

Report of the Working Conference on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees

17 May 2017

Amsterdam, the Netherlands

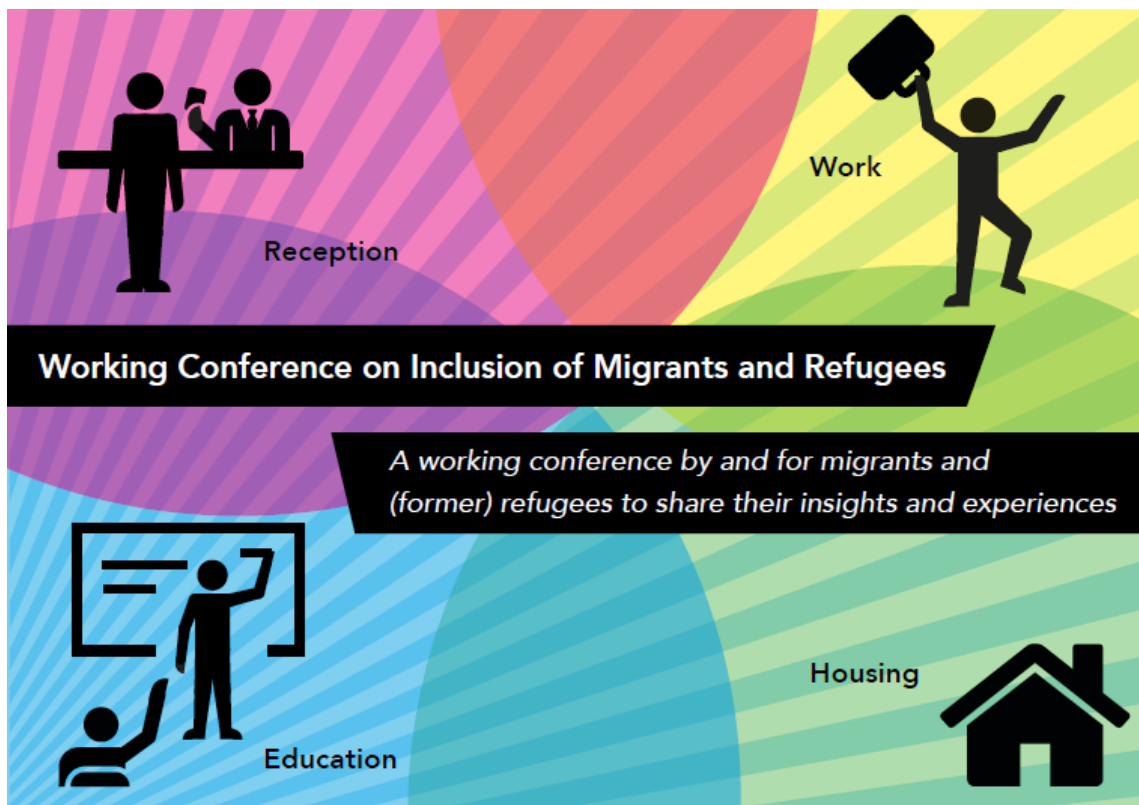


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1.1 Agenda

09.00 - 10.30 **Registration**

10.30 - 11.15 **Introduction**

Word of Welcome by *Arjan Vliegenthart*, Alderman of the City of Amsterdam

- Keynote Speech by *Bright Omansa Richards* of New Dutch Connections together with musician *Oleg Fateev*
- Introduction Urban Agenda & Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, by *Agnese Papadia* of the European Commission & *Sabina Kekic* of the City of Amsterdam
- Introduction Workshop Method, by Ink Strategy

11.15 - 12.45 **Workshop Round 1 – Challenges:** Reception, Housing, Work or Education

12.45 - 13.45 Lunch

13.45 - 15.15 **Workshop Round 2 – Solutions:** Reception, Housing, Work or Education

15.15 - 15.45 Break

15.45 - 16.45 **Pitching of Solutions**

16.45 - 17.15 **Launch European Migrant Advisory Board and Fellowship Open Society Foundations**

17.15 - 17.30 **Closing Remarks**

17.30 - 19.00 **Networking drinks and snacks** offered by the City of Amsterdam in cooperation with kokbestellen.nl, two Syrian migrant cooks.

