Promoting best practices to prevent racism and xenophobia towards forced migrants through community building
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INTRODUCTION

In Croatia, I Get You has witnessed various civil society organizations and spontaneously assembled citizens, who provided a wide range of services to forced migrants. Due to the objective circumstances - the arrival of a large number of forced migrants at one time and their relatively short retention in Croatia, most of the actions were focused on providing direct assistance such as the distribution of clothes, food, hygiene supplies and providing psychosocial support. The main reason for short retention of forced migrants in the territory lies in the fact that Croatia is perceived as a country of transit on their way to Western European countries.

Jesuit Refugee Service Croatia (JRS Croatia) works as a part of the larger JRS Southeast Europe network, and it has a daily presence in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers outside of Zagreb where it provides psychosocial support, legal consulting, Croatian language classes, computer courses and women’s empowerment workshops to the people living in the centre. JRS Croatia is also focused on providing support and services to people with international protection in Croatia to facilitate their integration process. In addition, JRS Croatia implements projects and public awareness raising campaigns that engage in advocacy activities for forced migrants’ rights in Croatia and to raise awareness about the issues that they face.

JRS Croatia, after researching different initiatives that showed hospitality and welcome to forced migrants who have come to Croatia in the past few years, has seen that these local initiatives have been the primary actors in the reception and societal perception of the so-called refugee crisis. First, they have provided support and service provision to improve the quality of life for the refugees and forced migrants in Croatia. Local initiatives have also raised awareness across the country and promoted values of solidarity and tolerance in Croatian society by promoting their activities, encouraging local citizens to volunteer and engaging in communication campaigns.

Most organisations that are working with the forced migrants in Croatia operate in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers in Zagreb and Kutina by providing services and activities on the basis of contracts concluded with the Ministry of the Interior. Nevertheless, I Get You found 14 initiatives, during the Mapping Phase of the research, aimed at not only at providing the direct assistance to forced migrants but also building a culture of welcome in local communities.

During the project, JRS Croatia contacted initiatives to know more about their work, activities and mission. Our findings show that all the initiatives are making a real impact through their work, despite their relatively small size and lack of financial support. All of them have shown great commitment to respect for human rights and dignity of forced migrants coming to Croatia by connecting them to services and local Croatian citizens who are involved in these Community Building Initiatives (CBIs).

1.1 CONTEXT: RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA TOWARDS FORCED MIGRANTS IN CROATIA

From September 2015 to March 2016 Croatia felt the effects of the so-called refugee crisis, when more than 670,000 people passed through Croatia on their way to Western Europe. During this time, NGOs working with forced migrants and many civic groups engaged in aid efforts by providing direct support and services to the forced migrants. From the early days of people transiting along the Balkan route, NGOs, volunteers and self-organized groups of local citizens hurried to the borders to help and provide assistance.

The issue of the so-called refugee crisis in Croatia was present on both political and social agendas and the media closely covered the situation, especially focused on the events in the eastern part of Croatia. The primary political attitude and
messages that were conveyed to other European Union decision makers was that Croatia will not build walls nor put wires across its’ borders. In addition, the media reports displayed narratives of courage and promoted solidarity with the migrants passing through Croatia.

When in April 2016 the Croatian borders were closed and the transit of forced migrants came to an end stopped, a new concern arose. At the same time, this moment triggered more returns to Croatia under the Dublin mechanism of both individuals and families as Croatia was the first country in which they were registered. The Croatian media referred to these issues at the time as “migration from the opposite direction.” The returned people were placed in one of the two reception centres for asylum seekers in Zagreb and Kutina. According to JRS Croatia records, currently, in Croatia there are approximately 650 people waiting for an asylum decision while 360 people officially have international protection.

Although Croatian people showed solidarity and empathy with forced migrants, it appears that certain changes in public support and opinion happened the moment when the context in Croatia shifted from people transiting through the territory to people being returned and staying in the country as they were not permitted to go any further. We have witnessed increases in hate speech and growing racism and xenophobia in Croatia. According to research from the Centre for Peace Studies conducted in 2016, Croatian society is strongly influenced by the process of securitization of migration in Europe. This seems to strengthen feelings of insecurity in Europe and other issues beyond forced migration such as terrorist threats.

