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REFUGEE INTEGRATION MILLENNIALS DO IT DIFFERENTLY

FACTSHEET



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INTRODUCTION

Integrating refugees into European society and structures stands at the centre of political debates across the European Union. Significantly, while established national and regional institutions appear to be struggling with these challenges, Europe's younger generation is doing things differently. With fresh ideas and different perspectives on the world, millennials have been testing out innovative initiatives and approaches to help refugees become part of local communities in many parts of Europe.

Given its decision to accept the largest number of refugees of any European country, the spotlight is clearly on Germany, where many exciting integration projects have sprung up since 2015. Yet, one needs only to delve a little deeper to see that innovation is taking place across the continent. Young people in the Netherlands, Greece, the United Kingdom, Finland and beyond are coming up with similarly successful tools to facilitate integration.

Friends of Europe is very much part of the Europe-wide conversation on refugee integration. This factsheet is based on our open source-based research on the many ways in which young Europeans are driving the integration process through private initiatives and projects. Having scrutinised a number of such impressive millennial-led initiatives, we took an independent decision to select five projects which we believe are transforming the current rather damaging narrative on refugees that too often portrays them as helpless victims. In contrast, the projects we have identified treat refugees as empowered individuals who are actively working to speed up their own integration into local communities.

Each project is unique in its purpose, location and outcome. A common thread, however, is that refugees and local communities are working together as partners. Rather than being infantilised or regarded as mere statistics, refugees are seen as individuals, each with their own skills, ambitions and ideas. Our publication aims to shed light on how these projects can help people to feel at home in Europe. We believe that there is much here that others, including established institutions, policymakers and funders, can learn from.

The information contained in this publication is by no means exhaustive: we have relied on details from news sources, government websites, Eurostat, UNHCR and more, as well as the websites of the projects under discussion with inside insights from the projects' organisers when provided. Also, given that many admirable German initiatives are already well-known, we have selected less-publicised projects from other European countries, some of which are not necessarily known for their pro-refugee policies.



BREAD & ROSES

Location: London

Purpose: To prepare women refugees for employment through floristry

Why it's innovative: The project provides training in a creative and social setting that builds trust and confidence

Despite being an incredibly multicultural and vast city, London can be exceptionally isolating for any newcomer. Particularly for those lacking proficiency in English, integrating into the city can be overwhelming. Moreover, the United Kingdom on the whole ranks poorly against other European countries when it comes to its intake of refugees and asylum-seekers.

- On average, the UK rejects 62% of people claiming asylum status.¹
- Of the 70% of appeals lodged against initial asylum decisions, the UK rejects 63%.²
- According to asylum law in the UK, asylum-seekers may only request permission to work once they have waited longer than 12 months for a decision on their claim.³

Examining the data shows that refugees and asylum-seekers face many obstacles in integrating both socially and economically. These obstacles are further enhanced for women, who, as compared to their male counterparts, often lack adequate English language skills and recognised qualifications. As a result, women are often pushed into the informal economy or jobs in which they earn below the living wage.

Olivia Head and Sneha Jani, two young social entrepreneurs, set up Bread & Roses in 2016 with this in mind. Offering trainings for refugee women in floristry, Head and Jani provide them with a space in which to improve their English, build their confidence and forge social connections. The focus is specifically on women refugees, as they often face further obstacles to finding jobs, such as the high cost of childcare, and tend to have less confidence and previous experience than men.

- The majority of women taking part in the initiative hail from countries across Africa and the Middle East.
- The bouquets and posies made in the workshops are sold to individuals and organisations, thus providing funds through which Bread & Roses can continue to run their workshops.
- At some of the sessions, an employment advisor helps the women with CV writing, interview techniques and finding volunteer opportunities.

Through training in floristry, Bread & Roses addresses social and economic issues and helps to restore or build self-worth in women who have experienced significant hardship. Taking their name from the political slogan coined by pioneering American feminist Rose Schneiderman – “The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too” – Bread & Roses provides the opportunity for women not only to work, but to flourish in what are often very difficult circumstances.

As of publication time, Bread & Roses had paused delivery to assess the initiative's impact and further development.



STARTBLOK

In the Netherlands, most refugees live in reception centres until they receive a decision on their residency application. But it is not only newcomers struggling with the housing situation in the Netherlands: cities like Amsterdam have become increasingly expensive for locals to live in, particularly students and young workers who cannot afford the rents.

- Reception centres are often located far from residential areas, thus preventing interaction between newcomers and locals.⁴
- If granted asylum, refugees move to a municipality which provides them with social housing.⁵
- Amsterdam, in particular, is the most expensive city for locals to live in, with a student room costing an average of €31 per square meter.⁶

Startblok provides a novel approach to housing in the Dutch capital. In cooperation with Socius Wonen and the municipality of Amsterdam, housing organisation De Key developed the project which offers housing units and communal living spaces for young Dutch citizens and refugees.

