



Embrace



PARTICIPATORY PROCESS WITH NEWCOMERS IN BRAGA, PORTUGAL

2022-2023



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WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOKLET

This Booklet combines the participatory experience of 19 newcomers and 9 decision-makers from Braga, under the project "Embrace", which took place from October 2022 until March 2023.

This document is structured into four main chapters. Chapter 1, titled "About the Project," provides an overview of the Embrace project and outlines the three phases of the participatory process with newcomers: Listening Sessions, Face-to-Face Meeting, and Co-Projecting Workshops.

The second chapter titled "Newcomers' Experiences and Recommendations," focuses on the insights shared by the newcomers during the Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting about their integration in Braga. The chapter is organized thematically, covering topics such as Language and Access to Work. It begins with an introductory text that combines testimonials from the newcomers, aiming to faithfully represent their contributions. The chapter then presents the main recommendations for better practices in bullet point format.

Within this chapter, illustrative quotes from newcomers are displayed in dark red boxes, while relevant input from practitioners on the same themes is presented in light red boxes.

Chapter 3, titled "Creation of a Collaborative Solution," highlights the final phase of the process, the Co-Projecting Workshops. After a collaborative decision on the topic to focus on - Access to Housing -, this chapter showcases the ideation process that led to the co-creation of two solutions for an improved language learning experience. These solutions were developed collaboratively by newcomers, practitioners, and decision-makers.

The Booklet concludes with a final chapter that presents a selection of "Testimonials from Participants," collected during and after the activities. These testimonials aim to highlight the added value of involving them in decision-making processes.

Overall, the information presented in this booklet serves to inspire decision-makers and practitioners by showcasing the unique perspectives and contributions of newcomers. It also shares significant experiences and recommendations regarding integration, with a particular emphasis on Access to Housing. This valuable information can be utilized for the development and improvement of policies and programs aimed at promoting the successful integration of newcomers.



THE PROJECT

The Participatory Process with Newcomers is part of the European project "Embrace - Empowering Migrants to Be Representative Actors in Community Engagement", funded by AMIF. It has been implemented simultaneously in 11 cities in 6 European countries, in 2022-2023.

Using ComParte's methodology, it aimed at involving newcomers in the decision-making process of the topics that directly affect them and their integration into the country.

This booklet compiles the knowledge collected during the participatory process, in the three main phases presented on the following pages: Listening Sessions, Face-to-Face Meeting and Co-Projecting Workshops.

It intends to be a working tool for decision-makers and practitioners, using the lived experiences of the newcomers to make better-informed and efficient decisions when defining integration policies, aligned with the beneficiaries' real needs.

NEWCOMERS INVOLVED:

19 newcomers, 47% female, from Afghanistan, Syria, Camaroon, and Congo.

DECISION-MAKERS/PRACTITIONERS INVOLVED:

9 decision-makers/practitioners from:

- Municipality of Braga: Solidarity and Social Cohesion Department and BragaHabit - Housing Department
- Adolescere - Refugee hosting organization
- Portuguese Red Cross - Braga area
- CLIB - International School of Braga - Refugee hosting organization



STEP 1. LISTENING SESSIONS

Listening Sessions are informal moments where, through creative and participatory methodologies, newcomers share their experiences and recommendations for better integration in the municipality. Between October and November 2022, a total of 5 Listening Sessions were conducted, involving 19 newcomers. The sessions commenced with an interactive activity using emojis, where newcomers selected specific emojis to convey their integration experiences upon arrival and in the present. This activity served as a catalyst for detailed discussions that explored their perspectives on what should be maintained or changed for improved integration of future newcomers in the city of Braga.

STEP 2.

FACE-TO-FACE MEETING

The Face-to-Face Meeting, held in January 2023, facilitated direct communication between 6 newcomers and 5 decision-makers and practitioners. This meeting served as a platform for newcomers to share their experiences and recommendations in a personal and direct manner. The session fostered dialogue among participants, allowing for the exchange of ideas and clarification of perceptions. During the meeting, newcomers primarily shared their insights, while decision-makers actively listened, asked questions, and provided feedback on how the newcomers' experiences and recommendations aligned with and influenced their work. Taking place in an informal setting, this meeting was an opportunity to create proximity between newcomers and decision-makers.



STEP 3.

CO-PROJECTING WORKSHOPS

The Co-Projecting Workshop, held in March 2023, brought together 3 newcomers, 8 practitioners and decision-makers for an intensive full-day collaboration. The focus of this activity was on a challenge identified during the Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meetings: Learning the language.