Also of importance is media responsibility for reporting as they are the first message sent to local communities. After analysing newspapers headlines, articles and TV reports we can conclude that while the media in Croatia tries to promote values of solidarity and tolerance, some outlets invoke a more negative narrative. This is exemplified in a report from the GONG on media coverage during the increased numbers of forced migrants in Croatia during the so-called crisis. GONG reports the worst stereotypes and prejudices, containing highly emotional negative assessments, are directed towards ethnic, national and religious minorities.

In its latest report on Croatia, Amnesty International stated that during 2016 and 2017 nationalistic rhetoric and hate speech targeting specific groups including refugees was increasingly severely present. They reported, “Civil society groups recorded increased instances of the media and public officials ‘evoking fascist ideology’ from the past by promoting the use of inflammatory iconography and generally fuelling an anti-minority sentiment.” Particularly, from 2015 onward, the internet, particularly social media networks like Facebook, became the new forum for hate speech to occur. In response to this, two NGOs in Croatia, GONG and the Human Rights House, have launched a website where one can report discriminatory messages and hate speech called ‘Dosta je Mržnje’ (Enough Hate).

Concerning the legal framework in Croatia, hate speech is covered by the Criminal Code (Article 325 ‘Public Encouragement of Violence and Hate’) and the areas of discrimination and racism by the Anti-Discrimination Act. Criminal acts of public incitement to violence and hatred in the courts are barely apparent, and up until now, there is no verdict that would condemn hate speech on the basis of the Criminal Code. The latest ombudsman report for 2016 on the issues

5  http://www.dostajemrznje.org/
6  http://ombudsman.hr/attachments/article/1147/Istra%C5%BEivanje%20-%20diskriminacija%202016.pdf
INTRODUCTION

of discrimination shows there are widespread negative attitudes towards forced migrants in Croatia. Currently, a National Plan for combating discrimination is in the development process. This strategic document will set out the priorities of the Croatian government towards building a comprehensive system of protection against discrimination in Croatia.

“Zagreb 041 is a football club formed two and a half years ago and is competing in the third league of Zagreb county. Since its founding the club was involved in the process of integrating forced migrants and today some of them train with us, furthermore, at the beginning, even our coach was a refugee. In first months of 2017, we have started a school of football for boys and girls, and since our football field is in Dugave, we have chosen to introduce ourselves to the neighbourhood school, as well as to the refugee centre that is on the same block. Our school of football is set on different foundations than other clubs. We have chosen not to chastise titles or create champions, rather to make an effort and offer children an opportunity to do sports and to be happy about it.

Right away about fifteen boys from the reception centre for asylum seekers joined us. The first few trainings we worked on introductions and got to know each other since it was harder to do serious training with the boys who just came to Croatia and did not speak Croatian or English. Apart from football skills, we were developing teamwork as well as mutual respect toward fellow players, adversaries and the female coach. My experience in last six months of trainings has been wonderful.

Today, just six months later the boys are a part of our club. They come to our games, cheer for our club and declare with proudness their position as players. They have learned all the fan songs, and often at the games they warn older players about inadequate behaviour, foul play or bad language toward opposite team. That means a lot to us since solidarity, friendship, healthy competition with respect to opponents and teamwork are the values that we want to bring to football. Therefore, we are glad to have members that cherish those values deeply and will spread them.

As our club is based on direct democracy and each member has an equal voice and decides on everything, we hope that our young players remain in Croatia and once they reach maturity they will become members and the driving force behind the club. After all it is their club, that was created for them and all those who are interested in promoting our values.”
Methodology

The Jesuit Refugee Service in Croatia used two main methodologies to identify and promote the best practices of local communities against xenophobia and racism and to raise public awareness on discrimination against refugees and migrants: first the Mapping Phase and then the Qualitative Interview Phase. The aim of these methodologies was, firstly, to provide a broad picture of existing CBIs in terms of numbers and statistics and, secondly, to take a deeper dive to learn more about specific CBIs that emerged from the mapped sample.

