
SOCIAL INNOVATION FOR REFUGEE INCLUSION

FROM BRIGHT SPOTS TO SYSTEM CHANGE



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By Liam Patuzzi, Meghan Benton, and Alexandra Embiricos

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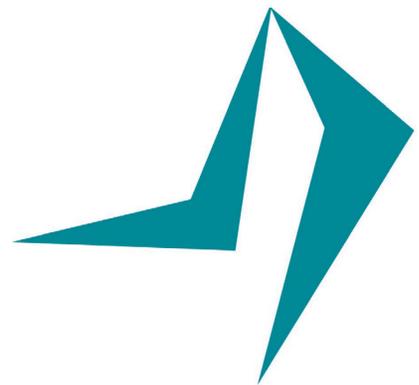
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Refugee and migrant inclusion has seen a wave of social innovation in recent years—ideas, practices, and collaborations purporting to offer new solutions. In response to the 2015–16 European refugee and migration crisis, hundreds of social enterprises, tech start-ups, and private companies on both sides of the Atlantic pioneered bright ideas to speed up or improve the process of helping newcomers settle into a new country and culture. Three years on, some of these initiatives have begun to bear fruit, while others have failed to deliver on their promise. The social innovation field is at an inflection point: as the intense public interest in refugee issues that followed the crisis wanes, it is unclear whether these new solutions will outlast the hype.

Social innovation has a lot to offer—at least on paper. It promises experimentation, a holistic approach to integration, and the flexibility to plug gaps in government services, for instance by providing support for unaccompanied young refugees who have aged out of child- or youth-focused supports. Some of the best-established innovations match newcomers with families or locals of a similar age in ‘co-housing’ situations. While the goal is to build social ties in an informal setting, this type of innovation hints at larger ambitions: at scale, co-housing could alleviate pressure on public and private housing markets, and potentially help assuage public anxiety about the competition posed by newcomers. Other examples include labour-market alternatives to rigid government integration trajectories, including coding schools (a zipline into high-growth occupations, such as computer programming and software development) and cooking or tailoring programmes that ‘unlock’ skills some newcomers already have instead of pushing them to compete in the mainstream labour market where they may have more limited success. Other well-established areas of innovation include connecting jobseekers with retirees who mentor them as they seek out training and jobs, and creating the conditions for different groups to meet, including through mobile community kitchens and voluntary activities.

As the intense public interest in refugee issues that followed the crisis wanes, it is unclear whether these new solutions will outlast the hype.

At its most ambitious, social innovation could sow the seeds of a more efficient yet fundamentally human approach to integration, one that better meets the needs of newcomers and members of receiving communities, who gain a sense of stake in the integration process. But the field as a whole has yet to deliver. Some of the most hyped initiatives have failed to identify sustainable funding or found themselves pulled away from their work by media interest and policy events. Meanwhile, the field has become something of an echo chamber, in which promising examples are continuously circulated without any hard proof that they work—and sometimes even before they get off the ground. Put simply, the best stories have not translated into the greatest impact.

Numerous design challenges call into question the potential for social innovation to spread and scale. Some models have limited potential to move beyond metropolitan settings since they rely on city infrastructure or an engaged community. Promising examples away from economic hubs are few and far between, and places with the greatest number of innovations (such as Berlin) may not be those with the greatest need. And since most social enterprises are small scale, they generally have few incentives to choose the most difficult settings and target groups; instead, they may end up ‘preaching to the converted’ or primarily serving newcomers who have other opportunities or avenues of support available to them.

To better deliver on social innovation’s promise for refugee inclusion, government officials, funding bodies, philanthropies, private companies, and social enterprises need to bolster the social innovation ‘ecosystem’ and move the conversation beyond sharing promising practices. The following areas demand greater attention:

- **Designing innovative partnerships.** Partnerships can help initiatives coordinate their efforts, or enable governments to scale up bright ideas and design more holistic or agile integration trajectories

(for instance, by working with partners to address cross-cutting integration challenges). But building effective partnerships between actors with different institutional cultures and uneven power dynamics is no easy feat: it requires clear communication, a shared vision, and an agreed-upon division of labour. While there are many promising models, such as the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee Issues and the Urban Agenda Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, the private sector is a particularly promising, if often less engaged, partner. Systematically hiring ‘bridge-builders’—professionals with experience in multiple relevant fields, such as business and community-based nonprofits—could help ‘unlikely partners’ find a common ground.