Building upon the tested Participatory Policy Design methodology implemented in several northern European countries, the workshop provided a platform for diverse stakeholders to come together and develop tangible solutions that are meaningful for the beneficiaries.

Throughout the entire day, participants engaged in a dynamic process, employing practical, fun, and creative tools. As a result of this intensive collaboration, two prototype solutions aimed at improving Access to Housing were successfully created.

NEWCOMERS' EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting, newcomers shared their experiences and recommendations about many different aspects of their integration in Braga. The following pages present their contributions, systematized and organized by theme. It starts with an introductory text that combines testimonials from the newcomers, followed by the main recommendations in bullet points, and relevant quotes from newcomers and from decision-makers/practitioners.

LANGUAGE

For us, learning Portuguese makes all the difference. There aren't always the right classes for our level, so learning the language remains a difficult task for us. Sometimes we are included in courses with European people for whom it is easier to understand Portuguese, other times the teachers are not able to speak English with us and, therefore, communicating during the class becomes impossible. Some of us learned during classes, some just after 3 years of courses, and others learned by speaking with Portuguese people, but for most people who have a different alphabet, the task is really difficult and some of us give up.

- Place us in classes based on our background (education background, age) and level of Portuguese knowledge.
- The language classes should start as soon as we arrive in Portugal.
- Don't start with grammar; teach us first basic/practical words like how to buy things.
- First, explain in Portuguese, but then translate to English or our common language.

"Learning the language... When I'll know how to speak, it will make all the difference. The first big thing is the language." - Newcomer

"In the beginning, they gave me a questionnaire of 50-60 questions. I answered just 3. But still, they put me with 20 students that already knew Portuguese. They put me in a class with Spanish people. I answered only 3 questions, and they put me at that level!" - Newcomer

"We need to try to understand how we can make classes work for everyone in the same room, without knowing each person's level." - Practitioner



ACCESS TO WORK

We feel happy if we have a job, it's much better than receiving money from the government; we don't want to be supported all our life. We are just looking for an opportunity. If we're lucky, someone from our community who's already working or a social worker may find useful contacts; otherwise, many of us are unable to find work and feel desperate. Since we came, we're trying to find a job. Trying, trying, applying for multiple jobs. But we can't, especially in the fields we have experience in. Having only a paper instead of a residence card, not knowing the culture, and above all, not speaking Portuguese leaves us behind.

- A person from the organization must help us find a job by looking for opportunities and helping us apply for them. It helps when the person knows the company and goes there with us.
- Create or send us to a vocational institute, where our skills are evaluated, where we can learn more skills (if necessary) and job paths are pointed out.

"I now work at the school. I have more money that I send to Turkey. I have a big family in Turkey. I got a job with the help of my social worker. I'm happy to say: I work in Portugal!"
- Newcomer

"To find a job, I need to speak Portuguese. I have tried. It does not matter what type of job. Even in cleaning and washing dishes, I need to speak Portuguese and that has made me really disappointed." - Newcomer

"There are constraints to finding a job in your related field. Many companies request certificates. For that, you need to have the equivalence of the skills and a university degree. Getting an equivalence is a long and difficult process. Some companies are more difficult than others."
- Practitioner

STUDYING

Give us hope; many of us came here with the dream of studying, also because in our countries it is not possible for everyone. We know it's hard to work and study at the same time, to continue our desire, but give us an opportunity. Don't speak only about work when we ask about our education.

- Create a quota for refugee students in universities, a program that we do not have to pay.
- Explain to us how we can get to university even if it is a long way. Don't just tell us we have to work.
- Help us get scholarships.

"Maybe we have to go down other paths, such as finding a solution to work first, and then trying to study. Because that's what we are here for, not to judge anyone."
- Practitioner

"I want to work, but I want to study at the same time. But they never told me to study. They always say "Work». Why? I asked directly about the university, and they were quiet. They said I needed to work. I asked about my education, but they never said anything. At least they could tell me something and give me some hope. They could say «It is ok. It will take time, but we will find a way.» Give me hope. It is impossible that it is not possible to study."
- Newcomer

ACCESS TO HOUSING

Towards the end of the program we ask ourselves: How will we pay for the house? Renting a house is one of the things that worries us the most. We would like answers, we would like to know if after 18 months we will have a house, because many of us do not earn enough money to be able to rent one on our own. Salaries are low and sometimes the work contracts are too short. Social aid helps, but we can access them only after three years of residence; in three years we will have better jobs and we can do it by ourselves. We need help now.

