

# General Meeting 2018

*Integration in European cities*

Twinning for successful integration and democratic engagement

**Presentation of results from workshops**



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## Background

Following an exceptional high migration to some of the municipalities of Douzelage in 2015 and 2016, the issue of immigrant integration into European societies has become increasingly important.

The towns of Douzelage face two closely related and significant problems that make integration difficult and that delay a successful integration of immigrants;

- Immigrants' low participation and influence in local society
- Prejudice and discrimination

In view of this background Oxelösund has, in consultation with the Douzelage presidency, formulated the project *Integration in European cities*. The project is the basis for a granted application for EU co-funding.

## Workshops during the general meeting

The work during General meeting 2018 is supposed to be conducted in workshops regarding the issue about strengthened democratically participation and the prevention of prejudices and discrimination.

The workshops will have focus on three main keys to a successful integration;

- **Language**  
Being able to communicate with residents in a new country is one of the main keys to successful integration.
- **Civil society**  
To establish contacts in a new country is an important factor for integration. It's about support and service from the society. But above all it's about what civil society offers in the form of community, culture, political involvement etc.
- **Culture**  
To be orientated about the culture of a new country is an important factor for integration. It is about becoming aware of the social norms typical of the new country, both written and unwritten.

## Preparatory work

About two months before General meeting the delegates has been asked to do some preparatory work. For one of the topics/main keys above they've been asked to make a short documentation on their towns (or country) has been successful and less successful according to immigration

The documentation of the preparatory work (**appendix**) has formed a basis for the discussions in the workshops.

## This report

This report presents, in point form, some of the conclusions and comments that the working groups found during their workshops

## Conclusions and comments on *Language* as a key to integration

- Today the system has collapsed due to the great number of immigrants in 2015. A lot of volunteers work with language instead.
- Women miss language schools because they have to take care of children. It is important that all members of a family learn the new language.
- In the Netherlands you have to pay for your course. If you don't manage to learn the language in a specific time, you will get a fine.
- Motivation, asylum rules and former education means a lot when you are about to learn a new language.
- The most important thing is that refugees learn the language spoken in the country. After that, work will come, then apartment, and then become involved in the rest of society and become part of it. Maybe by participating in activities, singing in the choir etc.
- Language education should be free, job is important and volunteers help in different ways. One can use sports, art and more to integrate the new arrivals. Also, one has to work to break prejudices.
- The government should take full responsibility for the refugees / new arrivals. Language is the most important thing to begin with.
- Denmark: 8 per cent of the town's population are immigrants. The higher integration the easier it is to learn the language and key to integration. Differences, Somali women were very good because they saw it as a chance to "break free" and get a chance. Difference between first and second generation.
- We should use local volunteers more. Of friendship and open hearts. Straight communication, language courses. We can welcome the refugees into our homes (the proposal came from a place that had only two refugee families all in all).
- Something that didn't work; big places where many asylum seekers are living at the same place not being blended into the community.

## Conclusions and comments on *Civil society* as a key to integration

- It may be necessary to introduce control systems to be able to control NGOs so they do not exploit the immigrants coming to the municipality.
- There is a lack of information to the municipality's and residents about refugees who are coming. Poor communication leads to resistance in society.
- Information and prevalence of communication, when refugees were on their way to the municipality, was a problem. The importance of getting information early to organize help efforts is necessary.
- It is not possible to integrate without having an understanding of the people to be integrated because they are often traumatized. You must have an understanding of the refugees in order to succeed.
- The influence of the press and social media on opinion is important. Now many have had a negative picture of the refugee reception.
- In Niederanven the population is used to receiving people from other cultures. We are trying to create meetings between refugees and citizens. We cook based on Luxembourg's traditional dishes and all cooking is done in the country's languages. We organize cafes where refugees have the opportunity to have direct contact and what needs they have.
- Bad integration experience of refugees resides in the same area. Now we try to spread the accommodation in several places, thereby strengthening integration.
- We had a meeting about Syria. Volunteers organized an evening in which refugees who moved from Syria had to tell their stories. As a result, those who participated took the discussion in society that we need to help the refugees.
- Good examples is common culture events, knowledge of civil society rules, special education and integration programs and free language courses.
- Less successful example is unfair media reports, extreme religious views and integration outside the society - create subcultures.

## Conclusions and comments on *Culture* as a key to integration

- Focus on educating women in ethnic minority groups. It helps the whole family and, in the long run, the whole community - rings on the water. One can train, for example, three women who, in turn, have the task of training three women and so on. In this way, one becomes a "role model" for each other.
- Everyone's own qualities must be noted, and everyone must be allowed to develop according to their own conditions. Information can be provided about the country's specific festivals and more.
- Size of towns are both good and bad – good in the sense that it's easier to "integrate" but complicated in the way that urbanization and ordinary population moving out.
- Discussing minimum wage, a good way for migrants to get into the labour market and integrated into the community. At the same time there are discussions regarding the ethical perspective and seeing to businesses doesn't dump the wages.
- Everyone has to attend school, and everyone has to find a job. The whole family should go to school for two years, and the young should get a normal schooling.
- You can cook together, and tell stories (storytelling) from each other's cultures. Old and young from different cultures can meet. You can perform different sports together.
- Failure is where people live separate lives and do not want to be integrated. Success is when you are motivated and integrated. Being part of a local culture and trying to speak the language and try to do the same things as local people are doing makes it easier to understand. Work with people and that people have different desires and needs.
- Difficulties when there are huge communities arriving to a new town, they are not curious or interested, if you do not adapt to that you cannot get acquainted to your new country. Bigger masses or more people that immigrate can lead to people segregating to their own culture.
- Another aspect is the boundary between the domestic culture and the immigrated culture where there is a risk of discrimination. Such an example might be the question of whether Burka is allowed to wear or not.
- The meeting concluded that it is important to inform immigrants about what is happening in the welcoming country, both written and unwritten. Then it is important that the recipient country (municipality) LISTEN on immigrant background descriptions and wishes. In the best of worlds, such a process speeds up integration work by increasing understanding of each other at an early stage.