- ***Improving impact assessment and evaluation.*** Evidence on what works is critical for social enterprises looking to strengthen their operations and for funders seeking to determine what to invest in and support to scale. Yet in the field of social innovation for refugee inclusion, there is limited understanding of what to measure, when, and how. The push for high-quality evidence in recent years, in part at the insistence of funders, has also been something of a mixed blessing: social enterprises may be evaluated on the basis of measurable, one-size-fits-all indicators, such as employment rates, but this may overlook less tangible but nonetheless crucial forms of impact, such as a sense of belonging or psychosocial wellbeing. Impact assessment also holds opportunity costs; in some cases, devoting more resources to impact measurement, particularly for initiatives that are small in scale, can lead to a counterintuitive drop in actual impact. Policymakers and funders could support social enterprises by offering additional funding and training in this area, by adopting more realistic expectations for initiatives just getting off the ground, and by learning from the broader definitions of integration success used by social enterprises.
- ***Supporting innovative funding models.*** Social innovation often falls through the gaps of traditional public and private funding. While there is a considerable amount of EU money available for migrant and refugee inclusion, its administrative requirements may be difficult to navigate and fulfil for young social initiatives. The question of who funds social enterprises raises philosophical, ethical, and political questions about whose role it is to support the vulnerable and build community—but the political and financial reality often demands that inclusion initiatives look beyond the government for support. Promising options may come from the growing field of social investment: social impact bonds, an innovative form of public-private partnership, can help governments fund high-cost preventative measures (thus avoiding the long-term costs of not acting) and test riskier solutions, all with the help of private investors. But thought should be given to how to make these options more accessible for grassroots initiatives.
- ***Improving learning platforms for policymakers and programme designers.*** The broader ecosystem—the infrastructure of exchange and support—can also help good ideas grow and spread. Forums aiming to broker relationships among policymakers, businesses, and other nongovernmental actors proliferated during the refugee and migration crisis. While many of these have focused on one industry or professional community, such as tech, local government, or the private sector, some are cross-cutting and have encouraged exchange between groups with a shared interest in supporting integration. Yet most platforms have struggled to move from showcasing innovation to promoting more in-depth conversations about what has and has not worked. Deeper analysis of failures and bad practices could jolt the sector out of its comfort zone and create a more substantive conversation about how to overcome stumbling blocks and make initiatives sustainable.

Forging ahead, one major challenge will be maintaining momentum as the sense of emergency (and the accompanying public engagement) wanes. The crisis exposed much broader structural challenges that European societies will face for decades to come—from dramatic changes in the world of work, to bottlenecks in housing and health care. Much will depend on governments’ ability to see the surge in interest in innovation for refugee inclusion as a catalyst for rethinking public services for diverse societies: reaping broader lessons from problems identified by social entrepreneurs, scaling what works into mainstream services, and selling the idea that innovation for refugee inclusion can be innovation for all.

I. INTRODUCTION

The plight of asylum seekers dramatically captured public attention in 2015–16 as a rapidly climbing number arrived in Europe, many having escaped the ravaging and protracted conflict in Syria. Many European countries experienced a rude awakening, as national reception and integration systems were pushed to their limits. Existing service infrastructures crumbled under the weight of the challenges posed both by the sheer number of newcomers and by the diversity of their profiles, backgrounds, and experiences. While the intensity of arrivals has dissipated, many of these challenges continue to echo across Europe’s education systems, physical and mental health services, labour and housing markets, and neighbourhoods.

Public interest in refugee inclusion issues sparked a burst of social innovation: new ideas and energy from untraditional quarters. Numerous new actors—from civil-society organisations, to tech start-ups and social enterprises, to large multinationals—brought creative solutions to bear on long-standing integration challenges. But these efforts have proven to be a mixed bag. Some new actors fostered bright ideas, agile ways of working, and cutting-edge or community-led solutions, but many tried to ‘reinvent the wheel’ without learning from the past. Others launched new services without due attention to the ethical and privacy considerations inherent to working with vulnerable populations. Meanwhile, the hype around some of the most promising initiatives compromised their productivity, as high-profile meetings, conferences, and media interviews pulled them away from their bread-and-butter work.

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Three years on from the height of the European refugee and migration crisis—and the explosion of social innovation that accompanied it—this is an important time to take stock of what has been learned. The field is at a critical juncture, having matured from its vibrant yet chaotic beginnings (often mired in emergency response) and entering a stage of consolidation. This report takes a closer look at this evolution, first offering an audit of the successes and limitations, and then outlining some of the most well-tested models. It concludes with a discussion of some of the key considerations for social enterprises, foundations and other funders, and policymakers as they look ahead to the next phase of social innovation for refugee inclusion.

This study builds on convenings, advisory board meetings, and informal discussions between representatives of government, civil society, social entrepreneurs, and the private sector as part of the Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion (SI4RI) conference. Co-organised by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe with the U.S. and Canadian Missions to the European Union and the European Economic and Social Committee, SI4RI has since 2016 provided an important platform for exchange that goes beyond showcasing best practices, and seeks to rigorously analyse what works and help translate the experiences of small-scale initiatives into broader system and policy change.¹

¹ Audio and video recordings from the 2019 Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion (SI4RI) conference’s plenary sessions and some of its breakout sessions are available online at Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe, ‘Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion: A Sense of Home’ (conference recordings, MPI Europe, Brussels, January 2019), www.migrationpolicy.org/events/social-innovation-refugee-inclusion-sense-home. Audio recordings and presentation slides from the 2017 SI4RI conference are also available online at MPI Europe, ‘Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion: Maintaining Momentum and Creating Lasting Change’ (conference recordings and materials, MPI Europe, Brussels, November 2017), www.migrationpolicy.org/si4ri. A report from the 2017 SI4RI conference is available at Liam Patuzzi and Alexandra Embiricos, *Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion Conference Report: Maintaining Momentum and Creating Lasting Change* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/social-innovation-refugee-inclusion-conference-report.

II. THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

The integration of refugees and other migrants into a society involves numerous cross-cutting issue areas, including employment, education, housing, health care, sociocultural inclusion, and political participation. But integration policy in European countries has tended to be confined to one ministry, and often reflective of the particular priorities of an administration, rather than coordinated across government. Adding to these constraints, many European destination countries were still struggling with the fallout of economic crisis for their public budgets when the urgent task of scaling up refugee reception and inclusion services hit them with full force in 2015–16. The public backlash that followed—and that was capitalised on by immigration sceptics—further reduced the room national policymakers have for investment, experimentation, and innovation.