1.2 Workshops method

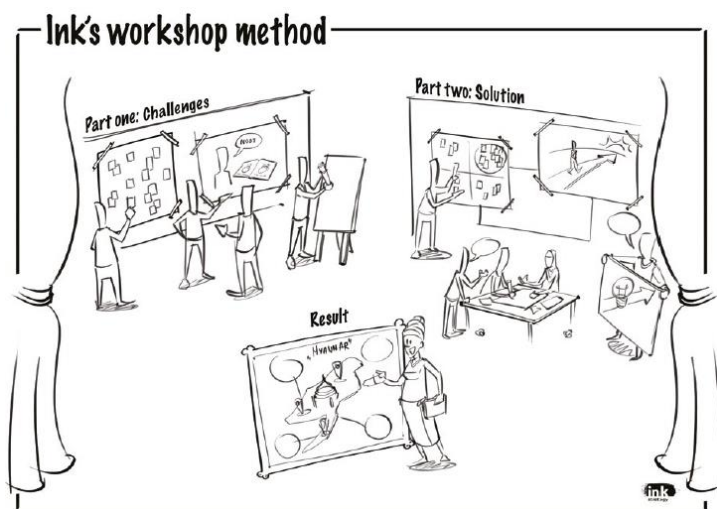
On 17th May 2017, the city of Amsterdam organised a *'Working Conference on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees – A working conference by and for migrants and (former) refugees to share their insights and experiences'*.

It brought together participants with different migrant and refugee backgrounds in order to together find solutions for issues on the topics of Reception, Housing, Work and Education. Next to the plenary sessions and keynote speeches, this Working Conference offered participants workshops to share their experiences and propose ideas for better integration policies.

The goal of the workshops was to receive feedback from the participants on the topics of Reception, Housing, Work and Education, so that their ideas can be taken into account by the Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in the creation of the final action plan. In this manner the Partnership aims to involve migrants and refugees in the process and find solutions to the challenges *with* them, rather than *for* them.

In order to fully benefit from the knowledge and experiences of the participants, the working Conference was set up to function as a 'pressure cooker'. All participants took part into two rounds of workshops with one of the specific topics.

The workshops were facilitated by Ink Strategy, a design consultant based in Amsterdam. They are industrial design engineers who use sketches and visualisations to communicate. During the workshops Ink Strategy focused on group thinking, using visual design tools to create simple solutions for complex challenges while creating engaging communication material. For each of the four topics, two rounds of workshops were organised. During the first,

