

Housing EC workshop – 6 november 2017

Convivial
MOUVEMENT D'INSERTION DES RÉFUGIÉS

Some lessons from a 20
years experience with
housing, integration of
refugees and volunteers
implication

3 core messages

- Support right from the start, give it time
- Invest for long term win-win result
- Mediation/practise to cross over discrimination

Convivial Vision & Mission

Vision

Convivial was created in **1994** in a '**warm**' **solidarity movement** between residents in Belgium and refugees from Rwanda.

Convivial aims to facilitate the integration of Refugees in Belgium through **comprehensive listening/dialog** and **mutual commitment** between Belgians and Refugees.

Mission

Convivial's primary mission is to support **Refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection** and **asylum seekers** in becoming settled and integrated, (both socially and professionally,) in Belgium. At the same time, Convivial works to **raise public awareness** of Refugees' situations and create relationships between local communities and refugees.

Convivial - Approach

- Personalised support which meets the **specific needs of each beneficiary**
- **Specialised services** which are in constant evolution with individuals' needs, articulated in a **global approach of the refugee path to integration**
- Commitment to **integration through employment** (about 30 persons involved each year, priority to refugees)
- Reception of each beneficiary in a language they understand, thanks to a **multi-lingual team**;

From Refugees' needs to services provided

(2013 version, some adaptations since then : resettlement, local solidarities,...)

Settlement

Be welcomed and listened to
Be guided in social, legal and administrative procedures



Reception and Counselling

Find decent, safe, sanitary and affordable accommodation
Find financial support for a rental guarantee



Housing

Get furniture, food and clothing



Material aid

Settle down into accommodation and a new neighbourhood
Understand and be accompanied through administration processes and procedures related to settlement



Practical assistance

Integration

Be able to communicate and speak French



French classes (in partnership with *Lire et Ecrire*)

Understand how Belgium works



Social guidance and citizenship workshops

Career planning : education, training, employment



Socio-professional guidance
Initiation to computer tools
Carpentry workshop

Avoid isolation, create new links



Cultural visits and cross-cultural meetings

Anticipate and manage difficulties arising from ageing



Social counselling and fieldwork assistance for aged Refugees

Awareness & community

Be welcomed, understood and respected without prejudices
Creating social network



Awareness program and cross-cultural meetings
Conversation tables and neighbours' encounters

Public in 2017

- More than **4,000 persons** (from 1,900 households) yearly, some for one advice, other for a long term support
- More than **75% recognised Refugees**, the remaining 25% either benefitted from subsidiary protection or asylum seekers.
- Top countries of origin are : **Syria, Irak, Guinea, Afghanistan, Palestine, Somalia, Burundi...**
- About **65% of men** and 35% of women
- Many **young people**: about 70% under the age of 35 and 25% between 36 and 50.

Focus on Housing

Process & Key factors

- First contact and follow up by **a social assistant**
- **Information on the housing market** and **needs definition**
- **Mediation towards owners** to cross over discrimination % income, language and social habits related to foreign origin
- Promote **long term partnerships with owners**
- Fund for **loans covering rental guarantees** or the first month's rent
- **Transit housing** for emergency cases and most vulnerable refugees
- Partnership with **social housing agencies**
- **Material help**

Focus on Housing

Some figures in 2017

- Convivial helped **about 500 families** to find an **accommodation** and complete **administrative procedures**
- 40 families were accommodated in a **transitional apartments**
- 108 **loans** were granted for rental guarantees or the first month's rent
- **About 1000 families** benefitted from **material aids** (more than 5,000 pieces of furniture, 62,000 items of clothing and 7,000 food packages were distributed)

Focus on integration

Process & key factors : launching pad to institutions

- **Combination** of **collective** information/training sessions and **individual** guidance
- Help to define a **socioprofessional integration project** : realistic and ambitious => long term win-win, rather the precarious short term job
- **Help with first steps** : degree equivalence, inscription to language school, trainings, jobcoaching,...
- **Fund** for financing degree equivalence and high school/university fees
- **Partnership** with private jobcoaching organisation & **orientation** towards training/labour institutions
- **Social support** throughout the process : family reunification, mental distress, change of housing...

Focus on integration

First labour experience at Convivial

- Aside of 40 professional social workers, **30 workers on integration contracts** and **20 volunteers**
- **Win-win** : first/new **working experience** in a supporting environment – **language and cultural** support for refugees – **priority** for long term internal job opportunity
- An integration contrat/a volunteer contrat with **lower selection criteria** allowing detection of motivation and competencies

Focus on integration

Some figures

- **About 300 refugees** guided in defining and initiate a **socioprofessional integration project**
- About 100 persons in **citizenshipworkshop** and **french classes**
- **More then 400** people have worked on **integration contrats** or as **volunteers** 30% (?) of permanent staf from there on

Focus on civil society

- About 1000 persons informed through 70 awareness **session for nonprofits, companies, mainstream social workers, policemen, etc.**
- **Cross encounters, conversation tables, neighbour solidarity project** to help refugees and citizens to meet :
 - ⇒ awareness
 - ⇒ Befriending
 - ⇒ Support with transport to administrations, conversation, children education,...
- **Wide range** of support from donations/loans for housing and study, material donation (individual and collectivities..), volunteers at convivial, participants at the cross encounters projects, jobcoach, etc;

Current issues

:

New public actors for newly arrived **refugees** both for transition to housing and for integration orientation but challenges : lack of **continuity**, mainstreaming vs **vulnerability**/specific needs, **public/private optimal mix** and place for **civil society**

Crucial 'forgotten issue' : **family reunification** => first need, a right directly connected to the status of refugee, yet strict condition of timing & administration and NO FINANCING to support them in this challenge !

Lessons for a broader public ?

:

- Mediation and housing guarantee
- Promoting integration contracts opportunities and other mediation towards direct employment on a 'trust basis'
- Investing in long term societal return
- Room for civil society but complementary to and with professional support

Thank you!



Convivial
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Convivial – Integration of Refugees' movement

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