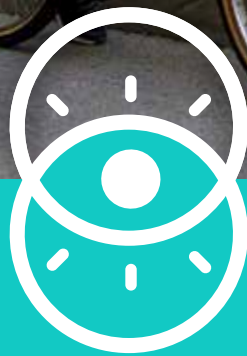
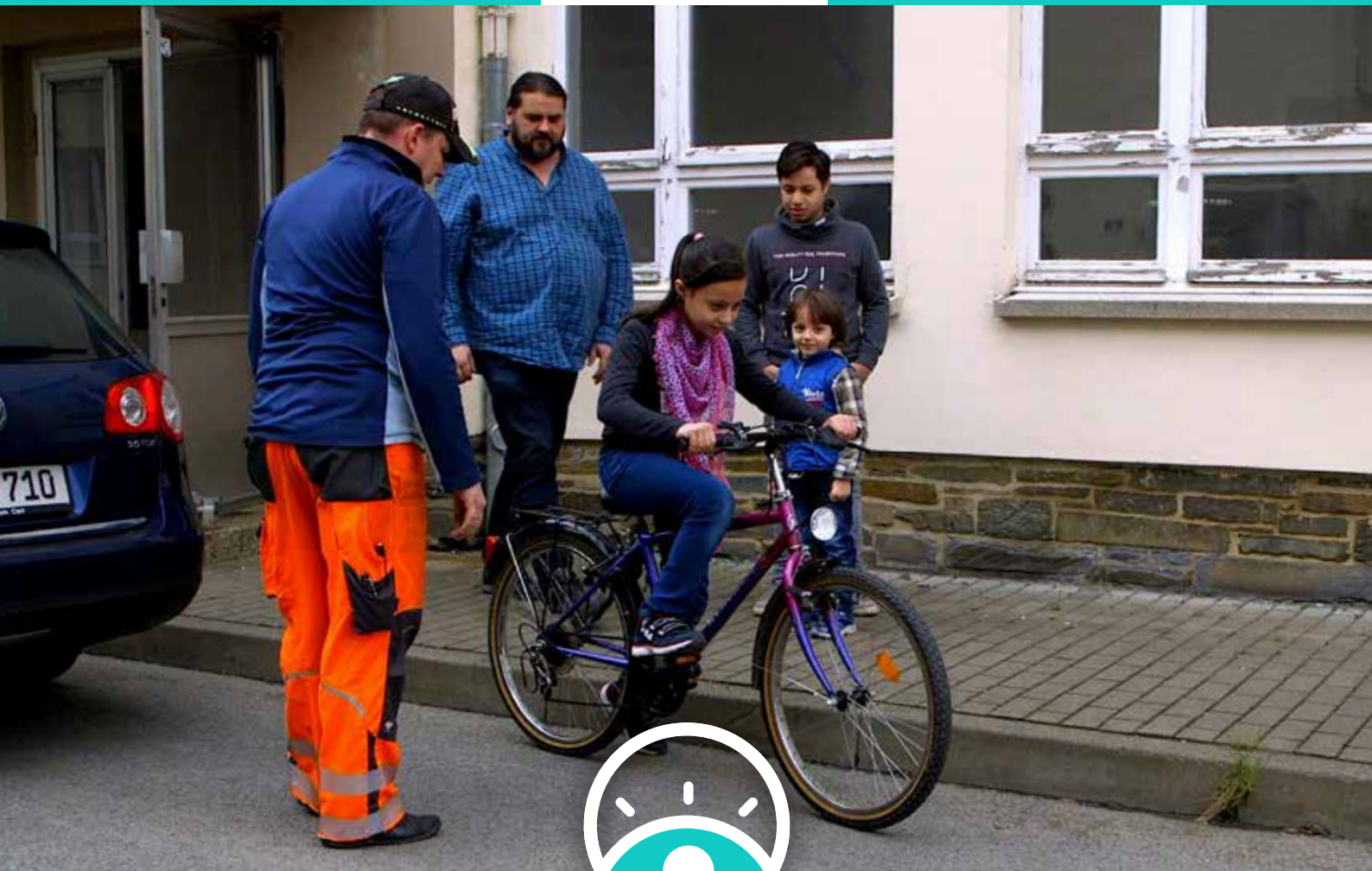


GERMANY



I GET
YOU

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

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A girl tries out a bike that has just been repaired as part of an initiative in Plauen, Germany. (Still taken from the German *I Get You* video: Denis Bosnic / JRS Europe)



I GET YOU GERMANY

National chapter no.4 of the European *I Get You* report

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Introduction

Across Europe, local citizens have opened their doors to people in search of safety – migrants and refugees – sharing meals, learning languages and simply being together, activities that are termed here as Community Building Initiatives (CBIs). *I Get You* is an initiative of Jesuit Refugee Service Europe (JRS Europe) to represent community projects of locals and refugees in Germany and eight other European countries, to make them more known to the public and to point out their findings and needs. *I Get You* also intendeds to understand better how civil society in the 9 countries involved responded to newcomers across varying national contexts. In Germany, we have seen overwhelming support for refugees amongst ordinary citizens after the arrival of a comparatively large number of refugees to the EU, but, at the same time, mistrust and hostility prompted by stereotypes and racism has also emerged.