Social innovation holds considerable promise for overcoming these constraints. Unlike government actors, social entrepreneurs may be better placed to work across policy silos, and thus address interconnected, or ‘wicked’, problems. Social innovation is also more porous than government-led problem-solving, at least in theory, in that it imports cutting-edge advances from other fields—such as digital technologies or behavioural science—with the potential of achieving better value for money.² It can also offer a people-centred approach to difficult or costly issues; while governments’ primary focus may be on getting newcomers into work quickly to minimise strain on public coffers, social entrepreneurs may take a broader view of integration as they often draw on philanthropic support that is less narrowly focused on economic objectives.

While examples of social innovation display different strengths, most demonstrate one or more of the following benefits:

- **Overcoming deficiencies in mainstream services.** Social innovations thrive when they counteract existing biases or blindspots in government services.³ For example, the Belgian co-housing initiative CURANT, which pairs refugees with local youth in flatshares, was designed to provide support for unaccompanied young adults who have aged out of many youth-specific programmes but are not yet able to live alone.⁴ In a similar vein, social enterprises such as From Syria with Love in Belgium,⁵ SisterWorks in Australia, Bread & Roses in the United Kingdom, and Stitch by Stitch in Germany support economic inclusion for those who may struggle to find mainstream employment by training female refugees to deploy their existing skills in cooking, craft work, floristry, or sewing to earn a living.⁶ Other initiatives seek to more radically disrupt existing models of service provision. In 2014, the German nongovernmental organisation Refugees Welcome, seeking an alternative to the segrega-

2 Meghan Benton, Antonio Silva, and Will Somerville, *Applying Behavioural Insights to Support Immigrant Integration and Social Cohesion* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/behavioral-insights-immigrant-integration-social-cohesion; Meghan Benton and Alexandra Embiricos, *Doing More with Less: A New Toolkit for Integration Policy* (Brussels: MPI Europe), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/toolkit-integration-policy.

3 Participants at the 2019 SI4RI conference described the importance of creating new methods and workflows to improve social inclusion, as well as the potential of social innovation to disrupt old methods. ‘People think that if everyone did their job right this would work—but that’s not true. We need to change the way we work’ noted Kenneth Lee Clewett, Head of Ashoka’s Hello Europe during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24–25 January 2019.

4 Comments by Jolien De Crom, Project Manager, CURANT, at the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24 January 2019.

5 Opening speech by Yara Al Adib, Design Consultant and Entrepreneur, From Syria with Love, at the SI4RI conference, 16 November 2017.

6 Such programmes take a two-pronged approach to support both the social and economic empowerment of newcomers. For example, Stitch by Stitch in Germany helps women build tailoring and design skills through fashion workshops; it aims to help them develop both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills by offering professional training in a craft alongside opportunities to build social capital. Initiatives such as this could also help the women bypass or supplement formal vocational training in a setting that puts less pressure on achieving immediate results, allowing them time to build their confidence and language skills in a supportive environment. See Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, *Beyond Work: Reducing Social Isolation for Women and Other Marginalized Groups* (Washington, DC: MPI, forthcoming).

tion inherent to large refugee reception centres, launched a portal through which locals could offer to share their flat or house with newly arrived refugees.⁷ One year later, Comme à la Maison transferred this concept to France, housing refugees with local families instead of in dedicated housing facilities, and complimenting accommodation with social and professional support. This approach involves communities in refugee integration from the get-go and could lessen pressure on rental markets if delivered at scale.⁸

- **Experimentation.** One of the hallmarks of social innovation is an emphasis on new solutions and tools, including cutting-edge technology (see Box 1). Without the need to account for every penny spent, as is often the case for government-backed service provision, social innovators often have greater freedom to experiment with new approaches. For example, the Belgian social enterprise DUO for a JOB tested out an intergenerational mentoring model that connects young migrants with senior professionals, because they theorised it could both improve the migrants’ employment prospects and create bridges between different age and cultural groups. After recognising this model’s success, the Belgian public employment administration officially partnered with DUO to include its mentoring programme in the agency’s catalogue of employment support services.⁹
- **A bottom-up approach.** Many of these initiatives place considerable emphasis on tailoring their approach to local needs and/or engaging communities. The Swedish project Entry Hub, developed by the Stockholm-based consultancy We Link Sweden, brings together refugees, employers, migrant community leaders, and local officials to identify and address locality-specific barriers to inclusion that may not be obvious to national stakeholders.¹⁰ For instance, it helped the Swedish postal service redesign its recruitment process to be more open to refugees through open ‘training’ days rather than formal interview processes. And in Germany, Kitchen on the Run—a mobile community kitchen that involves refugees and locals in dinner events where they share recipes, cook together, and socialise in an informal setting that encourages personal storytelling—has been created in a shipping container, meaning it can be moved to different cities and rural areas and temporarily stationed in central locations (such as in a market place or square) to attract local buzz.¹¹
- **Emphasis on engaging refugees and migrants.** Many initiatives have put a firm emphasis on engaging refugees and migrants themselves when designing and delivering services (a model known as ‘co-creation’). For instance, the ReDI School of Digital Integration (which teaches coding, among other things) employs graduates of the programme as teachers.¹² Similarly, the networking platform SINGA relies on its members (both newcomers and the native born) to propose activities and projects, with the stated goal of enabling them to ‘co-create society instead of just adapting to it’,¹³ and the co-housing initiative Sharehaus Refugio takes decisions through a board of residents. Done right, this approach can soften the line between service provider and recipient, and treat refugees as experts rather than as victims. But

7 The initiative has since expanded to encompass 16 countries and has changed its name to Refugees Welcome International. At the time of writing, it had matched almost 1,500 refugees to flatshares. See Refugees Welcome International, ‘How It Works’, accessed 10 June 2019, www.refugees-welcome.net/#details.