- Startblok offers 565 housing units consisting of 463 studios and 102 rooms in multi-person apartments. The studios are about 23 square meters and have their own facilities such as a small kitchen, bathroom and toilet. Each floor also has a communal living space for social activities and there are two large outside areas surrounded by greenery.
- Anyone between the ages of 18 and 28 is eligible to apply by filling out a questionnaire and stating their motivation for wanting to join this project.
- All residents pay the same rent and share responsibility for maintenance of the buildings and grounds through a self-management system.
- The housing complex also hires residents as project managers who subsequently earn a salary from Socius Wonen for their job.
- Startblok organises joint activities, like movie nights and football matches, and encourages intercultural exchange through a buddy system.
- In the beginning, information meetings for the neighbourhood were held, so that nearby residents could ask questions, meet tenants and generally learn more about the project.

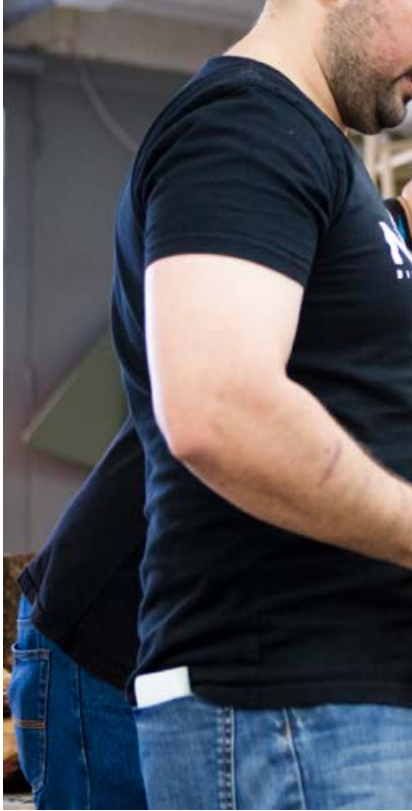
The municipality of Amsterdam has leased the plot of land to De Key at a below-market price for a limited period of nine years. After that, a new residential neighbourhood is planned for the area.

As young refugees and locals live together in affordable housing which is self-managed, Startblok is providing a unique solution to a variety of issues. By providing the right setting, Startblok allows integration to take place in an organic manner thus allowing for newcomers to feel a part of their new home more quickly.

Location: Amsterdam

Purpose: To provide an affordable communal living space for youngsters, both Dutch and refugees

Why it's innovative: Locals and refugees co-manage a communal living space



STARTUP REFUGEES

Unlike in other European countries, large-scale immigration of refugees is a relatively recent phenomenon in Finland, starting with the arrival of many Somali refugees in the 1990s.

- Cost of living in the country is particularly high as compared to the European average, with one source reporting that in 2017 Finland fell eighth in a comparison of European price levels.⁷
- In 2015, Finland saw an 882% increase in the number of first-time refugee applicants, the highest percentage in the EU.⁸
- Hostility to migrants in Finland has risen, with the number of hate crimes increasing by 50% from 2015 to 2016.⁹

Feeling that not enough has been done to help refugees integrate into Finnish society, Riku Rantala and Tunna Milonoff created Startup Refugees in 2015. Aware that reception centres can be tiresome and dull, the organisation aims to make this time more productive by providing people with the means to start their own micro-businesses.

- Startup Refugees acts as a networking group, connecting people at reception centres with investors and mentors who can equip them with the necessary skills and training to successfully start their own businesses.
- Companies and organisations already signed up include Supercell, Microsoft and the Finnish Interior Ministry, as well as communications and public relations agencies, universities and research institutes.
- They currently have over 500 network members and have supported 44 businesses through their business programme. Such support has included networking, funding, accounting and mentoring, as well as organising events to create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for asylum-seekers.
- Through the network, refugees can seek legal help, advice on bureaucracy, mentors, networking and funding for their business ideas.
- As of May 2018, they had collected the profiles of over 2,000 newcomers and proceeded to offer them new skills and job opportunities. This has led to the employment of 340 individuals.

By partnering with investors, companies and governmental bodies, Startup Refugees highlights how widespread collaboration can help refugees to quickly become entrepreneurs and economically active members of society. Moreover, in placing emphasis on the talent, skills and innovation of refugees, this organisation demonstrates how accepting refugees in Finland is a 'brain gain', as they bring new business ideas to the country.

Location: Finland

Purpose: To match refugees with employment opportunities

Why it's innovative: It has partnered with both the private and public sector for training and job-matching



KHORA COMMUNITY CENTRE

As a country at the southern borders of the Schengen zone, Greece has received and continues to receive a high number of refugees who arrive to Europe by boat.