Given the German national context, *I Get You* provides a possibility to learn about the different conditions for CBIs here, to understand factors of success and challenges, to share best practice experiences with and to learn from other countries involved. In this way, *I Get You* can reflect on and learn from CBIs to spread best practices for working with local citizens and forced migrants to counter racism and promote social inclusion in Germany and on the European level. At the same time, the lessons gathered from CBIs provide valuable information to promote best practices at a political level and to point out what concrete support such initiatives need from policymakers. JRS Europe is the lead coordinating organization for *I Get You* with partners in Germany and 8 other European countries: Belgium, Croatia, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Spain. *I Get You* was implemented by the JRS national country offices in

each of these 9 countries. JRS Germany was the national partner responsible for conducting the research and campaign in Germany country.

1.1 CONTEXT: RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA TOWARDS FORCED MIGRANTS IN GERMANY

In 2015 and 2016 Germany witnessed the highly emotional reception of hundreds of thousands of refugees. They were not, as often cited, one million asylum seekers, because many were registered several times, and estimates are rather between 650,000 and 800,000 persons. Since Germany was used to receiving far less refugees, this increased number of people presented a great change. German citizens were in the streets and train stations to welcome refugees, emergency accommodation centres and soup kitchens could only be run because tens of thousands of volunteers helped. Local citizens played a crucial role in the support provided to new arriving asylum seekers and the German municipalities quite often relied on the help of volunteers.

Today the overwhelming support for refugees amongst ordinary citizens continues. In 2017, according to government statistics, approximately six million volunteers are committed to actively support refugees¹. Their practical activities have now often shifted from emergency reception to long-term assistance in participation and integration. Although Germany has built new capacities for receiving larger numbers of refugees and UNHCR statistics show that the number of refugees worldwide is on the rise, the number of asylum seekers who make it to Germany has dramatically dropped. The official authority for the asylum procedures registered 86,196 asylum seekers between January and May 2017².

¹ Online-Commentary of Tagesschau, 26.5.2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1zKPR7atvQ> (as of 5.7.2017)

² BAMF Aktuelle Zahlen zu Asyl, May 2017, published 12.6.2017: <http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Statistik/Asyl/aktuelle-zahlen-zu-asyl-mai-2017.html> (as of 5.7.2017)

While the unique commitment at the civil society level still dominates the national narrative, at the same time, on the political level, 2016 and 2017 saw a rollback in German asylum policy and legislation. Probably the most severe impact of the new regulations is that it has become impossible for many of the refugees from Syria and other violence-torn countries to reunite with their closest family members through reunification procedures. Further, Germany is pushing deportations to Afghanistan.

In 2015 and 2016, Germany has also seen an alarming raise of racist attacks. On average, police counted three attacks on accommodation centres for asylum seekers every day, with total numbers in 2015 of 1,031 and in 2016 of 995 attacks³. On the whole, the number of racist and right-wing motivated crimes peaked to very high levels – roughly 23,000 crimes in the official statistics for 2016, with especially violent crimes on the rise (1.600 violent crimes listed in 2016)⁴. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution has warned that more than half of the 23,000 people they surveyed as extremist supporters of the far right-wing are potentially violent⁵. NGOs that monitor racist activities lately drew attention to the fact that racists do not only attack refugees and people of colour, but also attack and threaten volunteers who support for refugees as well as journalists and local politicians who are advocate for the reception of refugees in their communities⁶. Amnesty International has interviewed many refugees in Germany and documented the fear and insecurity that refugees experience in hostile and aggressive environments, with victims of attacks not daring to leave their homes afterwards. Many anti-refugee demonstrations took place, often allowed in plain sight of the people in accommodation centres. NGOs have pointed out

that his potentially leads to re-traumatisation of people who have fled violence and persecution in their countries of origin. Amnesty International criticised German authorities in 2016 for not adequately handling racist attacks, failing refugees in effectively protecting them and the places where they are accommodated from attacks and turning a blind eye to institutional racism⁷.

After the enthusiastic welcome dominated the public debate in late 2015, the feelings abruptly changed in beginning of 2016. After women were sexually assaulted and harassed in Cologne and elsewhere on New Year's Eve 2016, many of the perpetrators were described as men from Maghreb-countries. Many refugees and people of colour JRS Germany spoke with experienced open hostility and generalized prejudice after this instance. Discussions about "Cologne" also provided an effective platform for racist and right-wing mobilization. The relatively new party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) managed to influence the public debate with polemic, anti-refugee and anti-Muslim rhetoric. This political newcomer got disproportionate media and political attention and could then mobilize voters in the federal states (Bundesländer) elections, for example 23% in the federal state of Sachsen-Anhalt in March 2016⁹. Obviously reacting to this new nationalistic populist party, the governing parties have taken to the rollback policy. The Bavarian CSU sharply criticized Chancellor Merkel for having not closed the borders to refugees in late 2015 and campaigned for a set limit for refugees each year. Seeing that in 2017 the number of refugees arriving to Germany will most likely stay well below the limit that was in discussion and with upcoming national elections, in which CDU and CSU traditionally campaign united, this debate has, for now, ended. Some of the political reactions to the context

³ Press Release of the Ministry of the Interior, 27.4.2017. <http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2017/04/pks-und-pmk-2016.html>

⁴ Ibid.: Press Release of the Ministry of the Interior, 27.4.2017. <http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2017/04/pks-und-pmk-2016.html>

⁵ Migazin, 5.7.2017: <http://www.migazin.de/2017/07/05/verfassungsschutzbericht-2016-rechtsextreme-gewalt-hat-weiter-zugenommen/> (as of 5.7.2017), cf. Verfassungsschutzbericht 2016, published 4.7.2017: <http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2017/07/vorstellung-verfassungsschutzbericht-2016.html> (as of 5.7.2017)

⁶ Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, Press release, 4.7.2016: <http://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/aktuelles/2017/verfassungsschutzbericht-2016-amadeu-antonio-stiftung-warnt-vor-rechtem-terror/> (as of 5.7.2017).