"I need to be in Braga for 4 years before I can apply for social housing. They do not give us a solution."
- Newcomer

"I am a part of the beneficiaries of the DOMUS Project that allows me to have a house. I feel at home. My happiness has no dimension when I feel I will have a house in this country that will be mine."
- Newcomer

"My program ends in two months. I do not have work, I do not know what will happen. I ask my organization, and nobody tells me. Will I be able to stay in the house where I am? Will I receive any type of support? What are my options if I do not find a job? I need answers."
- Newcomer

"We have several housing supports. What I was talking about was rent support. Rent subsidy. There's also social housing but there's a waiting list of years, very long. But we have rent support. A family goes to the open market, rents the house, and then asks for help. In 2 months they get help, it's immediate. It is renewable for 10 years, every year. The general access condition is to live in Braga for 3 years. We now have a clause where we manage to fit refugees. The new regulation has an exception for people that have been in catastrophes. It was the way we found to go around the rule of needing to reside in the municipality for 3 years and that is how we are managing to help Syrian families."
- Practitioner

"To receive rent support you need to have a contract with the landlord and that can be difficult. You need a guarantor; those are things that the landlord asks and that we cannot do anything about."
- Practitioner

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

We cannot afford medicine and some health care treatments. It is too expensive for the pocket money we receive.

- Create protocols for refugees to have free access to health treatments (like the dentist).
- Create protocols with pharmacies where we can get medicine and pay in the next months.

"I am sad because my mother is sick. She has asthma. We need to buy the medicine, ourselves. And the 150€ we get are not enough for the medication, it is too expensive."
- Newcomer

"I also have no help number. If I get sick, how do I treat myself? I was sick before. The community had to put the money together to help me cure my teeth."
- Newcomer



THE FIRST DAYS IN BRAGA AND MAKING FRIENDS

The first month is hard because we don't know anyone. We feel in the dark, we feel very sleepy and blind. In the beginning, we do not know anything: where the bakery is, the name of a shop for bread, where is the market, the different places in the city, where is our house. We think about our life and future and adjusting to a new culture, to a new place... It takes time. We feel lost. Some of us do not remember what happened in the first two months, it is like we were asleep. We need time to get used to it, but when we meet people, we get more comfortable and we can start to "open our eyes" more or less. Knowing people makes it easier, friends help, they explain things. If they are Portuguese, we can learn the language with them. We usually meet them at work, in the mosque, or through our social workers or organizations that make the bridge.

- Having a warm welcoming at the airport makes us happy.
- It's nice to be welcomed at our new house by our social worker and have the house prepared with food and all the basics we need.
- Tell us where our cultural places are, like the mosque. This way we feel better and we meet people from our culture.
- In the first days, don't leave us alone. Even if it's the weekend or a holiday, it helps to have someone around.
- Present other newcomers or people from your country to us when we arrive.

"I like Portuguese people. Generally, I like Portuguese people a lot. When I arrived, they were very nice and helped me a lot. It is very good. They help and explain."
- Newcomer

"When I arrive in Portugal, I cried. I felt poor and lost inside me, and it was at that moment that I realized that I am a true refugee. Because in Afghanistan I have a house, my motorbike, and a job. I had a good job. Now I am in Portugal as a refugee. It was at that moment... a person with this background becomes a refugee. All in one week, one day. My government collapsed, and my identity collapsed." - Newcomer

"When I arrived in Portugal, I was very sad. I did not want to talk to anybody. I had friends, I did walks, everything. I arrived here and I had nobody. Colleagues, friends, girlfriend, love... I left all there. I got to Portugal, and it was very hard. For one month I did not speak to anybody."
- Newcomer

"Now I have friends. I meet them at my work, they are my colleagues. After a while, I know them better and I have many Portuguese friends."
- Newcomer

"Near the fire station, there is a mosque. I went there on the afternoon of my first day in Braga and I found there many Arabs friends and Africans. I felt more relieved."
- Newcomer

"They try to know about me, if I am fine, if I need something. That really helped me feel good." - Newcomer



ACCESS TO INFORMATION, MAKING DECISIONS, AND HONESTY

We want to understand what is going on and what will happen in the future. For that, we want to have access to the organization plan for our integration; not just parts of it, but the whole plan. We also want to know what is going on in the country; sometimes there is a holiday and we don't know and go to the office. We want to know if there is something happening in the city.

