INTEGRA's city integration labs) with data visualization are useful aids in the policy development process. However, involving research institutes takes time and money, and smaller municipalities may not readily have access to such services.

Producing outputs which are context-specific, practically oriented, versatile and easily adaptable to serve local needs.

This is particularly important when resources are limited; as the Czech partners demonstrated with the *photovoice* exercise, it is possible to take one tool and exploit it creatively in a variety of ways. Most campaign materials take into account the long-term priorities for each city/country with respect to integration and are practically oriented.

Visibility matters!

Effective information and awareness-raising measures are evidence-based, well targeted and tailor-made. They give the action visibility and attract new partners, supporters, and audiences. New partnerships can also lead to new projects and joint actions, gaining experience in new thematic areas, extensive media exposure and other benefits.