⁷ Amnesty International. Living in Insecurity. Germany Is Failing Victims of Racist Violence. Issued 9.6.2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur23/4112/2016/en/>

⁸ Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, an NGO monitoring racism and anti-Semitism in Germany, published a brochure on the instrumentalisation of sexism in fueling racism: <http://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/aktuelles/2016/neue-handreichung-das-bild-des-uebergriffigen-fremden-wenn-mit-luegen-ueber-sexualisierte-gewalt-hass-geschuert-wird-1/> (as of 5.7.2016)

⁹ <http://www.stala.sachsen-anhalt.de/wahlen/lt16/index.html> (as of 5.7.2017)

show similarities to reactions in 1992, when many refugees from war-torn Yugoslavia arrived in newly-united Germany. At that time, a racist mob terrorizing refugees in Rostock-Lichtenhagen and arsons on refugee and migrants' homes in Western Germany shocked the nation. Instead of sustainably and rigorously addressing and combating racist and anti-refugee attitudes within the population with long-term policies to prevent and combat racism, most politicians focused mainly on changes in asylum law and measures to lower the number of incoming refugees.

1.2 TACKLING AND OVERCOMING RACISM: THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Unfortunately, the eagerness of lawmakers to restrict the rights of asylum seekers in no way is matched by substantial efforts to protect them from racist crimes. Racial discrimination is banned by constitutional law, and the Federal Equal Treatment Act of 2006 considerably strengthened protection against discrimination in the fields of housing and the labour market, but discrimination by state authorities is hardly ever addressed in courts. Independent complaint mechanisms against discrimination by authorities and/or law enforcement are lacking in Germany. The experience of racial profiling is known to have a very negative impact on the relationship of visible minorities to law enforcement and might keep victims from reporting discriminatory incidents to the police¹⁰. Whereas the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, CERD, is – in theory - applicable in the domestic legal system, the absence of any statutory definition of racial discrimination in domestic law adds to significant gaps in effective protection. The UN Committee of the Convention, ICERD, as well as the National Human Rights Institution DIMR have repeatedly rebuked Germany for its insufficient and narrow understanding of racism¹¹. Many Germans, including law enforcement officers, members of the judiciary system, media and politicians, acknowledge the existence of racism only when it is linked to right-wing extremism. After it became a public scandal in 2011 that between 1997 and 2006

a right-wing terror group had murdered at least nine persons, while the victims of racist crimes – eight out of nine victims being of Turkish, Kurdish and Greek origin – and their families were under investigation for years, an all-party-commission of enquiry suggested a set of reforms. To many victims, self-organisations and NGOs, the dramatic failure to solve these crimes indicates systemic flaws in the handling of racist crimes against people of other nationalities and can in part be attributed to (sometimes non-intentional) racist attitudes, behaviour or stereotypes. Nevertheless, so far, no effort has been made to tackle institutional racism. Another point of constant criticism on Germany's institutional approach to hate crimes are the police statistics on so-called "politically motivated crimes". Hate crimes are considered a category of "politically motivated crimes", with sub-categories being inter alia racist, xenophobic, and, recently established in 2014, crimes against refugees and their accommodation facilities. In its most recent follow-up report, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) reiterated the criticism already voiced by ICERD, Amnesty International and other NGOs: Instead of focusing of the intentional motive of the perpetrator, the statistics should cover any incident which is perceived to be racist, homophobic or transphobic by the victim or any other person¹². These concerns are regularly confirmed by the high differences between NGO statistics and police statistics.

In 2015, article 46 of the German Criminal Code has been revised and now explicitly provides that courts, in determining their sentence, shall consider any racist motive as an aggravating circumstance. Financial support for NGOs who work to prevent racism or who counsel victims of racist discrimination has risen following a recommendation of the enquiry commission, but most civil society organisations still consider it far from sufficient. Especially in the Western Bundesländer where organisations and counselling centres for victims of racial discrimination and attacks are rare. Only after 2016, when not only people of colour but also white politicians, supporters and journalists were targeted by

¹⁰ Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), Towards More Effective Policing: Understanding and Preventing Discriminatory Ethnic Profiling. A Guide, p. 41 et al. (2010).

¹¹ CERD, Concluding Observations on combined 19th-22nd periodic report of Germany (2015), CERD/C/DEU/CO/19-22, §7. Petra Vollmer-Otto, German National Human Rights Institute DIMR, Statement to ICERD, 6. May 2015, cf. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15929&LangID=E>

¹² ECRI Conclusions on the Implementation of the Recommendations in respect to Germany subject to Interim Follow-Up, adopted 8.12.2016, published 28.2.2017. CRI(2017)6, p. 6 cf: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Germany/DEU-IFU-V-2017-006-ENG.pdf>



“In 2014, we started accommodating the first group of refugees in our abbey. Currently around 30 refugees from different nationalities and religions are staying with us. However, the possibility of decentralized accommodation of refugees (as opposed to accommodation centres) has been abolished by the provincial government of Bavaria. For the time being we got an exemption from the government but these constantly changing legal conditions have been very challenging as we are forced to adapt our concept frequently.

The idea to accommodate “strangers” for longer periods in our monastery has been very innovative for our monks’ community as it is part of our principles to separate us a bit from the village and public life. Our monastery is located on the outskirts of Münsterschwarzach, surrounded by walls and until recently there was no real exchange with the local population. This has changed tremendously so that we are now living together with refugees and hence are also in frequent contact with the local population. In that respect, I would say that “integration” happened in two ways: within our own community towards the local population and refugees and then also within the village towards refugees.