Most of the times, we are just informed about arrangements in our lives; when they talk to us decisions are already made. Make sure to involve us in all matters. In the beginning of our stay in Portugal people were not honest with us, they made false promises and there were always excuses for things not happening. For us, it's important when the workers are clear and transparent with us about what they can and cannot do.

- Share with us the whole plan for our integration. Tell us what happens after the 18 months.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep.
- Don't meet us with a predefined idea of who we are.
- Come to a meeting ready to hear us, not with your decision already made.
- Be very honest with us about what you can and cannot do.
- When you talk to us, take action afterwards; don't just talk.
- Involve us in the decisions that concern our life, like when choosing the city where we will live.
- Give us information about national holidays, what people do on those days and what activities are happening in the city.

"They were very clear with us from the beginning about what they could give. Now I accept that they can't do anything because since the first day in Braga, they were very honest with me." - Newcomer

"They have answers already. Decisions are already taken. Nobody asked us if we wanted to go to Braga. Until the last moment, we did not know if we were going to Braga or Guimarães. That is why many people left the country." - Newcomer

"One day, students were wearing a uniform. Teachers in uniform. We did not know what was going down. They had some symbols with them. There were shouting and they were singing. That is good to know. It helps us to get integrated." - Newcomer

"They are just talking with no action. Just promises. They talk with us, but no action is taken." - Newcomer



CREATION OF A COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

Post-its, role play, discussions, image theatre, drawings, brainstorming, laughs, creativity, and fun! These were the main ingredients of the Co-Projecting Workshop in Braga.

Throughout a very intensive and dynamic day, 3 newcomers and 8 decision-makers and practitioners worked together to create a collaborative solution for one of the main challenges of integration in the municipality, identified and decided unanimously upon the Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting:

Access to Housing

At the end of the day, these were the co-created solutions that were prototyped by the group:



SOLUTION 1

We are going to create a working group, that includes people from several institutions to identify isolated persons that are willing to share their houses with migrants for promoting integration and mitigating housing problems in Braga.

SOLUTION 2

We will create a physical point inside “Loja do Cidadão” in Braga, that offers 1) information 2) technical support 3) the creation of links with local communities for refugees who’re looking for a house in Braga. There are two types of workers in this place: 1) refugees with experience in the system, and 2) Portuguese people with specialized knowledge of the housing topic, voluntary or employed. The information is passed informally, accessible, and designed according to the needs of each person. So that refugees can find a home in a simplified and informal way.”

How did the group arrive at these solutions?

Identifying the root cause of the problem

Throughout the first phase of the Co-Projecting Workshop, the participants identified different causes that contributed to the lack of access to housing for newcomers. By organizing and clustering them, they can be summed up in these three thematic areas:

- Navigating the system: orientation and information
- Creating informal networks: to tackle problems with discrimination, and the required warranties from the landlord
- Work: a fundamental aspect for newcomers to be able to pay rent and to face some of the required warranties

Taking into consideration all the information shared, the participants were invited to create a problem statement, that would guide the process of creating a collaborative solution. The participants couldn't define one topic only, so they elaborated two statements:

- (1) How might we diagnose the current housing situation in Braga, so that we have more livable houses available?
- (2) How might we simplify the renting process and give people access to information, so that people can rent a house?

Identifying key features and possible solutions for the problem

The participants were divided into two groups to tackle both **problem** statements.

GROUP 1

Group (1) identified the following key features as important for the creation of a solution to the identified problem:

- Fiscal benefits
- Interactive diagnosis
- Incentives for landlords to rent their houses
- Platform for all migrants to share their ideas
- Contact government and share ideas with migrants
- Interaction with different people
- Solidarity and benefits
- Houses shared with whom can't get one easily and fight isolation of people living alone



Ideating key features and possible solutions for the problem

Considering the identified key features, different possible solutions emerged, such as:

We create a multi-stakeholder team to identify empty houses that are in good condition to host people or that need renovation. The municipality must create a campaign to involve owners in renting these houses. The team contacts the owners and informs them about the benefits they can have if they rent or renovate these houses. It's important to create links with local enterprises.

We create an app in which everyone can identify an inhabited house. We also create a team that goes around Braga identifying abandoned house and then putting them into the platform. This group will contact the owners and propose a solution.