8 The programme was created by SINGA, a civic organisation, which developed a digital platform that uses an algorithm to match potential local hosts and recognised refugees. Comme à la Maison Belgium recently launched a pilot of a highly personalised individualised matching service, based on in-depth interviews with both refugees and potential hosts. Author interview with Loise Mercier, Project Manager of SINGA Belgium, 22 May 2019.

9 DUO for a JOB, *Annual Report 2017* (Brussels: DUO for a JOB, 2018), www.duoforajob.be/en/blog/annual-report-2017-is-out/.

10 We Link Sweden, ‘Entry Hub’, accessed 15 March 2019, www.welinksweden.se/entryhub.

11 Kitchen on the Run, ‘Was Wir Tun’, accessed 15 March 2019, <https://kitchenontherun.org/>.

12 Ben Mason, *Tech Jobs for Refugees: Assessing the Potential of Coding Schools for Refugee Integration in Germany* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2018), 1-26, www.migrationpolicy.org/research/tech-jobs-coding-schools-refugee-integration-germany.

13 Ashoka, Impact Transfer, ‘SINGA’, accessed 3 June 2019, <http://impact-transfer.org/solution/singa/>.

the principles of co-creation sometimes work better in theory than practice: setting high expectations for participants, for example, may inadvertently exclude more vulnerable groups.¹⁴

Box I. Social vs. digital innovation: Perfect partners?

Since the onset of the European refugee and migration crisis, the international tech community has been an active player in exploring how technology could offer new solutions to issues as diverse as the recognition of academic and professional qualifications, newcomers' need for support navigating unfamiliar local bureaucracies, and employment matching and skills training. Many of these efforts were coordinated by the platform Techfugees, which uses events, hackathons, and networking to identify promising tech solutions. And because emerging solutions often require support to take the next step, Techfugees offers help through connections and prizes, including personalised assistance from partners in the humanitarian and digital sectors.

Tech-driven innovations can range from new products or services to platforms that facilitate skills training or networking. For instance, the German app Bureaucrazy aims to make complex bureaucratic procedures easier to understand and translates documents to and from German. Another model, the Digital Career Institute (or Devugees) in Berlin, offers 12-month immersive web design or e-commerce courses along with opportunities to visit German companies, apply for internships, participate in buddy systems, and complete language classes—all with the aim of comprehensively preparing newcomers for the job market. Digital innovations can also be used for employment matching, as is done by the French platform Action Emploi Réfugiés, which has worked with more than 5,000 refugees and 3,000 employers to provide professional mentoring and facilitating more than 250 jobs.

Tech solutions offer some key advantages: they are highly scalable, not strongly tied to a specific place, and often easily accessible and user-friendly. The Portuguese organisation SPEAK, an in-person language and cultural exchange programme, uses an Online 2 Offline model that has enabled it to scale to 17 cities, with the aim of reaching 100 cities by 2024. The web platform provides centralised management and oversight of crucial elements of the programme, such as lesson planning, buddy training, and service quality reviews, enabling participants in multiple locations to coordinate offline activities.

But tech solutions also have limitations. For one, they may exclude people without digital literacy or access to digital devices. And finding the right balance between online and face-to-face support can take time. Moreover, information and orientation apps require constant maintenance if they are to remain up to date, which can be difficult if they are developed and run by volunteers.

Sources: Techfugees, 'The Techfugees Global Challenges 2018', accessed 15 March 2019, <https://techfugeesummit.com/challenges.html>; Digital Career Institute, 'Web Development Course', accessed 15 March 2019, <https://digitalcareerinstitute.org/en/courses/one-year-program/>; Action Emploi Réfugiés and Tent Foundation, *Info Emploi Réfugiés* (Paris: Action Emploi Réfugiés, 2018), https://infoemploirefugies.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Guide_Info_Emploi_Refugiés_AERé_nov2018.pdf; SPEAK, 'Language and Culture Exchange', accessed 3 April 2019, www.speak.social/en/; presentation by Hugo Menino Aguiar, CEO and Co-Founder, SPEAK, at the roundtable 'Unlocking Funding Opportunities to Boost Growth', Impact House, Brussels, 3 April 2019; Meghan Benton and Alex Glennie, *Digital Humanitarianism: How Tech Entrepreneurs Are Supporting Refugee Integration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/digital-humanitarianism-how-tech-entrepreneurs-are-supporting-refugee-integration.

14 For instance, the co-housing project Sharehaus Refugio has a decision-making board that is open to newcomers, but its organisers acknowledge that refugees who work full time or have limited host-country language skills may not be able to participate. Meanwhile, some locals may be put off participating by the requirement that residents volunteer for a certain number of hours a week in addition to paying rent. Comments by Friedemann Bumbles, Senior Project Manager of Give Something Back to Berlin/Sharehaus Refugio, at the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24 January 2019.

