



MULTIRELIGIOUS

APPROACH TO INTEGRATION

WHO IS THIS GUIDANCE FOR?

This handbook offers an overview of the positive benefits of multireligious¹ cooperation on integration. It is useful for:

1. Any faith-based or non-faith-based organisation already involved in the integration of migrants.
2. Local religious communities who are, or want to become, involved in welcoming and integrating migrants.
3. Funders of integration projects.



¹ Throughout this handbook multireligious is understood as where people from two or more different religions organisations/communities/groups work consciously and proactively together.

MIGRATION IN EUROPE TODAY

According to the International Organization for Migration 144,166 migrants came to Europe in 2018. Whilst the number of migrants arriving in Europe has reduced significantly since its peak in 2015, many migrants continue to seek protection from conflict and hardship in their own countries, and a new life in Europe. Each of these migrants arrives with their own hopes, stories and short- and long-term needs.

Due to insufficient resources, and in some cases a lack of political will, many European states have struggled to accommodate the number of migrants, and have turned to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and actors for assistance. In many cases CSOs have stepped in and provided immediate and long-term assistance to the migrants.

Many Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) have also played an integral role in supporting integration projects and initiatives;

and at local level religious communities have played a very important role in welcoming migrants and supporting their integration into local communities.

In some cases, religious communities have assisted organisations already involved in integrating migrants; and in other cases religious communities have developed their own projects and initiatives.

In a few cases, rather than working alone, actors representing different religious groups have chosen to work closely together to welcome migrants and help them integrate - adopting a 'multireligious approach'.

WHY MULTIRELIGIOUS APPROACHES TO INTEGRATION?

It is often presumed that organisations and communities from different religions working together is in some way beneficial. However, in the area of integration until now there has been no clear evidence of why this is the case, or how multireligious cooperation can really help.

The guidance and advice in this handbook is based on the findings from the first comprehensive study of the benefits of ***multireligious cooperation on welcoming and integrating migrants***. The study looked at cooperation between organisations involved in integrating migrants and local religious communities, as well as cooperation between local religious communities/institutions on projects aiming at integrating migrants.

The guidance has three aims:

- To improve the knowledge and understanding of service providers about the benefits of working with different religious communities on integration projects; and how this can benefit not only the migrants but also local communities.
- To improve the knowledge and understanding of local religious groups about the benefits of working with other religious communities on integration.
- To improve the knowledge and understanding of funders about the benefits of a multireligious approach to integration, to support the design of funding programmes and to decide which activities and initiatives they should support.

OUR RESEARCH ON A MULTIRELIGIOUS APPROACHES TO INTEGRATION

The research focused specifically on cases where actors representing different religions worked together on integration.

The project carried out interviews and surveys with religious institutions involved in multireligious cooperation on integration; and migrants from a range of different countries who had taken part in these integration projects. The research included case studies from Germany, Poland, Sweden and the UK.

The aim of the research was to identify any potential benefits of multireligious cooperation for: CSOs and FBOs; for the integration services and processes they provide; for migrants; and for local communities and broader society ².

This handbook summarises the results of this study, and uses case studies to illustrate the benefits of multireligious approaches to integration projects and initiatives.

² You can read more about the project here: See: Lyck-Bowen, M. and Owen, M. (2018): *A multi-religious response to the migrant crisis in Europe: A preliminary examination of potential benefits of multi-religious cooperation on the integration of migrants*. In *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1437344

INTEGRATION SERVICE PROVIDERS AND LOCAL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Organisations involved in integration and many local religious communities share a common desire: to welcome migrants in a supportive and compassionate way.

CSOs and FBOs that are involved in welcoming and integrating migrants can benefit from this shared commitment in a wide variety of ways in their quest to provide outstanding services.