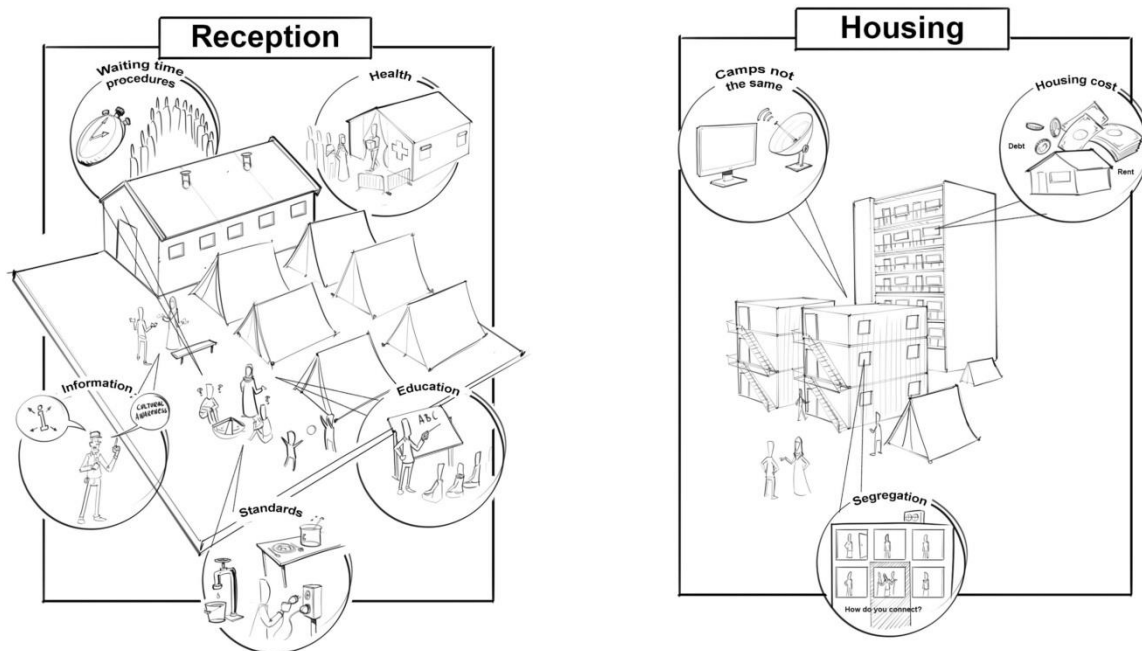


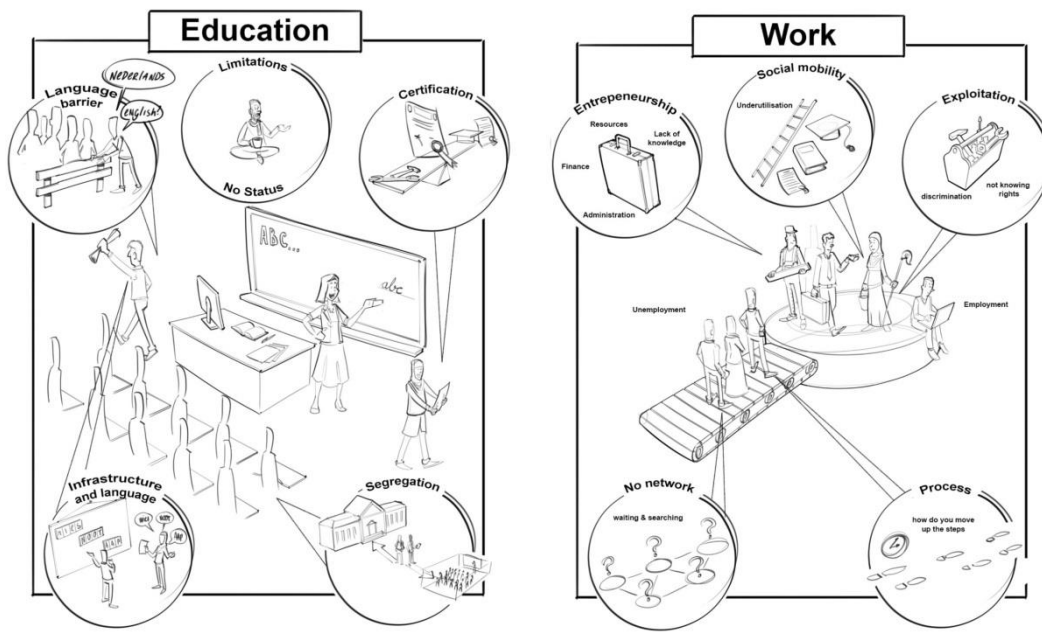
participants identified the main challenges related to the topic that was attributed to them. The second round focused on the solutions which were presented during in the plenary session.

1.3 Pitching of solutions

1.3.1 Consultative meetings with migrants and refugees in cities

Before the conference on the 17th of May 2017 took place the Partnership together with Open Society Foundations organized four consultative meeting with migrants and refugees in four of the Partnership cities: Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona and Berlin. During these meetings main challenges for migrants and refugees were discussed. The results of these meetings were direct input for the conference. You can find the results of these meetings in the graphics below.