2.1. MAPPING PHASE

The target group of the research were the CBIs aimed at combating xenophobia and racism towards forced migration in Croatian society. JRS Croatia was already aware of most of the organisations that participated in I Get You and completed the questionnaire, as we have cooperated with several organisations. We are pleased to say that all the initiatives that had been contacted were willing to participate by filling out the questionnaire.

In the Mapping Phase JRS Croatia collected data about initiatives that were focused on providing services and motivating local people to show welcome to forced migrants in Croatia. The I Get You website served as the main point of data collection as people who worked with CBIs or the general public could ‘Nominate an Initiative’ by filling out the electronic questionnaire in Croatian. At the same time, JRS Croatia meet with people involved in the CBIs and talk to them to share their experience on working with the forced migrants, the results of these meetings were published as personal testimonies on the I Get You website.

The methodology for achieving the project goals, as conceived in the description of the project, relied primarily on the support of the Croatian general public. It was expected that local citizens, after seeing the campaign in the media and on the website, would nominate various initiatives they consider to be the best practices for combating racism and xenophobia. Despite promoting I Get You broadly, the general public were not as responsive as we anticipated, and we decided to take more proactive approach. So JRS Croatia started to look for programs and projects targeted at refugee and migrants and contacted the initiative and organizations that were implementing them to complete the mapping questionnaire. This proved to be a better method because we found, through a detailed internet and social media search, more initiatives then we previously knew existed and increased our network of contacts. After finding the initiatives we contacted them by phone and email, explaining I Get You and asking them to complete the mapping questionnaire on the I Get You website. Some initiatives preferred to fill in the questionnaire themselves, JRS Croatia gave assistance to others asking questions from the questionnaire and entering their answers for them.

The results of the quantitative phase were published in the Croatian Mapping Report in May 2017. This report is available on the I Get You website in electronic version.

2.2 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW PHASE

After mapping the initiatives, qualitative interviews were carried out with the people involved in five CBIs. We decided to focus and research more...
those initiatives because during the Mapping Phase they proved to be including the most forced migrants in their activities and they showed to have a very proactive approach and response to I Get You.

The qualitative interviews were conducted with one staff member, a volunteer and a refugee from CBIs and during this phase, JRS Croatia received help a volunteer to do these interviews. Before conducting the interviews, the volunteer was introduced to the project, made aware of the goals and the methodology for conducting the interviews. making them aware of the goals of the project and how they should conduct the interviews.

After collecting the qualitative information from the interviews, JRS Croatia’s research team entered all the answers from the interviews into the evaluation grid based on the Delphi criteria.

2.3. LIMITATION

Even if the methodology of the Mapping Phase was well designed, it did not prove to be appropriate to find relevant local initiatives. The concept of having citizens nominating CBIs was not applicable to the Croatian context as the public were not sufficiently motivated in doing so. That is why the alternative method, which consisted of JRS Croatia contacting initiatives and helping them fill out the survey when needed, was more successful.

The biggest difficulty encountered was that only a relatively small number of initiatives in Croatia met the criteria of the project- being that they primarily focused on creating spaces of encounter and building relationships between local Croatian citizens and forced migrants. Most of the initiatives in Croatia are primarily centred around providing direct services or emergency assistance to migrants. Despite this, JRS Croatia identified 14 possible initiatives in Croatia that were doing the work of community building, and in the end, 13 of those initiatives were mapped in the research.

Also, an additional challenge for conducting the research smoothly was language. Since I Get You was not able to provide the financial support for the translators, all the interviews conducted with forced migrants were in English. Since the forced migrants did not always have a fluent level of English, many of the questions had to be simplified.

A group photo on a day trip to the Croatian countryside as part of intercultural activities organised by JRS South-East Europe (Photo: JRS SEE).
CBI bike repair workshop in Zagreb (Photo: JRS South-East Europe).
Data Findings

3.1. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FROM MAPPING PHASE

13 CBIs completed the quantitative mapping questionnaire in Croatia. By analysing the data collected from the online mapping questionnaire, we discovered the following significant variables: modes of financing, number of users, gender structure of the beneficiaries, length of stay in Croatia and types of target groups.