- From 2015-2017, 1.3 million people fleeing their home countries travelled through Greece on towards Europe.¹⁰
- As a consequence of the Dublin Regulation, a European Union law which states that the first EU country in which an asylum-seeker arrives must be the country which processes that asylum application,¹¹ many refugees are legally not allowed to move beyond Greece. This has left, and continues to leave, many in limbo, waiting in Greece until they can go elsewhere.
- As of early 2018, there were still more than 60,000 refugees stranded across the mainland and islands.¹²

Khora Community Centre provides services where the Greek state falls short, as the centre is run by volunteers, most of whom were involved in supporting the arrivals of refugees on the Greek islands in 2015 and 2016. An eight-story building, it provides a range of spaces and services which are used by approximately 700 people each day. This includes a legal assessment team, a workshop space, a café, music and poetry nights, language classes, a library, a women's space and a music school.

- Together, the Khora kitchen and café serve approximately 400-600 people over six days each week.
- They offer 20 language classes, including daily courses in English, German, Greek and French. Weekend visitors can attend Arabic, Spanish, Farsi and Turkish classes.
- Since November 2016, Khora has utilised its basement as a free shop, giving away donated clothes and basic items such as soap and blankets.
- Khora has been developing an urban farming project which aims to grow food on the roof of the building in order to be more self-sufficient in their kitchen operations.
- Khora staff also provide visitors with information about other services available in the area. In collaboration with the Aegean Solidarity Network, they provide information booklets in English, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu and French with details about vital local services, including a map pinpointing their locations.

Recognising that refugees are often made to feel like mere statistics, decisions involving the centre are made by volunteers and refugees alike. In doing this, the centre provides the services most needed for refugees to feel they are governing their own lives.

Location: Athens

Purpose: To provide a space where people from a diverse set of backgrounds, cultures and languages can learn, work, create, socialise and relax

Why it's innovative: They offer a one-stop community centre serving a full spectrum of needs and services



REFUGEE FOOD FESTIVAL

More than one million people applied for asylum in Europe in 2015, as well as in 2016, the highest number of applications since the Second World War.¹³

- While Syria has been the main country of citizenship of asylum-seekers in Europe, others come from: Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Burundi, Congo, Somalia, Turkey, Eritrea and elsewhere.¹⁴
- Among EU member states, Germany has received the highest number of asylum applications, followed by Italy and France.¹⁵

A world tour of food showed Louis Martin and Marine Mandrila that food is a universal means of communication. They mobilised that concept by founding the Refugee Food Festival in Paris, an initiative aimed at integrating refugees in France while simultaneously exposing French citizens to new tastes. On 20 June 2016, World Refugee Day, the first edition of the festival took place with 11 Parisian restaurants hosting eight refugee chefs over a period of five days.

- During the festival, refugee chefs take over the kitchens of the restaurants involved to showcase the cuisine of their home countries.
- Approximately 1,000 people participated in the initiative's first edition.
- With the assistance of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the festival expanded in 2017 to take place in 12 cities across Europe, from Madrid to Rome.
- In 2017, more than 10,000 diners enjoyed the festival, tasting food from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq and Cameroon.