1.3.2 Workshop 1: Education 1

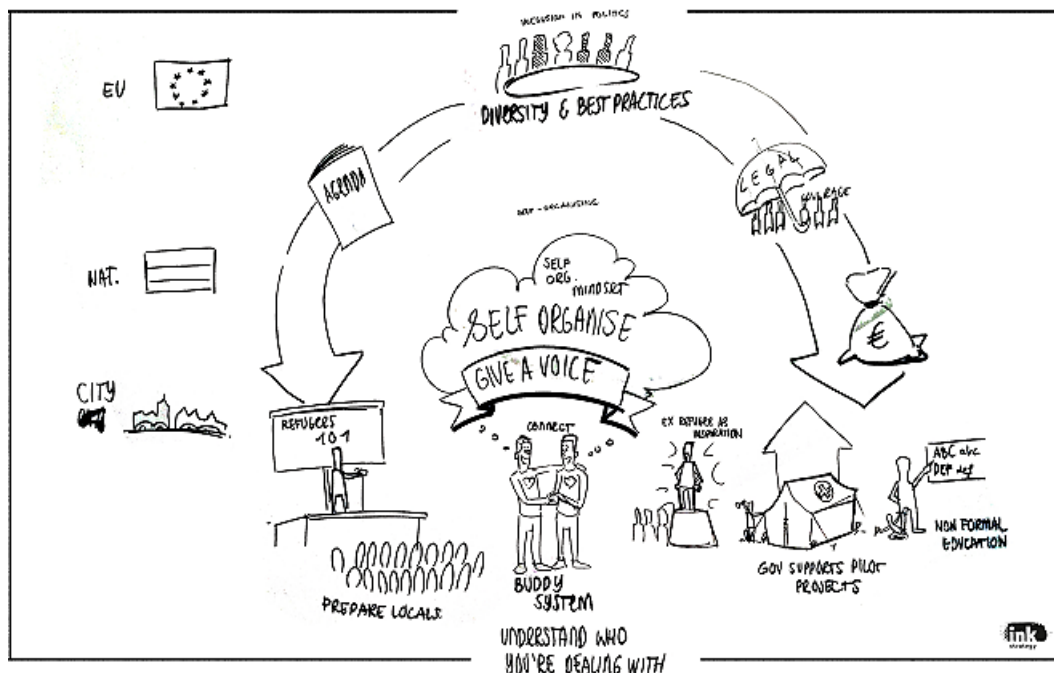
An issue often experienced by young migrants and refugees is segregation at school. Newcomers can feel excluded and sometimes discriminated when arriving to a new environment. Language and cultural differences are often felt as barriers for integration. Moreover, as time spent with their family and time at school are generally very distinct, creating or reinforcing the connections between these two parts of a child's life is indeed crucial in order to overcome the issue of segregation at school.

Parents should also be involved in their children's activities. It's indeed important to bring awareness at home because parents may not be necessarily informed of what their child is facing at school. Schools should organize cultural events for all parents from both sides to talk about experiences and issues. Exchange and communication should be an important aspect of the fight against segregation.

Education, housing, living conditions and work opportunities require integrated solutions. For this reason, the issue of education should not be tackled in isolation. Instead, an integrated and holistic approach needs to guide the identification of solutions and initiatives between different governance levels (EU, national, regional, local) as well as among local authorities and stakeholders.

The issue of education should be tackled in an integrated manner: the European level should stimulate the mapping and dissemination of best practices, while promoting actions and approaches that recognise diversity as a value-added to solutions. At the national level, political agendas and priorities would be defined in parallel with the necessary provision of financial and legal support. These would then be tailored by local actors and adapted to the concrete needs of cities.

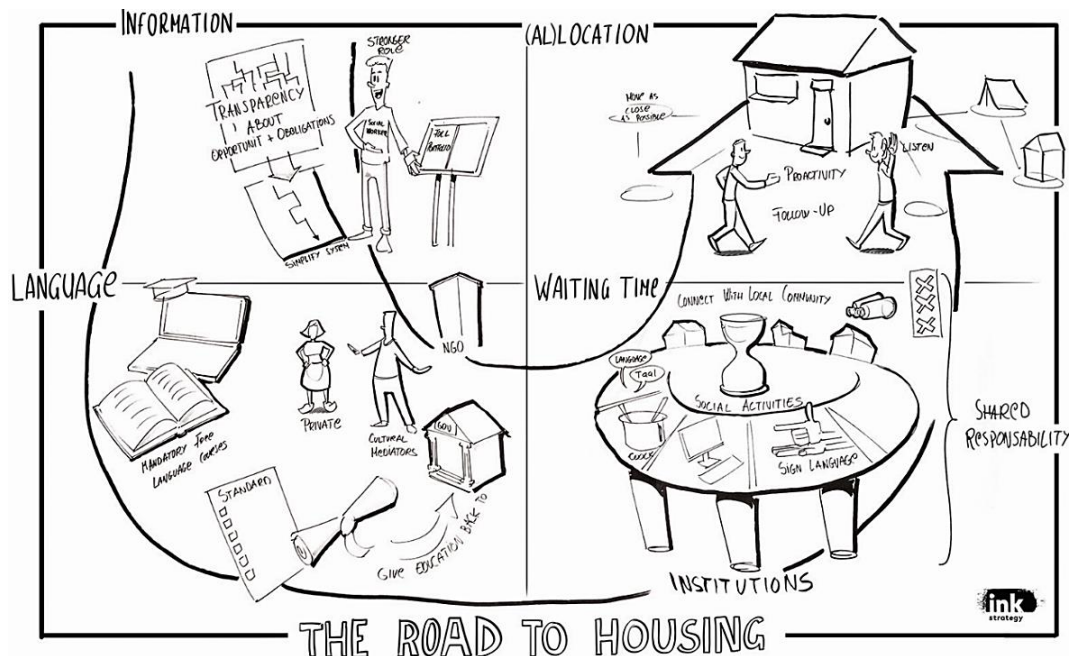
For instance, local authorities would be responsible for developing actions stimulating one on one exchanges and the interaction of individuals with other members of the local community. Pilot projects involving ex-refugees ('buddies') could really help integrating migrants and refugees. Also, 'giving a voice' and providing opportunities for sharing ideas and issues could be considered in parallel to the promotion of self-organisation.