Local religious communities can help organisations involved in integration by:

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- Increasing awareness of, and support for, an integration project within their community.
- Translating and interpreting to improve communication between the organisation and the migrants they are trying to help.
- Help organisations better understand migrants' cultural and religious needs and thereby help improve the quality of services and perceptions of support.
- Provide knowledge about the local context in a culturally sensitive way.
- Provide volunteers who can help implement the integration project.
- Provide food, clothes, furniture and shelter/accommodation for the migrants.
- Help migrants learn the local language and get to know their host community and country.
- Help migrants connect to local health, employment and education systems.
- Help migrants find shops with religiously appropriate food and clothing.
- Assist migrants in finding places of worship and congregations to worship and celebrate religious festivals with.

Local religious leaders can also:

- Encourage members of their community to become volunteers in the integration project.
- Encourage members of their congregation to offer material support for the integration project.
- Encourage their religious communities to warmly welcome and support all migrants, regardless of their background or religious affiliation.



CSOs and FBOS can find suitable local multireligious groups and organisations through:

- Local, regional and national interreligious councils.
- Local, regional and national authorities.
- Universities and other higher education institutions.

REFUGEE SUPPORT – A MULTIRELIGIOUS COOPERATION ON INTEGRATION IN THE UK

The Refugee Support project was run by the British Red Cross as part of the United Kingdom's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. The project aimed at providing emotional and practical support to the refugees including assisting them in accessing local services and adapting to their new life. The British Red Cross cooperated with a range of different actors in the implementation of this project; among these actors were local Muslim and Christian communities, and Interreligious Council.

What the coordinators think of Refugee Support:

- *If we have a specific individual from a specific religious background, we will try to find their church, or temple, or their community locally because religion is a fantastic integration glue. It's a brilliant way of stripping away all the orientation problems you have if you are new to a completely alien city like Southampton and Portsmouth for example. If you can find a community of people from your own background, culture and religion, that has to be a good thing.*

What the migrants think of Refugee Support:

- *We started to receive support from the churches around us and from them for example if you need anything you will find out that the church will provide you with for example the hoover or the tv.*
- *There is help from the Muslim community around us, when they hear that you are here, they start giving you a hand and there they give you help, and they do not hesitate to if you ask them anything.*
- *The church has supported me. The religious community in Winchester has helped me. Church groups have helped me. I have been invited to Christmas parties organised by the church.*
- *The Christians help with clothes and hospital. Muslims have helped with GP.*
- *I think it is very comfortable and very safe here there are no problems between Christian and Muslims here because they are always the same to us to all people and I feel safety here and I am happy with them.*



LOCAL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES INVOLVED IN INTEGRATING MIGRANTS

Many religious communities, institutions and organisations have a long-standing tradition of being involved in a wide variety of social activities; ranging from social work in their local communities to contributing to the delivery of humanitarian aid overseas. Some also have a long history of helping migrants settle and integrate in their communities.

However, religious groups have often worked side by side rather than together. Whilst religious actors individually have undoubtedly provided invaluable assistance to migrants over the years, there are also some specific advantages to actors from different religions working together on welcoming and integrating migrants.

These include:

- Migrants report feeling more welcome and at ease, and part of a wider community when helped by people from different religious backgrounds to their own.
- Helping migrants appreciate that equality and respect are fundamental characteristics of their host communities and the importance of accepting the freedom of religious beliefs and practices for all religions.
- The opportunity for opening space for interreligious dialogue and exchange of knowledge about different religious beliefs and practices, and life in general.
- Because of their diverse and often open nature, multireligious groups are likely to have a better understanding of the needs of migrants from different religious and cultural backgrounds, leading to improved quality of the services provided.
- Participation in multireligious projects, and working for a common aim, can also help strengthen relations between religious communities vertically and horizontally.

- It can also Increase visibility of local religious communities, and help counter-balance adverse stories about religion and religious actors by showing that they can work effectively and empathetically together and contribute positively to the integration of migrants.
- Demonstrate the advantages of cooperation, and how it can help build more accepting and cohesive societies.