The most obvious variables were the small-scale financial resources available to the majority of the initiatives. Notably, out of 13 initiatives, 11 had an annual budget under 25,000 Euros, which was the lowest possible choice in the questionnaire, with one CBI having a budget in the range of 25,000 – 50,000 Euros. 53 percent of the initiative focuses on families as target groups of beneficiaries, while the rest of the initiatives are open to all types of users, regardless of age, gender or family status.

The CBIs were very diverse with the number of participants they work with, with the smallest working with 12 people and the largest working with 851. On average, 67 percent of participants in the CBI are men. The majority of CBI beneficiaries, at 71 percent, are working aged adults from 26-65 years of age. All of the forced migrants who participate in CBIs have been in Croatia for less than two years. These demographic results regarding beneficiaries, is also representative of the demographics of asylum seekers and those with international protection in Croatia.

For the local citizens involved in CBIs, the majority at 64 percent are also working aged adults between 26-65 years of age. The rest of the CBIs in Croatia involve young adults from 19-25 years old. Like the numbers for the beneficiaries, the smallest CBI involves 10 local citizens while the largest involves 800. On average, the numbers of men and women involved in CBIs was almost evenly split with the participants being 50.7 percent female and 49.3 percent male.

3.2. RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PHASE

After mapping the initiatives, qualitative interviews were carried out with the people involved in five CBIs: Taste of Home, Zagreb 041, Welcome Initiative, Gender Task Force’s Initiative for Sustainable Growth and the Bicycle Repair Shop.

Interaction and Encounter & Participation

All the CBIs in Croatia are driven by the principle that encounter between forced migrants and locals works to dissolve prejudices. During the interviews, we found that the CBI Taste of Home is a genuine example of this because it attracts the interest of the local community to engage with the initiative which works with forced migrants through a business model to provide catering. During the events run by Taste of Home, local people have the opportunity to meet forced migrants and share food from their home countries. Here, both sides reported how the sharing of food, the exchange of experiences, learning about the culture of the other, all contribute to the encounter. Sadou, a refugee from Senegal who is one of the main cooks for Taste of Home describes his experience, “The encounter with the local community helped me because I got the opportunity to meet people and to create a relationship with them. I felt accepted and respected.”

In Croatia, through interactions and encounter promoted by the CBI, the local citizens reported how their curiosity was sparked to know more about the people they met and their larger stories. This lead to further interactions that gave the opportunity for intercultural exchange and they reported that it changed their previous attitudes towards forced migrants. Local citizens liked that CBIs were not just talk, but rather were places where people could get involved in their local community and feel like they were making a difference through concrete actions with the people that they met.
DATA FINDINGS

CBIs largely reported that they were guided by the principles of equality and democracy when thinking about how to set up their activities. They believed that these principals would enable the participation, support and openness towards people who have newly arrived in Croatia and encourage them to join the activities. For example, the football club Zagreb 041 uses these principles from the moment people become involved. Ibrahim, a refugee playing for the club says, “I always come to every training and football match because my participation in the initiative is very important for other people to learn more about refugees.” In this way, he felt his own participation in the club was valuable because of the potential effects it could have on other people. Zagreb 041 has become a symbol of inclusion in Croatia because it includes refugees as players of the club, club members and fans in an equal manner and finds ways to highlight the voices of everyone. Another example of how CBIs involved people and increased their participation came from the Bicycle Repair Workshop because the forced migrants were given something – a bicycle – through the initiative that they needed to repair and maintain. This bicycle acted as a catalyst to involve people and motivate them to come back.

Awareness Raising & Education

Some of the initiatives were very focused on awareness raising and they use social media and national media to share their work and message, while other organisation did not want to have any media coverage because of the risks that come with exposing people who are vulnerable to the media. Other CBI in Croatia do not conduct awareness raising activities on a large scale because their core activities were to provide direct services media coverage, but still managed to break stereotypes and prejudices of those directly involved. For the organisations that focused on raising awareness, one of the common ways of doing it was by organizing roundtables where refugee issues or concerns were discussed and presented to the public. Usually, these roundtables where the results of the collaboration between several different CBI

CHICI

“I am Chichi, and I found my place at Taste of Home! Although I knew almost nothing about Croatia, and I have never thought my path would ever have brought me here, but while traveling, I met my future husband who is Croatian. Then, one year ago I left everything familiar to me and found myself in a completely different world.