We create a database of people who live alone and an app with available houses. This is done with a contact with the parish councils to identify the available houses and the unoccupied houses. There are fiscal benefits to requalify and benefits to rent the houses. In the rehabilitation of the houses, we include volunteers and do a network with social institutions, owners, companies and create a multi-disciplinary team to see the results and see that the people share responsibilities.

Create a platform (done by Senior University and Minho University) where elderly people or people who live alone can host migrant people in their houses.

After this moment, the group started to understand what could be done. Many solutions were similar to each other, so converging was easier. The conversation began by talking about a way to map abandoned houses and about having elderly people living alone with empty rooms in their houses. Regarding the mapping of abandoned houses, a participant mentioned the mistrust and fear of the owners and that mapping abandoned houses and contacting them could be seen with bad eyes. So, the group started to focus on the rooms in the houses of elderly people, and on enhancing the solidarity of the local people. This was a way to tackle housing problems, loneliness problems but also change the narrative around migration.

Prototyping the selected solution

To prototype the selected solution, the group used a storyboard, defining the following steps:

- 1 Create a multidisciplinary team that brings together different organizations.
- 2 Identify isolated people through contact with the senior university, Minho University, parishes, parish council, and census. Identify newcomers that do not have a house through different local organizations.
- 3 Understand the profiles and see if they are eligible.
- 4 Meet the senior people in their houses and see if it needs some renovation.
- 5 Create a "match" and operationalize it.
- 6 Disseminate positive experiences to change the way people see migrants and become more willing to rent houses to them.

In the end, the group decided - as mentioned before - that...

We are going to create a working group, that includes people from several institutions to identify isolated persons that are willing to share their houses with migrants for promoting integration and mitigating housing problems in Braga.

Ideating key features and possible solutions for the problem

GROUP 2

Group (2) identified the following key features as important for the creation of a solution to the identified problem:

- Need for proximity
- Simplifying processes
- Easy access
- Prioritize and define criteria
- Get to as many people as possible
- Video with translations, so it's easy for everyone to understand
- As soon as newcomers arrive in the country
- Specific department regarding housing
- Informal
- Physical space
- Access to a network (creating informal relationships)
- Q&A (explanations)
- Fun, playful
- Rotate the houses
- Linking newcomers and landlords

The group chose to focus on this idea: The possibility of creating a specific space where all newcomers can go to get information and practical support regarding renting/buying a house, while also meeting new people, both for networking and for informal relationships.

The group decided on the fundamental characteristics that this space must have:



- To be a physical location.
- To be inside “Loja do Cidadão” in Braga, for its location and easy access.
- To offer information, and practical support and raise awareness about housing.
- It is aimed at refugees/ newcomers looking for a house in Braga.
- There are volunteers and contracted workers.
- Workers: some are refugees with experience in the system, and some are Portuguese with specialized knowledge in the area of housing.
- The information should be passed informally and has to be accessible and designed for everyone.

TESTIMONIALS FROM PARTICIPANTS

"This is the first time we have really talked about things openly. We had a lot inside and we feel comfortable now. We shared issues with other organizations, but they immediately interrupt us. But here we can talk. "
(Newcomer)

"What became clear is the different understanding that the entities and the refugees have of their role."
(Decision-Maker)

"It is very important to listen because the refugee is the person who is speaking directly." (Decision-Maker)

"Now I know what this is. You listen. You helped us to be heard by decision-makers." (Newcomer)

"It was perfect. You were here listening and not judging. It was not about judging. What I'm saying, you hear. There was no good or bad, just sharing."
(Newcomer)

"It was possible to share my personal work experience, to confront it, in a positive way, with other perspectives, institutional or personal ones, on these problematic. But also, my expectations were surpassed concerning the creation and the design of new and innovative answers." (Decision-Maker)

About 70% of newcomers said they felt safe sharing their experiences and opinions, and that they liked to participate in the Listening Sessions. About 65% stated they had space to talk about the experiences that they wanted to share and would like to participate in more sessions like these.

"This allowed me to see different points of view in a dynamic and interactive form. It was possible to pass through different phases to arrive to a solution in a creative and not tiring way." (Decision-Maker)

All of decision-makers agree that the Face-to-Face Meeting was a constructive moment that allowed to experience a closer connection with newcomers. 75% agree that the contributions and recommendations from the newcomers were useful for their work.



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PLACE



MECHELEN



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