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There are a range of activities that local religious communities can develop and implement together which are proven to help migrants' integration. These include:

- **Social café**, where migrants can meet and build relationships with local people and where migrants and local people can exchange information about each other's religion, culture, society and country.
- **Language café**, where volunteers can help migrants learn the local language and where migrants can learn about their new community and its culture and customs.
- **Social events**, where migrants and local people can share food and stories and get to know each other better.
- **Local guided tours**, where migrants can learn about their new community and its history and get to know the location of shops that sell religiously appropriate food, places of worship, local schools, medical facilities etc.
- **Friendly family program** that links migrant families with local families so that migrants can develop a new social network.
- **Information and advice center**, where migrants can get information about issues such as accessing education, employment, and healthcare; help understanding and replying to letters from authorities and assistance with filling in applications for family reunification, driving license etc.
- **Homework help**, where adult migrants can get help preparing for language and integration courses and where migrant children can get help with their homework.
- **Sports activities**, such as football and swimming sessions that can help migrants stay fit and develop social networks.

- **Music and drama workshops and performances**, that can help migrants share their experiences and develop social networks.
- **Shared celebration of religious festivals**, that can provide opportunities for migrants and volunteers to learn about each other's cultures and religions.



LESSONS LEARNT WHEN DEVELOPING A MULTIRELIGIOUS INTEGRATION PROJECT

Organisations involved in this research have identified a number of important considerations when designing and implementing multireligious integration projects.

- **Avoid duplication:** Before initiating a new integration project it is important to understand which needs are already met by other integration projects to avoid merely duplicating these services, and wasting precious resources.
- **Consult/cooperate with other actors:** If possible it is important to consult or work with organisations that are already involved in delivering integrations services locally.
- **Clear visual identity:** Developing a clear visual identity (such as Goda Grannar's logo that includes a mosque and a church) can help promote the integration project and emphasise its multireligious foundation.
- **Strategy:** To help maximise the outcomes and impact of the project, and to ensure that it is sustainable, it is essential to develop a robust long-term strategy that focuses not only on the migrants' immediate needs but also long-term integration requirements and funding.
- **Working together:** Working with people from different religious backgrounds can be challenging. It is important to meet each other with respect and curiosity, to embrace each other's uniqueness and to appreciate each other's strengths. The foundation of multireligious cooperation must be reciprocity and equality between all participating institutions and people especially concerning commitment, staffing and funding. It is also important to keep developing the relationships between all people involved in the project.

- **Relations with migrants:** It is essential to welcome and treat all migrants equally regardless of their religious affiliation and background. It is not about helping 'others' but about helping each other, and appreciating that often migrants can help and teach volunteers and staff just as much as staff and volunteers can help and teach migrants.
- **Services:** It is important to be dignified in all areas of support and delivery of services. It is also imperative to base all activities on self-empowerment and to support migrants' growing knowledge and independence.



CASE STUDY: GODA GRANNAR – A MULTIRELIGIOUS COOPERATION ON INTEGRATION IN STOCKHOLM

This project was set up in a response to the large number of migrants arriving in Stockholm in the summer of 2015. Initially Stockholm's mosque decided to provide food and shelter to many of the migrants that arrived at the central train station. The local Katarina Church wanted to help as well and rather than starting their own project they contacted the mosque and offered their assistance. This led to a cooperation that helped thousands of transiting migrants.

The mosque and the church soon recognised that they also wanted to find ways of helping migrants in the longer term. Consequently, together with Islamic Relief, they established Goda Grannar (Good Neighbours) that now provides a wide range of activities, including language classes, sports activities, advice services, help with homework, and friendship families, aimed at helping migrants integrate into the host community. Some of the reasons why the church and the mosque decided to cooperate rather than initiate their own individual projects include:



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- *'We chose the mosque because they have linguistic and cultural competences that we do not have.'*
- *'People came here to get help, but we could not help them on our own, we needed help.'*
- *'The mosque does a lot of youth work and they have many that come every Friday and they have space.'*
- *'People have heard from the Imam that this cooperation is not just between the church and the mosque... everybody must get together and create some things. Cooperation is not just that you talk about it, but that you find human beings to cooperate with.'*