Participation of civil society in non-formal education is key as it contributes to capitalise knowledge on civic education. It would indeed help to connect people and give a voice to migrants and refugees who might feel disoriented or disconnected from society.

1.3.4 Workshop 3: Housing 1

Housing is perceived as one of the most complex issues for migrants and refugees. Access to information, language barrier and waiting time may render the road to housing long and difficult.



As information regarding housing opportunities is sometimes lacking or only accessible in the language of the host country, it may be difficult for migrants and refugees to access the relevant information necessary for accessing housing. Overall, one of the most fundamental needs is to ensure full transparency when providing and communicating housing-related opportunities and obligations. Translated documents or websites from national competent authorities could be very useful, and could also be used to provide feedback to decision-makers. Moreover, intermediaries such as social workers remain key actors who should be empowered and further trained to provide informed advice and help to newcomers.

Language is a recurrent issue for migrants and refugees as they often don't master the language of the host country. In order to tackle what is perceived by many as a language barrier, mandatory free languages courses and cultural mediators could be put in place.

Long waiting time is often perceived as exhausting and hence can frequently lead to feelings including frustration, loneliness or even exclusion. To tackle this issue, it would be very helpful to develop some activities which on a short term may help migrants to find

some distraction and feel useful. Activities could be organised by public authorities and could involve cooking classes, language courses, sign language, etc. Connecting with local communities through social activities have also an advantage on the long term as they can help building relationships thus creating a network and maybe developing skills. Migrants' proactivity is maybe the key aspect of the solution as it contributes to the feeling of belonging.

1.3.5 Workshop 4: Housing 2

When arriving to a new city, migrants and refugees may face issues such as the language barrier, the lack of transparent information and the challenge of dealing with bureaucracy or developing a network of acquaintances and contacts. As housing is not among the policy competences of the European Union, solutions and initiatives can vary greatly across Member States. In addition, housing costs and levels of difficulty are perceived as significantly different depending on the country where a migrant arrives. Most notably, discrimination and segregation are potential risks where access to a shelter is more difficult.



A starting point would be the promotion of mutual cooperation initiatives between migrants and hosts which could be described as somewhat 'buddy system': thanks to this special relation, the migrant or refugee could address himself to a dedicated person or volunteer who would ensure guidance and access to information on housing legislation and opportunities. Accessibility of housing is perceived as a priority that host countries should ensure, as it is a condition of facilitating – if not even ensuring – the inclusion of migrants and refugees in local communities. Concretely, local authorities could rebuild vacant old houses or restore them with a view to either rent or sell them to migrants and

refugees at special conditions. One way for the European level to facilitate such process would be to develop guidelines and standards on this type of housing system.

1.3.6 Workshop 5: Reception



Reception has a crucial role as the ‘front door’ to integration of migrants and refugees. One of the main challenges is to ensure that hosting societies are inclusive and succeed in building bridges and connections to migrants and refugees. Concretely, this may start by ensuring that housing and reception facilities are made accessible at the time of arrival and that basic information on obligations and opportunities are easily accessible in the city of arrival. Conversely, waiting time and placement in temporary shelter solutions may prove difficult to accept and manage for migrants. That is why the participation in social activities and access to learning opportunities – including language learning – should be facilitated by local authorities. This is even more so as the language barrier is perceived as one of the main obstacles to integration.

A key role is played by interpreters who can facilitate communication but also identify specific needs or personal issues of migrants. In some cases, opportunities for exchange in the native language shed light on more serious conditions such as mental illness or other psychological or physical issues.