- **Market-led approaches.** In some cases, social innovation can offer market-led answers to social challenges. This can help separate these challenges from electoral or budget cycles, and fund services at risk of cuts. One example in this vein is Ashley Community Housing, a housing provider in the United Kingdom that started out with government seed funding but struggled to maintain its services in the face of austerity cuts. As the organisation has matured, it has attracted private investment, but with an eye to cultural sensitivities—for example, by finding Sharia-compliant alternatives to interest rates.¹⁵ Introducing a stronger element of market logic may also reinforce the message that the inclusion of newcomers can offer economic value for receiving societies, potentially improving perceptions among host communities. However, this narrative risks giving clearance to the notion that hosting asylum seekers is right because (and therefore, only for as long as) it is profitable.

Despite these advantages, social innovation for refugee inclusion has come up against a number of hurdles. First, the urgency of the situation in many countries in 2015–16 created pressure to come up with solutions rapidly, often without due care and attention to what already existed. The tech community, in particular, saw hundreds of innovators competing for attention and resources, with some intent on ‘disrupting’ existing structures and creating something from scratch, rather than collaborating with government, humanitarian organisations, or one another for incremental change. And because many individuals and organisations were working on similar digital solutions, often without communicating with each other,¹⁶ this led to an unwieldy landscape of apps and websites for refugees, many of which never reached their target group—or worse, continue to linger in cyberspace, presenting outdated information that may mislead vulnerable people. A positive sign of change is that many more recent innovators are seeking to work with governments from the get-go—Skilllab, for instance, which currently supports migrants and refugees in Amsterdam, Helsinki, Tampere, Bristol, and Thessaloniki by helping identify their skills (including hard-to-capture practical and soft skills) and then automatically generating job applications, began with extensive user research, analysis of barriers encountered by similar initiatives, and engagement with municipalities and other stakeholders.¹⁷ It has also realised that offering its service as a tool for government officials (in this case, employment and careers advisers) holds greater potential than pitching a new app directly to refugees and other migrants.

A more deep-rooted challenge pertains to evaluation. The field is so new that evaluation tools and appropriate metrics for assessing success are broadly lacking. And because many social enterprises are media-savvy, this can create considerable hype and an echo chamber of ‘promising examples’, where good ideas are continuously circulated in media and policy circles before they have proved their impact, or in some cases, even gotten off the ground.¹⁸ Meanwhile, many social enterprises have extremely limited time and resources to invest in collecting evidence of what works, which can create problems when they try to scale or sustain their models.

15 Ashley Community Housing’s Yield Sharing Finance model, launched in 2018, aims at making social investment more interculturally sensitive and inclusive. It does so by providing an alternative to interest-bearing debt, which some Muslim communities cannot access for religious reasons. The model has so far mostly been used to purchase housing units that are then provided to vulnerable refugees at risk of homelessness. Ashley Community Housing pays a share of the net yield of the purchased properties to investors yearly, for a five-year term. These payments are not comparable to interest rates on a loan; instead, they are based on expected performance and agreed at the beginning of the investment. See Ashley Community Housing, ‘Yield-Sharing Finance: What Is It?’ (fact sheet, n.d.), www.sibgroup.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/ACH%20Investor%20Info%20FAQ.pdf.

16 Ben Mason, Lavinia Schwedersky, and Akram Alfawakheeri, *Digital Routes to Integration: How Civic Tech Innovations Are Supporting Refugees in Germany* (Berlin: betterplace lab, 2017), 1-60, www.betterplace-lab.org/wp-content/uploads/Digital-Routes-to-Integration.pdf.

17 Author interview with Ulrich Scharf, Managing Director of Skilllab, Washington, DC, 14 February 2018.

18 For instance, during the height of the refugee crisis, Refugees Welcome Germany struggled to cope with the number of registrations, donations, and media requests following significant interest in their model. This ultimately strained staff capacity, led to issues coordinating with crucial partners such as social workers and the job centre, and made it difficult to reimburse rents, all of which in turn left little opportunity to prioritise and measure impact. See Meghan Benton and Alex Glennie, *Digital Humanitarianism: How Tech Entrepreneurs Are Supporting Refugee Integration* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/digital-humanitarianism-how-tech-entrepreneurs-are-supporting-refugee-integration.

Finally, there is a risk that innovations will remain in settings with greater funding, skills, and networks, and where they are more likely to resonate with the local population. Some of the most celebrated innovations for refugee inclusion from the past few years were developed in wealthier countries and urban areas.¹⁹ And since many social innovators operate on a small scale, they have considerable incentives to play to an easy crowd, at least when making a name for themselves, by choosing areas that are likely to be receptive to their work.²⁰ Competition for funding may further encourage initiatives to protect their corner of the market instead of bringing lessons to bear on the sector as a whole, thus potentially preventing good ideas from spreading to new settings.

The field is so new that evaluation tools and appropriate metrics for assessing success are broadly lacking.

Whether social innovation for refugee inclusion can break out of these bounds will be an important test in the coming years. Such novel approaches could have considerable impact in challenging contexts where public budgets are already drawn tight or receiving communities have less experience interacting with new arrivals. Some EU-funded projects are currently investigating innovative approaches to refugee inclusion in rural areas and mountain regions, for example. The results of these projects may contribute to a more inclusive and democratic understanding of social innovation,²¹ helping it move beyond its comfort zone.

