



# Guidelines for cities on the role of culture in the integration of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers

September 2016

In May 2015 EUROCITIES published a statement on the important role European cities play in receiving and integrating asylum seekers, refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection<sup>1</sup>. The statement on cities and asylum stresses the responsibility of 'all cities to ensure that asylum seekers settle in well for the duration of their stay, however short or long'. This responsibility goes far beyond the allocation of shelter and food. Psychological, social and emotional needs are equally important for personal wellbeing and social stability. To guarantee social cohesion, city authorities have to create an environment of mutual understanding and respect. This requires systematic and concerted efforts with a range of stakeholders at the local level to ensure a successful social and economic integration.

We believe that culture and the arts play a key role in the integration of newcomers and all residents of a migrant background, irrespective of their formal status. We reiterate the principles of the EUROCITIES Integrating Cities Charter, launched in 2010, committing cities as policy makers, employers, service providers and buyers of goods and services to the integration of migrants.

With these guidelines prepared by our Access to culture working group we highlight the possibilities offered by cultural policies for the integration of migrants.

## The role of culture and the arts in integration

### Empowerment

- Getting involved in cultural projects gives people a sense of community and belonging.
- Taking an active role in a cultural project helps empower and train participants, raise their self-esteem and develop skills, which then play a positive role in their social and economic integration.
- Cultural projects give migrants the possibility to make a contribution to their host city.

### Communication and exchange

- Cultural institutions/activities can help facilitate exchanges about different views, beliefs and social rules; raise awareness about different cultures and identities; and identify common interests and goals.
- The arts create a basis for communication beyond cultural or linguistic barriers.

---

<sup>1</sup> EUROCITIES statement on asylum in cities: <http://bit.ly/20X1h9u>

## Changing perceptions

- Integration is not just an issue of social welfare and economic policy, the emphasis should also be on engaging people in valuable cultural experiences and achievements.
- Discussing and presenting different cultures promotes a positive public perception of migrants.
- The ‘cultural capital’ gained from migrant involvement in cultural activities can lead to new artistic expressions.
- Host cities also get an opportunity to widen their cultural perspective and to reflect upon their own cultural experience.

## Recommendations to cities on developing a long-term strategy on culture for the integration of migrants

- City authorities need both a welcoming strategy with dedicated services, such as multilingual information, language courses in cultural institutions, and a long-term strategy for economic, social and cultural inclusion.
- Be prepared to take action when needed and respond to new challenges in the work context<sup>2</sup>.

### Create opportunities for mutual learning and intercultural dialogue

- Provide shared public spaces for participation and mutual learning through culture. The impact is greater when established civic institutions such as libraries or museums are involved as it encourages public participation<sup>3</sup>.
- Strengthen the self-esteem of the participants by allowing them to share their skills and experience instead of drawing attention to their lack of language skills.

### Develop your cultural programmes from the bottom-up

- City authorities need to change their way of working; they have to be more process oriented and to work more horizontally to find new ways of collaboration.
- Encourage programmes where migrants get access to previously closed-off cultural opportunities and become advocates within their own communities<sup>4</sup>.
- Institutions such as theatres or art centres should have a presence outside their physical buildings, to make culture visible and accessible to everybody<sup>5</sup>.
- Promote the co-creation of programmes: coordinated promotion and planning increases engagement, attendance, participation, impact and ongoing socio-demographic relevance<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Espoo case study on mobile libraries visiting refugees centres: <http://bit.ly/2doiqGr>

<sup>3</sup> Karlsruhe case study on increased accessibility for newcomers to local museums: <http://bit.ly/2cygSlz>  
Nuremberg case study on volunteers, accompanied by cultural workers, visiting refugee accommodation centres to invite ‘a guest or new friend’ to cultural events: <http://bit.ly/2cRYrzp>

<sup>4</sup> Karlsruhe case study on increased accessibility for newcomers to local museums: <http://bit.ly/2cygSlz>

<sup>5</sup> Strasbourg case study on artist residencies developed in priority districts for artists coming from deprived neighbourhoods: <http://bit.ly/2cyi5PV>

## Helping staff adapt to a diversified society

- Raise the awareness of city staff and staff of cultural institutions at all levels - from museum assistants and volunteers right up to the director. This requires activity building and training in intercultural dialogue<sup>7</sup>.
- In the longer term, the employment strategy should be flexible so that the composition of the staff reflects the diversity of the city<sup>8</sup>.
- Give qualified migrants the opportunity to build up their language skills during working time.
- Building new services needs leadership.

## Change your cultural institutions from within

- Reflect and consider the diversity of people originating from different social and cultural contexts.
- Foster discussions and search for answers together with your audience. The goal should be to create new common values together.
- Be open to intercultural discussions and do not shy away from conflict. Multiple visions and voices have to be heard and respected. Shared artistic work opens up a realm of possibilities, in which differences are not seen as threatening but as stimulating.
- The cultural background of others should be accepted as equally valuable. Key approaches include clear communication, open dialogue with different communities, involvement in the day to day programming, and genuine engagement at all levels of cultural and city planning. Many migrants would like to see their specific cultural background as well as their individual experiences more strongly represented in public life. Being part of the programme provides acceptance of these contributions as part of culture and shows that they have validity well beyond the themes of integration and inclusion.
- The repertoire/programming of libraries, museums, theatres, orchestras and operas needs to be responsive to ongoing changes in audience and participant demographics. This development has to be monitored and reflected on an ongoing basis within the institution.
- Develop more meaningful cooperation and dialogue between cultural institutions and migrant cultural associations.
- Collect personal stories of citizens with a migrant background to link collections from museums to locals.

---

<sup>6</sup> Antwerp case study on local young people producing the programme for urban music evenings: <http://bit.ly/2czM6Uu>

<sup>7</sup> EUROCITIES Integrating cities toolkit, Managing diversity and promoting equality in cities' administration and service provision: <http://bit.ly/2d2OSD9>

<sup>8</sup> Espoo case study on mobile libraries visiting refugees centres: <http://bit.ly/2doiqGr>