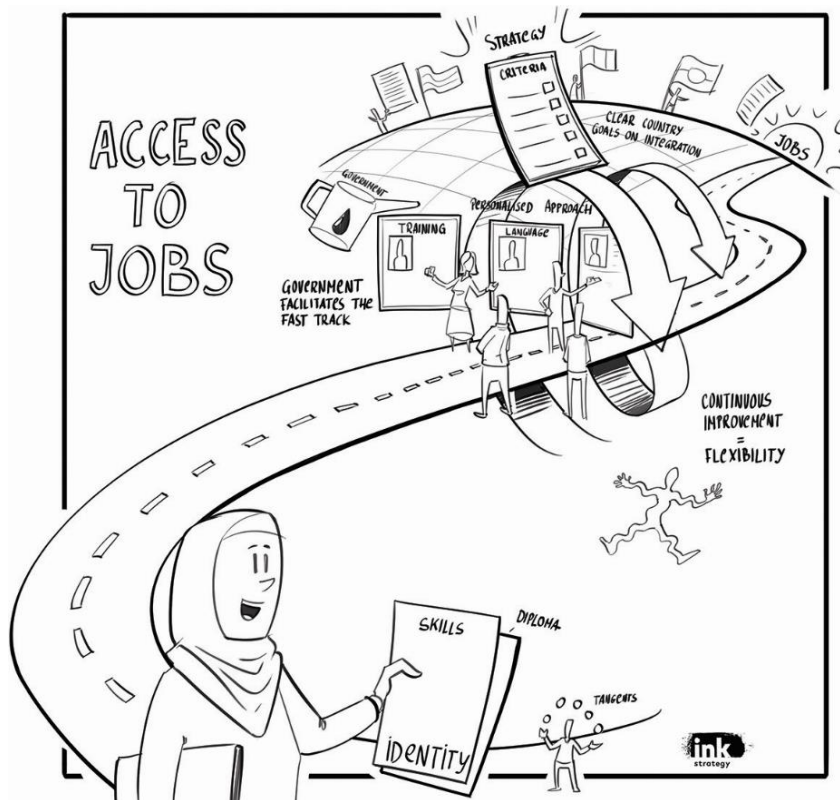
As already noticed, standards and practices of reception conditions may vary considerably between southern and northern European countries. A possible solution to

be considered is the creation of a one-stop-shop where data and information could be easily access by migrants and refugees.

1.3.7 Workshop 6: Work 1

Access to work for a migrant or a refugee can at times be complex or take a considerable amount of time. In order to tackle this issue, a targeted strategy should be set up at national level, including clear objectives and actions on integration.

At city level, public authorities should encourage the development of targeted and personal approaches to individuals, which could facilitate and accelerate the access to the labour market. For instance, this support could be given through training and language courses, as well as through mentoring for preparing job interviews of the drafting of a curriculum vitae.