Despite my love for my husband, it wasn’t easy for me to find myself in an unfamiliar world and to adapt to a different culture when I don’t even know the language. I miss my culture and customs very much, which I had always cherished. I am shy by nature, and it takes me time to relax and fit in with new people. That’s why I can’t tell you how happy I was to join the team from Taste of Home. Here, I can truly be myself and share my culture with others, particularly through cooking dishes typical of my home country, Ethiopia. We have also been known to start a dance, which is my great passion!

I feel more at home in Zagreb now. I meet many people through work at Taste of Home. I have been accepted, and I can say that this is my family now. I am happy when I hear positive reactions from people to our food and when people ask about customs from our countries. I was scared that it would be very difficult for me to find a job here and join in everyday life considering that I am, after all, different. However, I’m not scared anymore. I see my future here, and I would say to everyone that they should be open to something new, to meet and get to know one another. In the end, we’re all the same.”
as in Croatia we found that the small-scale nature of the country contributes to a tight network of actors who work on the same issues.

A good example discovered was Taste of Home's national campaign: "We accepted the food, why can’t we accept the people." This campaign’s message was spread widely on social media, and it’s simple yet striking message proved effective in encouraging the public to think critically about their personally held biases on a deeper level. Other strategies employed by Taste of Home to raise awareness were participating in festivals and conferences and giving talks at local schools.

Another example when it comes to awareness raising is the CBI Welcome Initiative. They cooperate with the national media and organize public discussions, presentations and campaigns whenever there is a particularly relevant contextual moment to do so. Through their activities in the local community they try to sensitize the locals and initiate exchanges with forced migrants and refugees. Josip, a volunteer involved in the Welcome Initiative told us, “I like to get involved in the campaigns and activities that are bringing the stories of refugees closer to children and younger populations. I believe that this has a positive effect, which is visible when people, after some public presentation, contact our organisation for more information or decide to volunteer with us."

In this case, Welcome Initiative links both its awareness raising activities with activities focused on education by visiting local schools. Taste of Home also focuses on education as it has around ten educational facilities as partners and they organize workshops in local schools. In addition, the CBI Zagreb 041 has contacts with several local elementary schools where they organise talks and activities with the students as the see it as crucial that young people and children get to know a refugee by name and face and to learn more about their story.

**Support and Service Provision**

In the context of support and service provision, most CBIs provided language courses, although not all to the same extent as some were very informal and some structural professional courses. They also provided vocational training and support for successful labour integration.

_I Get You_ witnessed how, the vocational training and support in accessing the labour market were the most important services that CBIs provided to forced migrants in Croatia. Through the business model of Taste of Home, providing a supplementary job and training in cooking and running a small catering business has proved invaluable in putting forced migrants on the path towards financial independence. In the long run, this also contributes to future long-term employment and integration. The Initiative for Sustainable Growth, which was a temporary project of the Gender Task Force, provided forced migrants with the concrete vocational training in woodwork as well as Croatian language courses. All the materials for the project were donated by a local company. The activities of this initiative were done in a structured and professional way, and this lead to high success outcomes as all participants increased their woodwork skills by the end of the project. Another good example of a CBI that provided useful training for forced migrants was the Bicycle Repair Workshop where forced migrants learned how to repair bicycles that Croatian citizens donated to shop. This CBI involves local volunteers to give the bicycle repair training.

**Interculturalism**

The presence of interculturalism in the CBIs has changed the mindset of the local community as culture was shared and exchange with direct contact between locals and refugees. Something that local community have considered as foreign or strange, now is something that they comprehend and accept as a part of their life. In addition, we saw how CBIs fostered a cultural exchange between the forced migrants and refugees who are all from different countries. Mostly these cultural exchanges happened during workshops or social events organised by the CBI.

A good example of a CBI that promotes interculturalism is Taste of Home where forced migrants and refugees cook food that is native to their home countries and offer it at social events, local gatherings and conference. Local communities reacted extremely positively with an acceptance and openness to the culinary diversity that Taste of Home provides. Also, interculturalism was present in the CBI Bicycle Repair Workshop when the opportunity was given to the volunteers and forced migrants involved to interact and exchange cultural values and experience.