III. PROMISING MODELS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

Social innovations in recent years touch on numerous aspects of migrant and refugee inclusion, from education to social ties and community cohesion. The ‘special sauce’ for many successful initiatives lies in their appreciation of the interconnected nature of integration issues: family obligations (such as caring for children or elderly relatives) and/or housing in a remote location may hinder newcomers’ participation in integration courses; this may slow down their economic integration, which in turn may affect their self-confidence and further reduce their chances in the job market. With these dynamics in mind, co-housing, for instance, helps build social ties between different groups, while increasing awareness of refugee issues among locals, improving the language skills of newcomers, and alleviating housing pressures.

While many such examples resist neat categorisation by policy area, this section highlights a number of the main approaches.

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- 19 Most coding schools for refugees and digital matching portals were created in metropolitan start-up hubs, such as Berlin, London, and Paris. Similarly, well-off countries, such as Germany, Sweden, and Canada, have dominated discussions about innovative solutions while other major receiving countries, notably those in Southern Europe or adjacent to conflict regions, have been less well represented.
 - 20 For instance, a staff member from Über den Tellerrand, which supports Kitchen on the Run, described wanting to work in places that seemed to be fertile ground for their projects, particularly when they were just beginning to make a name for themselves. Participant discussions during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24–25 January 2019.
 - 21 Project SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas) is a Horizon 2020-financed programme working to identify and measure innovative projects that support the inclusion of migrants in rural and under-researched areas. See Lucía Lopez Marco, ‘Changing the Narrative of Refugee Inclusion – SIMRA at the European Economic and Social Committee’, SIMRA, 14 February 2019, www.simra-h2020.eu/index.php/2019/02/14/changing-the-narrative-of-refugee-inclusion-simra-at-the-european-economic-and-social-committee/.

A. *New models of economic inclusion*

To promote the economic integration of refugees, a common focus among social innovations is better matching labour supply and demand. Initiatives often seek to speed up inclusion by circumventing typical barriers—from complex processes for getting professional or academic qualifications formally recognised to risk aversion among employers.

- ***Making integration programme sequencing less rigid.*** Many policies and projects aim to overcome problems related to the rigid sequencing of integration measures (for instance, that language training must come before skills training), which can be ill-suited both for newcomers with multiple barriers to work as well as for those who could jump more quickly into employment. Examples of innovative approaches include the programmes Perspectives for Refugees in Germany and Accelair in France: both combine language training, career plan development, job placements, and on-the-job assistance; Accelair also offers housing support. Similarly, some new programme formats and tools merge language learning and employment support, for instance with the help of peer coaching,²² or apps for building the language skills needed in communication-intensive jobs, such as much sought-after health-care professionals.²³
- ***Streamlining pathways into high-growth sectors.*** For refugees with education and in-demand skills, several recent initiatives support rapid training for jobs in high-growth sectors. With tech jobs rapidly expanding, coding schools have attracted interest as an avenue for refugee inclusion since they offer a pathway to a well-paid occupation with remarkable growth prospects and, in many countries, fewer formal barriers to entry than other skilled jobs (professionals do not necessarily need a degree, and they may be able to work in English instead of the host-country language).²⁴ Coding schools are by no means a silver bullet: software development requires high levels of technical expertise, and despite lower employment barriers, only a small number of refugees—or anyone, for that matter—will have the ability and motivation to succeed. But many of these schools have tried to ‘lower the threshold’ for getting involved in coding by offering introductory courses, informal exchange formats, and even activities for children.²⁵ In a less field-specific approach, Upwardly Global has since the early 2000s helped highly skilled migrants and refugees in the United States find jobs that reflect their abilities through a programme of support that includes training (both on aspects of different industries and on soft/job-searching skills), networking, coaching, and employer partnerships.²⁶ Upwardly Global has recently scaled its operations in Europe.²⁷
- ***Highlighting migrants’ skills and build trust among employers.*** Other initiatives have focused on making the skills of newcomers more visible, circumventing some of the intricacies—and idiosyncra-

22 This helps refugees identify opportunities to refine their language skills in a workplace context and is therefore well-suited for people of lower education levels, who might need to develop ‘learning-to-learn’ skills. See Liam Patuzzi, ‘The My Plan Approach’ (fact sheet, Network IQ, Berlin, 2018), www.netzwerk-iq.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Downloads/IQ_Publikationen/Good_Practice_International_EN/IQ_GP_Int_2018_MyPlan.pdf.

23 Netzwerk IQ, Fachstelle Berufsbezogenes Deutsch, ‘Ein Tag Deutsch – In der Pflege’, accessed 22 April 2019, www.deutsch-am-arbeitsplatz.de/app.html.

24 See Mason, *Tech Jobs for Refugees*.

25 ReDI School of Digital Integration provides wrap around support for members in their coding schools, including part-time courses adapted to women with child-care duties or who work part time. See ReDI School of Digital Integration, ‘Digital Women Program’, accessed 22 April 2019, www.redi-school.org/berlin-women-program. In Germany, Devugees offers refugees a well-balanced, modular catalogue of coding courses and couples these with site visits to tech companies, language training, and mentoring opportunities. Crucially, the certificates that participants earn are officially recognised by the German public employment services, which means that refugees can get their expenses fully covered by employment agencies. See Mason, *Tech Jobs for Refugees*.