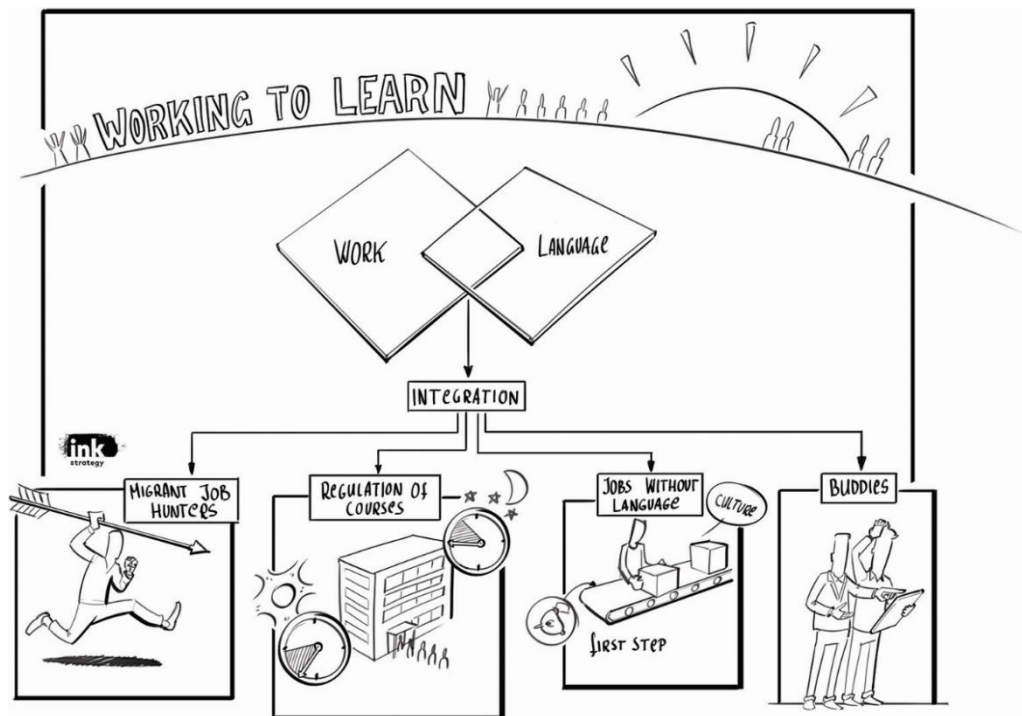


1.3.8 Workshop 7: Work 2

Work and language are very often seen as pillars for integration. Language can be used as a channel motivation and energy into work opportunities. However, challenges do exist and include the difficulty to envisage a clear career path, the risk of loneliness and isolation as well as the dependence of individuals from help and local support.

Various programmes and tools exist to address the variety of needs and expectations of refugees. Integration into the labour market could be facilitated, for example, through migrant job hunters and regular languages courses. Alternatives to be considered in the short-term include the application for jobs that do not necessarily require a high language level, or the support through a “buddy system”.

Since language remains a key barrier and that its knowledge is an accelerator for inclusion, free language courses could be considered as valuable opportunities to facilitate the integration of migrants and refugees into the host communities. In some cases, integration is facilitated through personal networks and the local diaspora. The latter is indeed a useful tool for accessing professional and financial support but may limit integration into the wider society. In this sense, the creation of a group of volunteers could facilitate and promote exchanges among migrants and local communities.

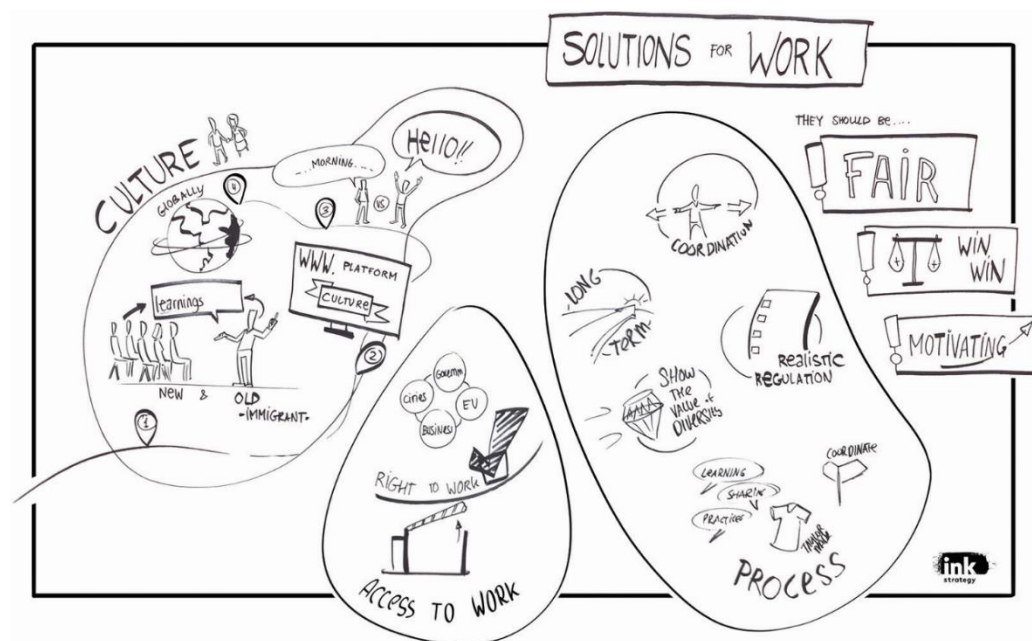


1.3.9 Workshop 8: Work 3

As noted before, migrants and refugees face difficulties when looking for a job. Access to work may indeed become a lengthy process in which lacking or partial information may discourage people from continue looking.

Better regulation and coordination at national level with possibly an EU-level harmonisation of policies could be considered as a solution, as it would help addressing the frequent lack of clarity and fairness observed in several cases across Europe. Solutions should be fair, provide concrete benefits for the interested parties and motivating for both job hunters and job seekers. Furthermore, promoting migrant ownership and sharing data and good practices between stakeholders are deemed crucial when searching for a job.