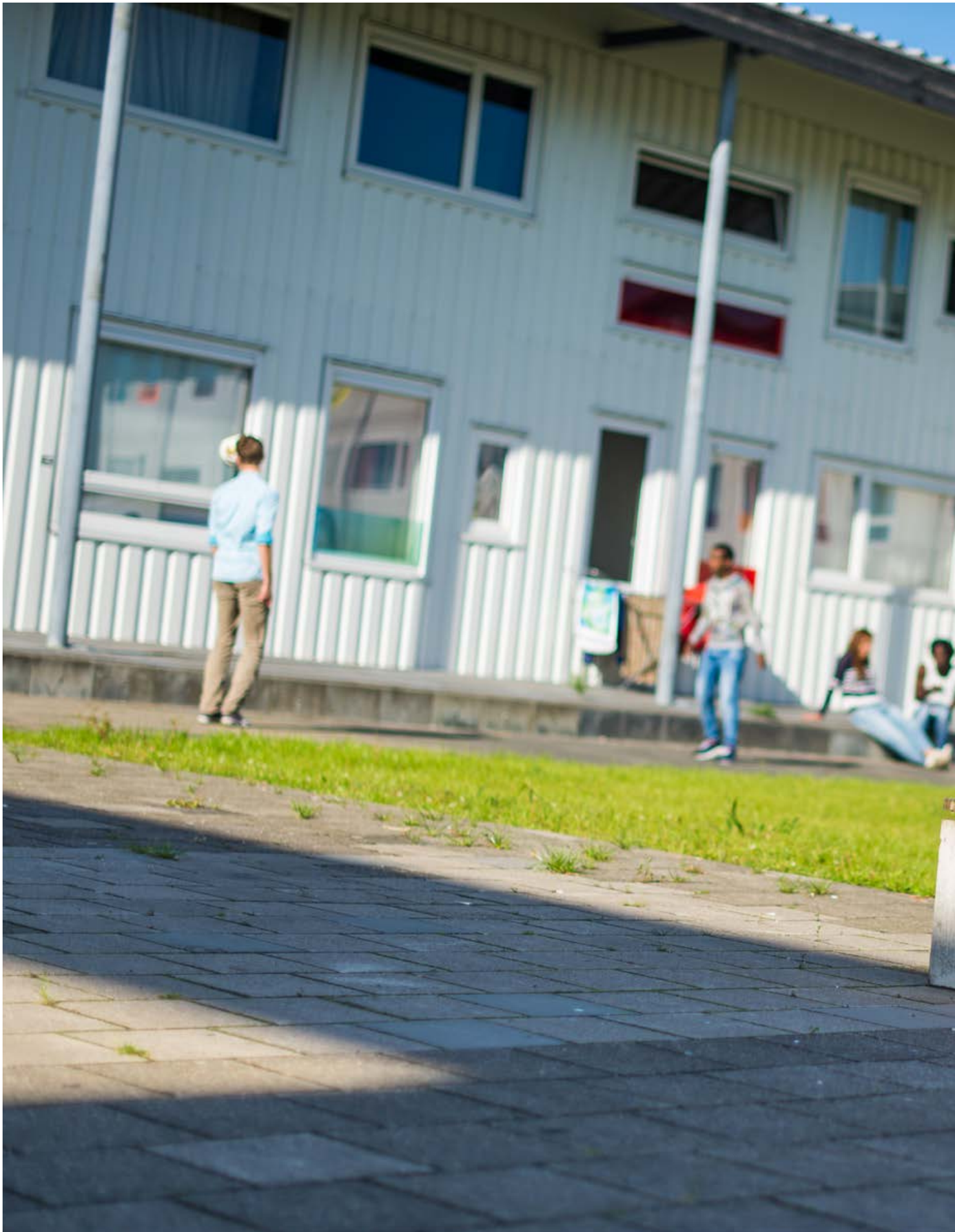
In 2018, the festival has plans to extend beyond Europe to the United States, Canada, Brazil and Australia.

Following the event, the organisers meet with the chefs as well as the restaurateurs to discuss potential employment opportunities. In this way, the festival is able to achieve three things: it exposes local citizens to new flavours and cuisines; it showcases refugee talent; and it provides job opportunities for the chefs who participate.

Location: Europe-wide

Purpose: To showcase the cuisine, skills and talents of refugees and their countries of origin while enabling them to secure a job

Why it's innovative: The project adopts the notion of a festival for integration purposes, enabling restaurateurs to open their doors to diverse foods made by refugees





CONCLUSION

The five projects showcased in this factsheet demonstrate a diverse set of ways in which integration can be facilitated across European cities and states. Despite cultural and linguistic differences, what is common to all projects is their focus on collaboration, whether among newcomers and citizens or between the public and private sectors. In addition, all projects in one way or another promote the concepts of self-management and autonomy. In doing so, these and similar initiatives contribute to changing the downbeat refugee narrative which is currently based on victimhood towards a story of empowerment and personal agency.

These and other initiatives certainly cannot take the place of larger and more ambitious state-led integration programmes. But they are making an enormous contribution to helping refugees to become part of their new environment. Policymakers should think about how to borrow from these examples and engage these millennials who are thinking differently about integration policy and funding. Very importantly at a time when many in Europe are succumbing to the anti-refugee policies favoured by populists, young people are showing their commitment to building an open, inclusive and multicultural Europe.

ENDNOTES

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- 6 'Amsterdamse Kamers blijven duurst per vierkante meter'. Het Parool, 7 October 2017. <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/amsterdamse-kamers-blijven-duurst-per-vierkante-meter~a4520268/> Accessed 10 April 2018.
- 7 'Asylum in Finland'. Asyluminfofinland.info, 10 November 2017. <http://asyluminfofinland.info/you-can-survive-in-an-expensive-country-if-you-find-work-for-yourself/> Accessed 10 April 2018.
- 8 Sollety, Marion. 'Finland's open door roils its politics'. Politico, 6 June 2017. <https://www.politico.eu/article/finland-juha-sipila-keeps-hardline-nationalist-true-finns-at-arms-length/> Accessed 10 April 2018.
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