**Dignity & Hospitality**

All the CBIs were guided by the value of dignity in working with their participants, but especially
with the forced migrants. The sentence, or a variation of it, ‘Here I feel accepted and respected’ was the most common comment that refugees and migrants involved in the CBIs shared with us during interviews. Hamzah, a refugee involved in the Bicycle Repair Workshop, said, “Having a bike gives me the feeling of independence and free movement. I feel a bit important now, and I will keep and maintain my bike well.” In some CBIs, equality was ensured through horizontal decision making, like Zagreb 041 and Taste of Home. Sadou from Taste of Home also conveyed how a feeling of independence was an outcome of the CBI upholding a value like dignity: “Taste of Home helped me to become more autonomous and independent not only in conducting my daily professional activities but also in life.”

Hospitality is another of the core values for most CBIs. The CBIs’ staff and volunteers demonstrated great hospitality towards the forced migrants in helping them adjust to life in Croatia. Some CBIs provided an environment that makes migrants feel close to home such as preparing the dishes they used to cook in their countries.

*Sustainability & Innovation*

The views on sustainability of the best CBIs involved in this project are quite diverse. While some of them are financed through member’s fee or donations, others were a part of EU funded programmes. Also, CBIs were seen as sustainable because of the way they provide work or training for the refugees and forced migrants, increasing their ability to be successful in the labour market and therefore decreasing their dependence. In Croatia, we saw good examples of how CBIs can integrate with business models, such as the Bicycle Repair Workshop and Taste of Home, and how local businesses and companies can collaborate with CBIs in ways that are beneficial to both such as how a local company donated woodworking material to the Gender Task Force’s Initiative for Sustainable Growth. All the CBIs have proved to be very innovative in the Croatian context.
From the results of the qualitative interviews, three initiatives emerged as those that adhered the best to the Delphi criteria and displayed extra values like tolerance, a strong welcoming attitude and the creation of networks to improve the quality of life for newcomers in Croatia.

**TASTE OF HOME**

Taste of Home is a cooperative for intercultural collaboration that employs migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in a catering business. At times, other vulnerable groups of people who have a hard time finding their place in the very tight Croatian job market also are involved. The association deliberates the best ways to include migrants and refugees and promotes social entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. Through both culinary and cultural exchange, refugees and migrants prepare and cater food from their native countries for events. Taste of Home has found that using food is a good medium to motivate people to get involved and sharing a meal is a good start to meeting people.

Taste of Home is a unique CBI in that there are no others doing similar work, of helping forced migrants develop social entrepreneurship skills, in the region. They also organize workshops in local schools and provide refugees and migrants with language courses.

One way in which Taste of Home has an impact on the local community is through awareness raising, because through its activities they have changed the local community’s perspective towards refugees. Through a long process and an investment of time and resources, Taste of Home brings forced refugees and locals closer by encouraging encounter. Organising workshops, different culinary events, conferences and conducting a national campaign called ‘Prihvatili smo hranu, zašto ne bismo i ljude’ (We can accept the food, why not the people) in order to disrupt the prejudice, stereotypes and fear. An additional good practice that can be drawn from Taste of Home is their approach towards educational institutions in Croatia. They have more than ten educational facilities as their partners and they are connected with local schools in which the refugees share their experiences and stories with students.

**ZAGREB 041**

Zagreb 041 is a football club that fights racism and prejudice. It includes forced migrants as players of the club, club members and fans. The CBI provides forced migrants with the opportunity to train and play football. They have trainings every day for 3 to 4 hours and they play matches on weekends. After the matches, they organize a get-together for players and friends, which includes members of the local community. It is a great opportunity for forced migrants to show their skill and knowledge, as well as broaden their social network. The CBI uses social media for the promotion of refugee issues and they are also present in other media, both Croatian and international. They also have plans of expansion in the future as they recently started a football school for local and refugee children.

In the end, Zagreb 041 is more than just a football club, it is the place for encounter where people of different backgrounds, nationalities and religions work together as a team both on and off the field. Zagreb 041 ensures democratic and equal participation of migrants and refugees in decision making and activity planning. The feeling of hospitality, acceptance and equality is something that makes this CBI different from the rest. An intercultural football club that welcomes refugees is something completely new in Croatia.