Solutions could be envisaged at three levels, culture, access to work and process. Culture refers to the fact that new immigrants should be able to learn from other former migrants via, e.g. relevant networks and social activities including language learning. This would have an impact on the mentality of the newcomer as he would feel more integrated and therefore more motivated to find a job. In general, access to work should be a right promoted at local, national and EU levels. Finally elements such as coordination, regulation, promotion of diversities and values, and the use of tailor-made approaches through learning and sharing practices could be very valuable for job seekers.

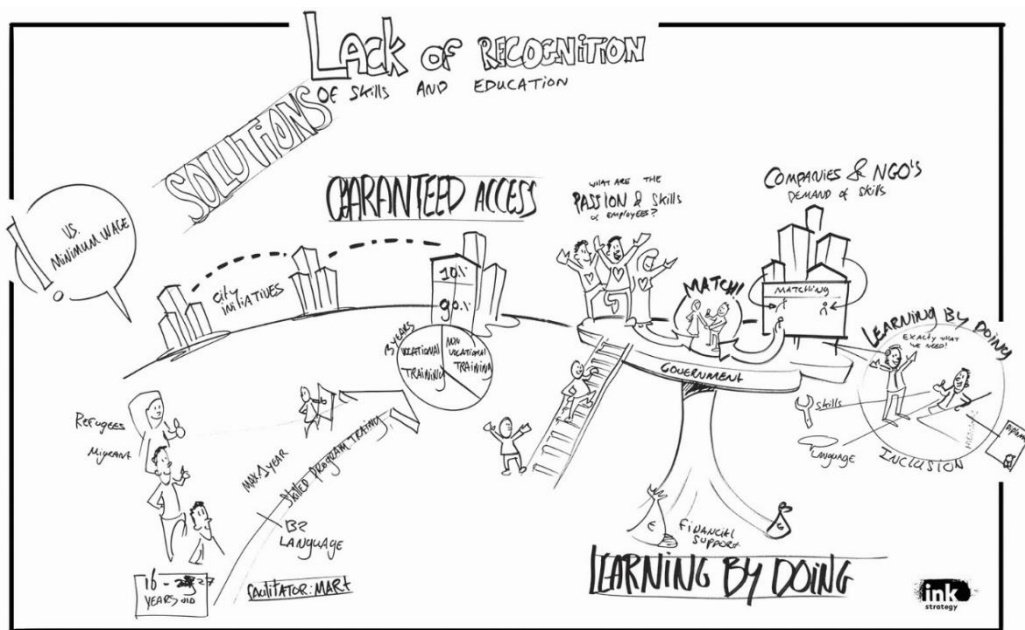


1.3.10 Workshop 9: Work 4

One of the issues which is sometimes encountered by young migrants and refugees when entering the labour market is the lack of recognition of skills and education. In fact, individuals have not always been enrolled in educational systems or have not had the opportunity to obtain a diploma. Language also represents also an obstacle to enter the labour market. In addition, the lack of connections and networks may hinder the process

of job finding. Another element is the considerable gap between northern and southern European cities which do not always offer the same opportunities to migrants. Therefore, acquisition of skills and competences in the host country may not always be possible, which in turn has an effect to the risk of remaining unemployed.

One possible way to tackle this issue could be the creation of a training programme designed for migrants and refugees of from 16 to 27 years old. National government would provide financial opportunities, while cities would create and promote language courses as pre-conditions to training programmes, 'buddy systems', job-hunting support and facilitation of career opportunities in selected companies and/or NGOs.



Language courses would be organised to enable migrants and refugees to better follow the integration programmes and to facilitate their integration into society. In this frame, the completion of a learning course would anticipate the starting of the integration programme. For instance, a one year programme or a longer programme of three years could include both vocational training and non-vocational training. This solution would give migrants the necessary knowledge to increase the chance of finding and keeping a stable job.

Another solution could be the creation of a platform involving different stakeholders such as public authorities, the private sector, NGOs, associations, refugees etc. The idea would be to manage demand and offer for work by giving the possibility to migrants to create a profile with their skills and education and to look for job opportunities. The

system would ensure that companies can directly access and consult profiles of job seekers.

Finally, there is a need to reflect about the access to work of vulnerable groups (LGBT, elderly, etc.) as they are among the categories most at risk when it comes to social exclusion and discrimination.

1.4 Refugee Conference – Solution directions by Ink Strategy

Based on the results of the different workshops Ink Strategy made a presentation which gives an overview of the main actions governments could do to contribute to the inclusion of migrants and refugees according to migrants and refugees themselves.

[Go to presentation.](#)