26 Upwardly Global, ‘Start Your U.S. Career’, accessed 23 April 2019, www.upwardlyglobal.org/programs/.

27 Hello Europe, ‘Migration Ventures (Upwardly Global)’, accessed 23 April 2019, www.hello-europe.eu/cause/migration-ventures/.

sies—of official qualification recognition systems. The French project Action Emploi Réfugiés has built an online matching platform where employers can get a sense of candidates’ skills and experience, while the Swedish initiative Entry Hub provides physical spaces where newcomers can meet employers and other labour-market stakeholders, for instance in open recruitment days, vocational training courses, work trials, and practical skills mapping sessions.²⁸ Other efforts have focused on adapting skills assessment tools to better evaluate diverse job candidates, including by allowing them to demonstrate hands-on experience and soft skills—elements that aim to emphasise the potential rather than the limitations of newcomer professionals. Skilllab, a social venture, launched a multilingual, user-friendly app in mid-2018 to map the skillsets of individuals and the skill needs of employers, and to match the two with greater speed and transparency. Rather than bypassing official recognition authorities, Skilllab’s goal is to include them in its platform.²⁹ And in Canada, the ALiGN Network Model uses a tech-based psychometric assessment tool to map the strengths of those without classic ‘good fit’ credentials (formal qualifications, language proficiency, and in-country work experience); it then suggests the job that may best suit their strengths, and makes their profile accessible to employers.³⁰

- **Encouraging entrepreneurship.** Other programmes have explored innovative ways to help refugees engage in entrepreneurship as a path to a stable income and sense of dignity and self-worth. Many of these seek to capitalise on skills that refugees already have but may not yet have applied to work, as in the case of programmes that support female refugees who are often homemakers (e.g., From Syria with Love in Belgium; see Section II). Another approach is employed by the online language tuition programme Chatterbox, through which trained refugee tutors offer one-on-one courses over video link, sharing their native language skills with students while earning the local hourly living wage.³¹ In Sydney, Australia, Ignite Small Business Start-Ups seeks to help highly motivated refugees, including some with no business skills and limited social and financial capital, become successful entrepreneurs.³² And in Germany and France, the insurance company Generali has partnered with social innovators to help refugees set up a business through a mix of training, individual coaching, networking events, and financial support.³³ Other interventions have been more structural in nature: in Europe, the FIBIA project (Fostering Inclusive Incubation and Acceleration) aims to make business support ecosystems more sensitive to the needs and strengths of refugees and other under-represented groups. FIBIA uses a peer-learning model in which incubators that work with a traditionally underserved target group counsel more mainstream ones.³⁴

28 Cities of Migration, ‘Entry Hub – Because Integration Is Local’, accessed 23 April 2019, http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/entry-hub-because-integration-is-local/. We Link Sweden, a consultancy focusing on diversity and migration and the force behind the Entry Hub model, recently cooperated with the Swedish postal service PostNord to redesign the company’s recruitment procedures, incorporating refugees’ feedback; this included a desire for more in-person meetings and on-the-job skills assessment to allow candidates to demonstrate their skills instead of having to explain them in an interview. Presentation by Hugo Ortiz Dubón, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist, We Link Sweden, at the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 25 January 2019.

29 Currently three cities are operating initial pilots with Skilllab—Amsterdam, Tampere, and Helsinki—to evaluate the effectiveness of the technology for their local contexts. See Eurocities, ‘The Skilllab Startup Calls for Partner Cities to Test Innovative App for Labour Market Integration’, updated 1 September 2018, www.eurocities.eu/eurocities/news/The-Skilllab-startup-calls-for-partner-cities-to-test-innovative-app-for-labour-market-integration-WSP0-B4KJMN.

30 The tool was initially developed for unemployed youth but is currently being piloted with refugees. See Cities of Migration, ‘ALiGN: Matching Refugee Job Seekers to Jobs’, updated 8 April 2019, http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/align-match-ing-refugee-job-seekers-to-jobs/.

31 Chatterbox, ‘Learn Languages with Refugees’, accessed 15 March 2019, <https://wearechatterbox.org/>; Chatterbox, ‘Coaching FAQs’, accessed 10 June 2019, www.chatterbox.io/coaching-faqs.

32 Jock Collins, *Ignite – From Refugee to Entrepreneur in Sydney in Less than Three Years: Final Evaluation Report on the SSI IGNITE Small Business Start-Ups Program* (Sydney: UTS Business School, 2016), www.ssi.org.au/images/stories/documents/Ignite/SSI_Ignite_evaluation_report_2017.pdf.

33 The Human Safety Net, ‘From Refugees to Successful Entrepreneurs’, accessed 22 April 2019, www.thehumansafetynet.org/programs/for-refugee.

34 EBN Innovation Network, ‘Shaping Inclusive Business Support Services: Encouraging Women, Migrants, the Young, and Unemployed into Your Business Incubator’, updated 3 October 2018, <https://ebn.eu/index.php?lnk=M11HN01YZWdt-T1h5ZXNsRStLQVM0K0NDUEgyZm1wU1BKTnhua1g0UkN2OD0=>.