What the project coordinators think of Goda Grannar:

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- *'There are many things we have learnt about each other, we have taught each other what Christmas means and what Eid means and about what happens in the mosque.'*
- *'Our meeting place, our faith in God, we want to show a God that loves unconditionally.'*
- *'The cooperation is not just between Christians and Muslims but between human beings. We have 80% commonalities we can cooperate on, there are a few differences, but we accept our differences. We work together as human beings'*
- *"Something exciting happens when you cooperate on all levels, we as leaders talk to each other but all the volunteers talk to each other too."*
- *"We talk a lot about how we get people to meet and do things together, so they can see how alike we are"*
- *'There are many people that no longer believe, we (referring to the church and the mosque) do something for human beings that gives meaning to religion. We open up and are there for other people.'*

Some examples of what migrants think of Goda Grannar:

- *They brought together all the religions and gave the thought there is no difference between the religions.*
- *All the time when I go there, I feel very happy and welcomed and I get help, and someone listens to me, and at the same time tries to help me.*
- *This is how they respect us, on the basis that when there is like, our religious celebrations, they participate in them with us, this is a very nice thing.*
- *They offer help, like their way of doing it, through the mosque and the church, because perhaps if I found the church by its own and no-one spoke Arabic, it would be difficult to understand them.*
- *They entered just with helping us as we are, to integrate in the country and to know their customs and traditions and to feel that we and them are united.*
- *They show each other respect, they demonstrate that we need each other, we are strong together, we cannot simply be alone.*
- *No religion says that you cannot meet that one or this one, all of us are brothers and all of us love each other.*

FUNDING FOR MULTIRELIGIOUS INTEGRATION PROJECTS

Our research has shown that religious actors can make a significant contribution to the integration of migrants especially when they work together. However, these projects can often only be developed and implemented if funders recognise the benefits, and are willing to support them.

Given that there are some distinct benefits of multireligious cooperation on integration, this guidance encourages funders to include multireligious cooperation as one of the criteria for deciding which activities and initiatives should be supported. An example of a funding scheme that already includes this is the Weiss Du er Ich Bin? funding initiative in Germany.

WEISST DU WER ICH BIN? – FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MULTIRELIGIOUS INTEGRATION PROJECTS IN GERMANY

This program was initiated in 2016 and it is funded by the German Federal Ministry of the Interior. The program aims at encouraging Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities, institutions and organisations to cooperate on projects that focus on assisting migrants in the integration process. It offers up to € 15.000 per project.

A wide range of multireligious projects all over Germany have benefitted from this funding. These projects include the establishment of multicultural cafés in Bad Berneck and Biberach; multireligious swimming lessons for women and children in Frankfurt-Hausen, IT courses for refugees in Oberhausen and information services for refugees in Bremen.

SUMMARY

Religious communities, institutions and organisations have an important role to play in providing short- and long-term assistance to the many migrants that are coming to Europe.

Our research has shown that there are many benefits of religious communities, institutions and organisations working together across religious boundaries to provide such services. These advantages extend to service providers and Integration organisations; religious groups and communities; migrants; and host communities and societies.

It is hoped that this guidance will inspire and encourage many more religious actors to get involved in, and cooperate on, welcoming and integrating migrants.



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

This booklet is a joint initiative between the European Council of Religious Leaders and the University of Winchester's Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace.

The research which informed this booklet was carried out by Dr Majbritt Lyck-Bowen and Dr Mark Owen.

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WHO WE ARE

The European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL)

was established in 2002 as a platform to enhance communication and cooperation between senior religious leaders of different faiths across Europe. The Council draws on the rich religious traditions and values that are an integral part of Europe's history and fabric, in order to support the enhancement of social and environmental harmony, and peace and stability throughout Europe and the wider world.

The Winchester Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace

is a high-impact research centre dedicated to helping create a free, just and peaceful world. It aims to do this by sharing excellence in knowledge, understanding, skills, relationships, and best practice in reconciliation and peacebuilding, with people of all religions and none.

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