First some of the local people were clearly not happy with the accommodation of refugees, particularly some of the catholic community. But after the first encounter has happened some of those local people approached me and asked how they can support us. This is when I understood how essential it is to create possibilities of encounter and interaction. The politicians try to tell us that “die Stimmung kippt” however this is by far not my experience and it even makes me angry. For that reason, at our monastery we even want to focus more on sharing good examples and positivity about our experiences on social media as this is our reality. Hence my message is that we will continue our work no matter how many obstacles the politicians put in our way.”

potentially violent racists, a public debate has evolved around hate speech as a factor that fuels racist attacks or other violent hate crimes. Consequently, in 2017 a law was passed targeting hate speech, criminal content and fake news on the internet and social media¹³. It has been widely criticised – not only by advocates of freedom of expression, but also by many NGOs actively engaged against discrimination and racism – as inadequate. This is because the law burdens private actors with a task that is at the core of any state’s human rights obligations: to secure effective protection against racial discrimination¹⁴.

In this climate, the role of civil society actors is still key to fighting stereotypes and prejudices as well as to address those concerns and feelings that far right-wing parties exploit for their political aims.

The results of *I Get You* underline that the majority of ordinary citizens stand for the continuous support for refugees. It is time for policymakers, media and politicians to listen and focus on this majority to create a counter narrative to those of populists and racist. A counter narrative which reflects the situation on the ground to a much higher extent.

¹³ Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz:

<http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2017/kw26-de-netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz/513398>

¹⁴ <https://netzpolitik.org/2017/hate-speech-gesetz-verbaende-erheben-schwerwiegende-rechtliche-einwaende/>

Methodology

For the research, JRS Europe and its partners applied a mixed-methods sequential design to the data collection and analysis. Over the two years of project implementation, the research was divided into two complementary phases: first the Mapping Phase followed by the Qualitative Interview Phase. The intention of these two phases was to first provide a broad picture of existing CBIs in terms of numbers and statistics and then to take a deeper dive to learn more about specific CBIs that emerged from the mapped sample.

The development of the methodology relied on the expertise of the Lead Methodology Committee while the practical implementation of the methodology through the research was carried out by the Steering Committee in which JRS Germany was a part.

2.1 MAPPING PHASE AND TOOLS

From April to November 2016, quantitative data was gathered on CBIs in Germany via an online questionnaire. In total, 50 were nominated through this process and completed the mapping questionnaire. The results of the quantitative phase were published in the German Mapping Report available on the *I Get You* website in electronic version.

The questionnaire gathered quantitative information about the CBI, using a mixed-methods approach, through directed questions focusing on: gathering basic information about the CBI and organization, demographic information, information about the refugees, asylum seekers and forced migrants who benefit from and participate in the CBIs, as well as on characteristics of the host community and general characteristics of the CBI. Next, the data was analysed using SPSS statistical software by JRS Europe and sent to JRS Germany for review and interpretation.

2.2 DELPHI METHODOLOGY

While the mapping occurred, JRS Europe also prepared for the qualitative side of the research by engaging in the Delphi methodological process to establish criteria by which to evaluate best practices used by CBIs. Through the Delphi Methodology the hypothesis of *I Get You*, that CBIs promote the social inclusion of forced migrants thereby countering racism and discrimination in society, was formally validated. The criteria and their definitions that have been agreed on by the Delphi experts are:

- *Strategies:*
Interaction & Encounter - Participation
- *Methods:*
Awareness Raising – Education - Support & Service Provision
- *Values:*
Interculturalism - Dignity - Hospitality
- *Organizational and Structural Aspects:*
Sustainability - Innovation

2.3 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS AND EVALUATION

The gathered quantitative data through the mapping phase enabled the selection of 20 CBIs to conduct interviews within the qualitative phase. The main criteria were that CBIs reflected the diversity and geographic spread of the quantitative data set and promoted social inclusion of refugees by bringing together local citizens and refugees. In total 20 CBIs were visited and interviewed in February and March 2017 in Germany. With each, initiative 3 interviews were conducted in a triangulated structure (1 with a volunteer, 1 with a refugee and one with a staff person or volunteer coordinator) to gather information from three different groups of stakeholders with invested interest in the CBI. All interviews were conducted in-person and on site.

After the completion of the interviews two experts of JRS Germany's were appointed to evaluate the interviews. Evaluation was done based on a special rating system and point allocation according to the Delphi Methodology and the agreed upon

criteria. Through the analysis of the results of the research best practices used by CBIs have been identified. These best practices are presented in the Guidelines section of this report.

ASIF MOHAMMAD NIAZY



AFGHAN REFUGEE,
PARTICIPANT IN KOMPETENZ-ZENTRUM FÜR INTEGRATION

"I'm living in Plauen since 2015. What I like about the project is that half of the official members are refugees and some of them are actively contributing to the project. At the beginning, I had some negative ideas about Plauen because of what other refugees were telling me and because it is such a small city. However, after some time I really started to like Plauen and feeling at home here. Clearly my involvement with the initiative is one reason, but also, I believe that small cities provide a much better opportunity to get to know each other and also to practice your German. "Integration statt Isolation" is really successful in bringing together different people with different backgrounds. Not only refugees and locals but also old people, unemployed, people with disabilities etc.