**WELCOME INITIATIVE**

Welcome Initiative gathers individuals and civil society organizations with the aim to support refugees on the ground. It was founded at the height of the so-called refugee crises in Croatia in response to the positive motivation of civil society wanting to be involved and help. The initiative gathers more
than 60 civil society organizations into a network, one football club and more than 400 volunteers who give support to refugees daily. The network provides humanitarian support, coordination with local organizations, and information sharing to ensure accuracy when communicating logistical and legal information to refugees.

Welcome Initiative is a good example how to coordinate large numbers of the volunteers without whom relief efforts on the ground would not have been possible as they provide education sessions, trainings and supervision for the volunteers. In addition, Welcome Initiative is a good example to follow when it comes to advocating for forced migrants’ rights and issues. Putting and keeping the refugee issues constantly on political and media agenda is a central part of their mission.

“My name is Josip, I am a student from Zagreb and for the last two and half years I have been a volunteer at for the Welcome Initiative and Centre for Peace Studies. Personally, before I joined Centre I didn’t know much about asylum system and refugees in general but after the first time I visited refugee reception centre Porin and met people there I knew I would get involved. At the beginning, I wasn’t too sure how to utilize my knowledge and what would be useful for them to learn. That uncertainty in me actually turned out great because it forced me to try different things; teaching Croatian and/or English, organizing workshops on history and politics in Croatia, organizing public events etc.

Here I would like to point out specifically public events such as presentations of refugees about their native country or culture. That form of integration seems to me great due to mutual learning through presentation and even more discussion afterwards. Interested guests have an opportunity to meet presenter but also to learn a lot of things about other countries and cultures. At the same time, presenter can learn how people think about other countries and people but also gets an opportunity to present itself they he or she wants. That personal presentation enables them to be recognized as people not as a number or part of big group but rather as an individual with their own knowledge, wishes and wants.

Volunteering with refugees creates in me, but as I learned also in other volunteer, dual feelings. On one side it is positive feeling, especially when you are working directly with people and develop friendships. Also, it is fantastic feeling to be appreciated and to feel gratitude from the people you work with. But, beside those positive feelings, volunteering and working in asylum system and with people whose future is so unpredictable can be frustrating and exhausting. Inability to influence decision making alongside often illogical decisions coming from different ministries create sense of despair and failure in a volunteer. But, at the end of the day the good side of volunteering triumphs and in that you can always find extra motivation to push forward on the road of creating a society where everyone can feel welcome.”
Policy Recommendations

Recommendations for the national government

- Address the issue of welcoming refugees also in non-emergency times. Continue to convey to the public the message that Croatia will support refugees and strongly condemn hate speech or any form of racism and xenophobia.

- Include and consult with nongovernmental organisations, institutions working with forced migrants and forced migrants themselves when designing new legislation on asylum, migration and integration.

- Run raising awareness campaigns and educational programmes on forced migration issues. The experience of initiatives such as Taste of Home and Zagreb 041 show the benefits of discussing refugees’ experiences in schools. Such initiatives should be supported and replicated.

- Provide appropriate training for civil servants dealing with the issues and right of forced migrants.

- Invest in creative employment schemes, looking for way to use forced migrant’s diverse skills and abilities and where their migrant background can be a strength. Initiatives such Taste of Home and the Initiative for Sustainable Growth, that offer both real employment opportunity and exchange with the local community should be promoted.

- Provide in structural and professional programmes of Croatian language courses for forced migrants. These activities cannot be left only to citizens’ initiatives.

- Provide financial support for community building initiatives.

Recommendations for local authorities

- Provide community building initiatives with physical space to meet, such as office space, sport facilities or polyvalent rooms. Our research shows that encounter is crucial for community building. On the other hand, community building initiatives generally have very low budget for their activities. Free spaces to meet would mean an important support for them.

- Encourage schools and others educational institutions to organize awareness raising lectures and activities and provide them with appropriate educational material and financial support.

- Initiate public local events that would promote community encounter and gather forced migrants and local people.

- Provide training for civil servants dealing with forced migrants.
Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and others who are forcibly displaced.

Jrseurope.org  Igetyou-jrs.org