



# Key Lessons from the ARCI Project

The “Action of Red Cross on Integration of Relocated and Resettled Persons” (ARCI) project, launched in 2017 supporting the integration of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the EU under relocation and resettlement schemes.

Implemented through German, Bulgarian and Croatian Red Cross National Societies, funded by the EU’s Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), and managed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), ARCI adopted participatory approaches, with a focus on providing clear, useful, tailored information.

Research for these key lessons was carried out in July 2019, as ARCI entered its final few months, to capture best-practices and learning.

## Ensure timely, flexible access to practical information

Providing the right information, at the right time, and in the right way is critical. The provision of practical, easy to access information was highlighted in each of the ARCI countries—whether it be through pocket guides, maps, apps, or person to person. One-to-one interaction, and the availability of a consistent dedicated individual to support people, even if this is

online or over the phone, should not be underestimated. Effectively tailoring information provision inevitably requires the inclusion of people who use the service in programme design.

## The inclusion, participation and meaningful involvement of refugees throughout is vital

The added value of deeper inclusion, involvement and participation of refugees themselves, as well as staff and volunteers with refugee or other relevant cultural backgrounds, was another clear lesson from the ARCI project. Cultural Mediators were consistently recognised as being key for success—in particular, their roles in enabling ongoing dialogue with refugees outside the scope of events and services, supporting sustainability by encouraging refugees to exercise their rights independently, and presenting an example of integration and long-term sustainability as an achievable ambition, were invaluable.

## Comprehensive, long-term integration strategies must be government-led

Recognition, leadership and commitment from authorities to ensure long-term, comprehensive and reliable support—encompassing accommodation, language classes, skills training, assistance finding employment, access to health care and education, and cash assistance—to provide a foundation for integration, was a need recognised across project

countries. For traditionally transit countries in particular, access to services and support enabling families to rebuild their lives is crucial to breaking the cycle of people moving on. Ensuring areas receiving refugees have the capacity to meet known, specific needs—including language, and physical and mental health needs—was also identified as a key issue.

### Engage with authorities

The importance of working with authorities and the benefits this can bring was another highlight. The necessity for organisations working with refugees to have coordinated engagement with government authorities, providing a voice within political and administrative decision making, was raised multiple times. In addition to advocacy, engaging with authorities offered opportunities to share materials, access official distribution channels, and the chance to provide practical support to key staff whose understanding of refugees' rights and vulnerabilities is key to ensuring people are treated fairly, respectfully and able to access vital services.

### Engage with host communities—and don't be afraid to make things fun

Alongside government authorities, local host communities were also held up as crucial partners. Often it was felt the positive benefits of integration had not been effectively discussed and communicated, while a focus on “challenges” helped perpetuate the idea of refugees as a problem rather than an opportunity. The benefits of social interaction between refugee and local host communities were clearly observed, with events that were fun—rather than explicitly didactic—providing a non-threatening environment for people to get to know each other. Linking refugees with existing local networks, including employers but also interest groups, social clubs, public libraries, and other facilities was also recognised as key.

### There is an ongoing role for civil society organisations

The critical role of civil society organisations in supporting the integration of refugees was evident across the ARCI project, and all the more so in countries with less-established refugee communities. Refugees in these countries faced multiple issues: not having established communities to seek support from, administrative systems and processes not yet



being aligned to their situations, and a compounding lack of awareness from both civil servants and refugees themselves in knowing their rights. Civil Society organisations' role in supporting people to access health services was particularly important, requiring a parallel advocacy role supporting systemic change.

### Legal pathways, such as the emergency relocation and resettlement programmes are vital

The ongoing need for resettlement and relocation programmes, providing legal pathways for people seeking asylum to EU countries from hotspots both inside and outside the EU, was often referenced by those working in ARCI project countries. The dual benefits of ensuring people are safely able to reach sanctuary, while also reducing pressure on countries and regions handling large numbers of arrivals, were widely acknowledged as crucial.

### Barriers to accessing family reunification remain, and have a huge impact on integration

Consistently emphasised as a critical issue, the administrative complexities and bureaucratic challenges of accessing family reunification were specifically referenced as a barrier to people's integration, a drain on time and energy, and a catastrophic burden on people's mental health. Consistently applied, clearly communicated and fairly administered reunification policies and processes must ensure everyone who has the legal right has the opportunity to be reunited with their family as swiftly as possible.