My active involvement in the project is important. I know that many Afghans don't feel comfortable or shy to take part in activities of initiatives. However, I observe that my participation helps them to overcome some possible inhibitions and they become less hesitant.

Moreover, I think it is very important to think about how we can ensure that female refugees are benefiting more from services and activities. For example, some Afghan women have told me that even though they are so interested in learning German they are too ashamed to take part in language courses as they have never been to school before. Afghan women should also have the possibility to meet other German women but for them to be more active we maybe also need to create more opportunities for them.

Nevertheless, I feel very sad about one thing: if any refugee somewhere in Germany shows some bad behaviour it automatically affects all "us" refugees: like last year after the events in Cologne on New Year's Eve. I feel that I or other refugees have to make then an extra effort to proof that we are "good" refugees and that we distance ourselves from the behaviour of those others just because we are seen as one group of "refugees" in which seemingly everyone has the same personality."

Data Findings

3.1 SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS FROM MAPPING PHASE

In Germany, 50 CBIs were mapped with 23 initiatives located in Berlin, 8 in the east of Germany and 19 in west of Germany.

- Most initiatives, at 76%, are active locally
- 62% of the initiatives having an annual budget of less than 25,000 Euros, 16% between 25,000-50,000 Euros and 12% with a budget over 50,000 Euros with most CBIs (60%) acquiring these funds from donations
- 80% of CBIs work with refugees that are originally from Syria and Afghanistan with about 50% of CBIs working with refugees from Iraq and Eritrea

I Get You has seen that in Germany the support offered to people is versatile and flexible and can easily be adapted to meet the changing needs of people. *I Get You* has also demonstrated that more and more CBIs don't want to work for refugees but with them, and as a result projects are coordinated by Germans and forced migrants together.

3.2 RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE PHASE

It is impressive to see how many different CBIs currently exist in Germany. Initiatives such as grassroots initiatives, parishes, student organisations, and volunteer networks all differ from each other in size, organisational structure, financial or personnel resources. However, they all have in common that they want to create inclusive communities in which everyone is valued. CBIs offer various kinds of services, from emergency support, job search to creating space and opportunity for encounter between locals and refugees. Especially in 2015 and 2016 German municipalities quite often relied on the help of CBIs and volunteers to help access the "jungle of bureaucratic state assistance."

The following section is a breakdown of the main findings of *I Get You* from the qualitative interviews with 20 CBIs in Germany.

3.2.1 Support & Services Provision

"Here at our language school at JACK we accept each student the way she is and try to promote hospitality to everyone: especially to those who are not welcomed like those nationalities who are not allowed to take part in Integration-Courses. We don't want to live this kind of preferential treatment of some nationalities." - *Daniela, project coordinator of JACK*

"By offering refugees their own housing our CBI gives them the opportunity to offer hospitality to others – something that has a very high cultural value for refugees from many different countries. But when living in accommodation centres it is very difficult for them to show and share hospitality as they don't have any privacy." - *Heike, staff, working for Caritas in Fürstenwalde*

- All CBIs contribute to stabilize forced migrants who are often living in an unsecure situation, especially by offering open and low-threshold services.
- Over the course of the last two years, most of the CBI's changed their service provisions from "emergency support" to "long term support" to accompany people in the lengthy process of integration, participation and self-sufficiency in German society. Many CBIs have grown into dynamic spaces of assistance and encounter.
- Refugees as well as volunteers have expressed the difficulty to conduct outreach to refugee women. According to their experience, women are taking less part in activities for various reasons such as not being able to join language courses because of a lack of child care. It is therefore important



📷 The CBI Herzlich Ankommen in Rostock: football competition within the framework of the nationwide project Unsere Zukunft.Mit Dir! funded and organized by F^rderwerk AVICENNA (Photo: Hossna Yassin)

to tailor activities specifically for women. No CBI reported outreach especially to LGBTI refugees.

3.2.2 Organisational Structure

Most CBIs arose in response to voids in public service structures and fill the gaps of those services that public authorities could not satisfy.

- Many of those interviewed initiatives that were started in 2015 as grassroots initiatives are connected to a parish, community association or other institution. For many grassroots initiatives, this cooperation was and is helpful as they could benefit from an already existing organisational structure and equipped facilities. Particularly with regards the management, administration and taxation of donations newly established CBI's profited from this cooperation. Now these CBI are going through a process of formalisation and professionalization of their own to either expand their activities or give more strategic structure to their plans.
- Several CBIs talked about the importance of creating dynamic spaces of assistance and encounter as this would enable them to adapt to new situations and needs more

easily. Especially interview partners from grassroots initiatives saw their rather loose organizational structure as an advantage towards more institutional organizations as it would be easier for them to adopt and react to constant changing needs.

- Networking and cooperation among different stakeholders, as well as encounter between refugees and locals, may be easier to implement in villages and rural areas because of the denser network of social relations. This was evident from statements from Plauen and Büchenbeuren, for example, when interviewees described their rather "easy" cooperation with other local institutions such as sport clubs, unions, possible employers, and educational institutions.
- Because CBIs are situated in different contextual conditions, they subsequently face different kinds of challenges. In some regions commitment of CBIs tends to earn social recognition, whereas, in other regions refugees and locals act in an openly hostile environment where a lot of courage is needed. In Rostock, for example, a CBI initiated a football competition between refugees and the local neighbourhood where racism and right-wing attitudes are wide spread. That

event was only possible with police protection. For that reason, some of the interviewees agreed to be interviewed only after the request of anonymity.

3.2.3 Language and Encounter

“Once I was sitting at the train station and an older woman about 60 years old came up to me and asked me if she could sit next to me. Slowly, slowly we got into a conversation and she told me that it was the first time for her that she would talk to a refugee. And she told me a lot about her memories of her past. She was born right after the Second World War and after Germany got divided into East and West Germany she fled with a boat from east to west Germany. And then she told me: “Don’t be afraid, many older Germans experienced the same as you did when you were escaping from your country.” I was so happy to hear from an older person that she understands what it is like to be a refugee. This is a feeling and experience we actually both share, a feeling she cannot share as such with younger Germans for example.” - *Anas, Syrian refugee and member of the CBI “Herzlich Ankommen” in Rostock*

- Grassroots initiatives, NGOs and other projects are important contact points between refugees and local citizens. Most of the interviewees mentioned “Language and Encounter” as an important step to integration and participation as well as also a step to counter racism. Consequently, almost all interviewees described the positive change once space in the neighbourhood was made available for refugees and locals to meet. In that respect, several volunteers expressed how the encounter with refugees not only broadened their experiences but also at times forced them to reflect and challenge some of their own stereotypes and prejudices towards refugees.
- Several refugees expressed the wish to meet and join the host society and emphasized that to do so learning German is a vital step. This is particularly important as refugees have often to wait many months before they can participate in an official “integration” course. Meeting German people without the existence of CBIs would often constitute a challenge during the early days of newcomers’ arrival in Germany.

Several refugees referred to the negative attitude towards refugees in the aftermaths of the New Year’s events in Cologne in 2015 and how it affected their personal life. In that respect, many of the interviewees stressed the importance of encounter to overcome those negative attitudes towards refugees and to combat stereotypes.

- Refugees who are still living in accommodation shelters expressed the difficulty of different nationalities and cultures living together in a small space. Especially for those refugees who are coming from war torn countries in which different national governments are involved and fight against each other. While all CBIs work on building bridges between locals and refugees, none of the CBIs interviewed work to overcome this barrier of the differences that exist between different forced migrant communities.

3.2.4 Impact on Volunteers and Local Community

“I grew up in a small village in Saxony-Anhalt. In our village neither migrants nor refugees were living. My image of these people was influenced by what I was told in the media. Today I can see how many lies the media has told us. So often the news talked about refugees as a threat but now, after my experiences with ‘Begegnungschor’, my perception has totally changed.” - *Helena¹⁵, local volunteer, Begegnungschor in Berlin*

- Staff members emphasized that in most CBIs, volunteers show a high degree of commitment and reliability.
- Whereas some volunteers describe how their involvement in a CBI has positively changed the attitude of their friends and family towards refugees, others express their difficulties to “justify” their work towards close friends and family.
- The overwhelming support for refugees amongst ordinary citizens continues and many volunteers see their commitment as a long-term commitment. Yet many volunteers are frustrated by the increasingly complicated and negative legal framework for refugees and other bureaucratic hurdles which would clearly aggravate and limit them in their work.

- Many volunteers do not feel effectively supported by policymakers.

3.2.5 Participation of Refugees

"I don't care that I live in a monastery. In Afghanistan, I heard that Christians aren't good but I don't care. We are all humans and equal and I'm not afraid. In Afghanistan, we are really hospitable and we invite each other for dinner all the time. But in Germany it is not so common. It is rare that somebody just comes over for tea or coffee. I feel that many Germans are afraid and I would like to tell them that they don't have to be scared. Contact and encounter is so important. We all need contact!" - *Safi, Afghan asylum seeker living in a shared accommodation in the abbey of the Benedictine Monastery in Münsterschwarzach*

- Whereas in some CBIs refugees are already active members of the initiative, other initiatives are still in the early stages of implementation.
- Different CBIs address different needs of refugees and thus step in at different moments of accompaniment and integration. Subsequently this also influences to which degree refugees can be actively involved in the organization and implementation of projects. *I Get You* observed that CBIs which focus on emergency or basic needs, such as

housing, food, access to job market for new arrivals like CBIs in Weilerswist and Sieglar do, the actual assistance of those responsible is much more focused on accompaniment. Higher degree of participation of refugees has been seen in projects which focus on exchange, interaction and empowerment.

- Several refugees emphasized that active participation in a CBI also supports a feeling of "belonging."
- 2 interesting observations have been identified with regards the criteria of participation:
 - Several refugees articulated how difficult it is for them to ask for help and assistance in general. Subsequently it would also be difficult for them to ask for greater involvement in a CBI or partake in criticism of it even if such criticism lead to a positive change.
 - When reflecting on their involvement in a CBI several refugees pointed out how their participation helps other refugees from the community to also join that CBI. By being active members, they can spread information about the activities of a CBI, which helps other refugees to overcome possible inhibitions which might prevent them from taking part.

📷 Frans Wandern is organised by Syrians who have brought the idea of their friend Fr Frans van der Lugt SJ to Germany. (Photo: C.Ender/JRS)



Inspiring Community Building Initiatives

During the evaluation process, *I Get You* has identified some of the many good practices of community building that exist in Germany. Provided here is a short description of 5 CBIs deserving of special mention, followed by which good practice they utilise. From these, *I Get You* has developed best practice guidelines that are useful for CBIs in Germany.

These 5 CBIs received an overall high rating in the 10 criteria established by a committee of experts through the Delphi Methodology. They are initiatives which have a special focus on promoting social inclusion of refugees into the host society by bringing together local citizens and refugees and hereby aim to prevent racism and CBIs which took a strong overall inclusive approach regarding different sections of society.

KOMPETENZ-ZENTRUM FÜR INTEGRATION | PLAUEN¹⁶

“People need to sit down face to face and get to know each other. Talking is not enough but it’s nice to cook together, or throw a party together. That’s how you get to know one’s character. That’s when changing one’s mind can go really fast.” - Mandy, original member of the coordination team

Kompetenz-Zentrum für Integration has a strong focus on encounter and inclusivity towards all marginalized people. They also use networking activities to counter and prevent racism and break down stereotypes. The organisation “Kompetenz-Zentrum für Integration” started as a grassroots organisation of volunteers in 2015 and today employs a few paid staff members and refugees. It is situated in a region of East Germany where strong racist and right-wing tendencies are widespread among the local population. The CBI offers a variety of services and focuses on encounter and

interaction with the local population. It also has a strong collaboration with other local institutions and together offers various kinds of events such as urban gardening and mixed football teams. The inclusive approach of the initiative is unique because it creates spaces for integration and encounter among different groups of marginalized and vulnerable groups of locals in Plauen, such as young people with disabilities, unemployed and underprivileged locals. The CBI envisions promoting an inclusive community for all rather than competition among locals and refugees.

FRANS WANDERN | BERLIN¹⁷

“Isn’t it ever so beautiful and inspiring when people who are different in so many aspects - be it religion, culture, nationality - walk together the same path, meet the same obstacles, share smiles and a common spirit?” - Magui, Syrian member of the organization team of FransWandern

Frans Wandern promotes peaceful, intercultural encounters initiated by self-organised refugees. Activities of encounter in which diversity, mutual acceptance and particularly equal participation are key elements, but also there is time for fun, leisure activities. Since these events are fully organized by newcomers for other refugees and locals, it is a CBI that values empowering and stabilizing the lives of the people involved. Frans Wanderungen – Frans’s hikes are a vision of peace brought to Europe by idealists from a war-torn country. These are hikes in the memory of Fr. Frans van der Lugt, SJ organized by people from Syria for people in Germany and Europe. Fr. Frans regularly organized hikes from his chosen home town Homs in Syria and invited everyone to join: poor and rich, Alevites and Sunnites, Christian and Agnosticians. People of all nationalities shared the same experiences while wandering in the nature. Fr. Frans was

¹⁶ To know more: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/KomIntegration/>

¹⁷ To know more: Facebook account: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100011179997659>

murdered in 2014, but his Syrian friends brought his vision to Europe and organize hikes that are open to everyone who would like to join. In 2016, more than 300 people from many different countries - including local Germans- joined the hikes who took place in Berlin and Dresden.

BEGEGNUNGSSCHOR E.V. | BERLIN¹⁸

"The choir is fun for me. I learn German and get to know the German culture. I meet other people and cultures. I particularly like, that I can do all that without being forced to talk about how I fled my country. It is not important for the other members who I was in the past but what a person I'm now."
- Hussein¹⁹Refugee, member of the choir

Begegnungsschor e.V. organises "low- threshold activities" with a resource oriented approach that promotes encounter between local Germans and refugees and offers intercultural exchange through music. Songs in different languages make sure that everyone is sometimes learning and sometimes teaching. Hierarchies of residential, financial and social privileges are minimized at the same time as the activities are psychologically stabilizing. Begegnungsschor e.V.-Berlin is a choir made up of refugees and Berliners that was founded in October 2015. Every Berliner who wants to participate must bring a refugee and a refugee a Berliner. The initiative, through the singing activities, promotes the encounter of residents and refugees. Currently there are 2x20 fixed and 2x20 sporadic participants. There is also a little orchestra of five persons with a piano, violin, cello, bass and percussion. Once a week they practice, and once or twice a month they organise a gig.

PROJEKT ANKOMMEN | DORTMUND²⁰

"Many German volunteers are engaged to help refugees integrating into the society. Going to theatre for example is something very important here in Germany, it is part of the German culture. But when we arrive here we have just left a war-torn country behind us and in the beginning, we really have other interests and worries than getting to know the German culture right away." - **Ismael, Syrian refugee, member of the CBI**

Projekt Ankommen focuses on long term integration of refugees through shifting away the attention from immediate assistance to sustainable assistance.

The fully volunteer-based initiative "Projekt Ankommen" was founded in April 2015 and has over 500 members. Since the beginning the CBI focused their assistance on the transition of refugees out of accommodation centres into independent living, a moment when refugees often lose contact with counselling services which existed in the shelters. Through practical help with move-outs and accompaniment their intention is to assist refugees through the process of long term integration rather than emergency support. Together with refugees, who also became official members of the initiative, they offer German classes, legal counselling and various other events and leisure activities.

CAFÉ INTERNATIONAL | BÜCHENBEUREN²¹

"I really like going to the Café International. I'm always really excited. I never plan something else for Wednesdays. I like the encounter!" - **Elise, Local volunteer of the organization**

Variety of service provision and strong focus on integrating the local population and refugees into their daily activities - through awareness raising and through the help of professional assistance trying to overcome existing and partially deeper rooted discriminatory tendencies towards refugees in some parts of the population. The "Cafe International" is the first project for refugees in Büchenbeuren, a village that has a population of around 2000 and which also has to struggle with some severe instances of racism and racist fake news, thus creating a climate of hostility and insecurity for refugees. The Café was founded in the beginning of 2015, is open 5 days a week and offers various services such as language courses, leisure activities, internet cafe or legal counselling. Together with volunteers and refugees, who are also active members of the initiative, various events are organized such as thematic evenings on country of origin information, choir, and a theatre group. These events open doors to other parts of the general population who are not active members of the initiative. Café International' has a strong focus on sustainability.

¹⁸ To know more: Website: <http://begegnungsschor.com/>

¹⁹ Name changed

²⁰ To know more: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CafeInternationalBB/>

²¹ To know more: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CafeInternationalBB/>

Policy Recommendations

Drawing conclusions from the best practices *I Get You* identified, JRS Germany has elaborated a set of recommendations for the EU institutions, for the German government and local municipalities.

Recommendations to the EU Institutions

- Promote the creation of a counter-narrative to the one of negativity, rejection and concern and support the millions of citizens who are actively engaged in welcoming refugees.
- Guarantee funding for citizens' initiatives for and with forced migrants to ensure their sustainability.

Recommendations to the German Federal Government

Promote a positive narrative on refugees and forced migrants by:

- Develop comprehensive policies to guarantee sustainable support and funding for initiatives against racism and xenophobia.
- Giving priority and visibility to policies and initiatives that focus on reception, integration and participation of forced migrants in society.
- Showing commitment to protect refugees at international level. This can be done by increasing the pledges for resettlement and facilitating family reunification. Through resettlement Germany can offer a safe and legal way to durable protection to refugees who are otherwise in countries that do not want or cannot protect adequately. Given the decrease in asylum seekers' arrivals, Germany is now in the perfect position to capitalize on the experience and the capacity that was established in the past years in the communities to ensure qualitative protection to people in need.

- Refraining from a political discourse that mainly focus on enforcing returns. *I Get You* findings shows that such a discourse is counterproductive for an inclusive society. It reinforces the idea that forced migrants are not welcome and conveys to actively engaged citizens the message that their efforts to welcome forced migrants are not valued.
- Publicly acknowledge and encourage the efforts as citizens who actively engage in welcoming refugees. *I Get You* shows that feeling supported by the authorities is an important element for volunteers to keep motivated in the long term. Moreover, this would pass a positive message to the rest of the population and might motivate others to engage.

Ensure clarity to forced migrants on their legal situation by:

- Adopting clear legislation and simplify administrative procedures to allow forced migrants to obtain clarity on their legal situation within a reasonable time.
- Refraining from frequent legislative changes and guaranteeing sufficient information to forced migrants and their advisers when modifications happen.
- Volunteers interviewed in *I Get You* stress the strong negative effects of uncertainty about their situation on forced migrants' mental health. They also expressed their own frustration when they find themselves incapable of advising them properly, due to the continuous changes in legislation.

Recommendations to Local Authorities (Länders, Districts, Municipalities)

In the German federal system, the "Länder" have the competence to adopt regulations and policies

that have the most direct effect on the daily life of asylum seekers. However, implementation of these regulations and policies on a case-to-case basis lies within the competence of cities and district administrations. Hence, the following recommendations address both the “Länder” governments and the local administrations.

- Refrain from adopting regulations and policies that put forced migrants and their supporters in situations of uncertainty. For instance, the frequent changes in regulations on decentralized vs. centralized accommodation for asylum seekers in Bavaria have resulted in great challenges to the Benedictine Abbey at Münsterschwarzach. The monks had to repeatedly change their support concept, and asylum seekers were left in uncertainty about their accommodation in the following months.
- Promote and invest in initiatives that target broader groups, including both forced migrants and other vulnerable social groups. Forced migrants are not the only group suffering from social isolation and discrimination. Our research shows that investing in services that meet the requirements of forced migrants as well as other communities in need have higher chances to succeed in fostering social inclusion.
- Actively consult with and listen to forced migrants when deciding which initiatives should get priority, and give them ownership on the activities put in place.
- Offer qualification and training of volunteers on all relevant aspects of their work with refugees (e.g., on the legal framework, intercultural dialogue, how to deal with mental health issues), and to initiatives and small organisations on fundraising.
- Invest in spaces that facilitate encounter between newcomers and locals. A consistent finding of *I Get You* throughout the different initiatives is that the establishment of safe spaces where Germans and migrants can easily meet each other is paramount to integration and participation of forced migrants and to counter racism.
- Facilitate the participation of female forced migrants in social inclusion initiatives by considering the specific needs, for example by providing child care. A consistent finding throughout the interviews conducted by *I Get You* is that women participated less in the proposed activities, for example language courses, because of lack of child care.

📷 Graffiti workshop as part of the CBI Cafe International in B,chenbeuren (Photo: Cafe International)





"I'm engaged in the project since 2015. I think each week I spend around 20 hours at the project. I would say that currently we are about 250 active volunteer members, 30 of those are refugees who work as interpreters or do different kinds of volunteer work. I really like the fact that locals and refugees are both engaged in the project as members. It kind of shifts away the separation between those who help and those in need of help. Sometimes we also get weird looks when we are doing outside activities together. For example, many people just don't understand that German girls and Arab men can have fun together, especially after all the bad news after the New Year's events in Cologne.

At "Projekt Ankommen" we are offering various kinds of services though from the beginning we focused on the transition of refugees out of accommodation centres into independent living. This has been one of our principles: to not go into the accommodation centres but trying to get refugees out of there. It is important for us to be very flexible in our activities and always adapt to the current situation which is changing frequently. For example, in the beginning everyone was focusing on providing beginner German courses but now we understand that there is also a need to organize more open language courses as many refugees need to rather practice their German than learning it from scratch. In addition to training of volunteers (local and refugees) we also do "awareness raising". However, I wish we would have more capacity and resources to do even more of those important awareness raising activities."



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