Since many of these initiatives have very small numbers of beneficiaries, it remains to be seen whether they could be transferred to different contexts or scaled up to reach a wider audience. Some have found ways to fit their offerings into mainstream employment service systems—such as Devugees in Germany, DUO for a JOB in Belgium, and Skilllab in the Netherlands—but many others have been less successful so far in this regard.³⁵

In deciding whom to serve, these initiatives have to strike a difficult balance. If they focus on high-potential sectors such as tech, they risk funnelling resources to those who need the least assistance, as their education and resources may open other doors for them. By contrast, the returns on investment for targeting those furthest from the labour market may be less immediate or visible, and careful attention must be paid to designing appropriate services and setting realistic expectations.³⁶ For some participants, the greatest benefit of these projects may be their ability to instil a sense of meaning or purpose, rather than ‘only’ serving as a way into work. Social innovations such as Action Emploi Réfugiés and DUO for a JOB, for instance, have models built on the premise that reinforcing refugees’ self-confidence, sense of belonging, and psychosocial wellbeing can be much more effective in getting newcomers into jobs than traditional employment support—and most importantly, that these are desirable goals in and of themselves, independent of their labour-market consequences.³⁷ While robust approaches to measuring these less tangible aspects of integration are often lacking, policymakers and programme designers should consider alternative ways to support these aims.³⁸

B. Creating human-centred integration services

Rather than offering services directly, social innovations can also help newcomers navigate existing institutions and services (which are often far from user-friendly), adding a human touch to these processes. Mentoring approaches, while not new to migrant integration, have recently been adapted to better suit refugees’ needs and vulnerabilities. For example, DUO for a JOB has begun offering a training course to help its mentors hone active listening and intercultural communication skills, and learn about refugees’ experiences, in order to improve their understanding of the challenges mentees face and how to provide tailored support.³⁹ Mentoring can offer mentees tailored guidance, help them develop social and professional networks, and nurture feelings of self-worth; for members of the host community, it provides a structured and safe space for engaging

35 For more on the obstacles that digital innovations for refugee inclusion encounter when trying to cooperate with the public sector, see Mason, Schwedersky, and Alfawakheeri, *Digital Routes to Integration*.

36 For instance, programmes that push refugees towards entrepreneurship in order to meet minimum business creation targets risk nurturing false expectations and leading their beneficiaries into unstable financial terrain.

37 For more on the value that employment-focused social innovations for refugees place on creating a welcoming environment and investing in the wellbeing and happiness of refugees, see RFI English interview with Kavita Brahmabhatt, Co-Founder of Action Emploi Réfugiés, 21 January 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCjccanc-wA.

38 Decision-making guided by a view of integration as exclusively a labour-market issue can lead to unintended consequences for newcomers who are not ready or able to enter work, such as programming that promotes job searching over and above language learning, building social ties, and contributing to the local community. Instead, it might be more cost effective to help those farthest from the labour market find nontraditional ways to contribute that may nonetheless have real social and economic value, for instance by offering support to elderly neighbours to help combat loneliness and reduce the need for formal elder care. See Banulescu-Bogdan, *Beyond Work*.

39 Since 2013, the Belgian nonprofit DUO for a JOB has promoted exchange between people from different generations and cultures as a way to address some of the less visible barriers immigrants face when looking for a job, such as discrimination and a lack of professional networks. DUO pairs young, migrant-background jobseekers with experienced professionals (age 50 or over), ideally from the same sector. Even before the European migration crisis reached its peak in 2015, DUO opened its offerings to refugees, a group with particularly weak social capital. As of the end of 2017, refugees accounted for about one-third of the programme’s almost 500 mentees. Apart from almost doubling participants’ chances of finding a job, DUO’s mentoring model creates trust between newcomers and long-time residents and challenges common public misperceptions about migrants and refugees. True to the principle that social and economic inclusion are two sides of the same coin, DUO has established relationships with providers of social services that can quickly help mentoring pairs tackle a variety of needs, whether related to mental health or administrative support. See DUO for a JOB, *Annual Report 2017*.

with newcomers and promotes empathy and trust between old and new residents. For it to work, however, it is crucial that mentors are trained and supported along the way on how to deal with complex and stressful situations and how to avoid intercultural misunderstandings.⁴⁰

This type of intervention pushes organisations to focus on how individual refugees or migrants seek and use supports, and to identify frictions and gaps, rather than on what makes sense institutionally.

Social innovation thus does not necessarily refer to creating new tools and services; instead, it may entail ‘connecting the dots’ in better ways. Several initiatives have focused on improving coordination and partnership among key inclusion players. In Ottawa, Canada, the civil-society organisation Refugee 613 coordinates the efforts of private, public, and community-based stakeholders to improve refugees’ access to support. This is done by sharing information, creating an inclusive platform to facilitate decision-making about joint next steps and activities, and even seeking to influence relevant policymaking through coordinated advocacy.⁴¹ This type of intervention pushes organisations to focus on how individual refugees or migrants seek and use supports, and to identify frictions and gaps, rather than on what makes sense institutionally. Moreover, by allowing stakeholders to pool information and resources, it may be easier to create streamlined integration pathways and to detect and adapt to upcoming bottlenecks in services.⁴²

Collecting important information and making it available in one location, whether physical or virtual, can also reduce complexity for refugees. In Vienna, the Centre of Refugee Empowerment (CoRE) is a one-stop shop providing integrated support to refugees, thanks to a broad network of partners; at the same time, the project maps the city’s integration services to make them more open to innovation and to fill potential gaps in support.⁴³ Similarly, the Integreat app in Germany is an easy-to-use tool that informs users of available integration services; it is available in 48 municipalities and highly adaptable to different local contexts.⁴⁴ And since 2013, the rural community of Merzig in western Germany has been organising IMMIGRA, an information fair for refugees and other migrants that brings together all main service providers and institutions, and groups their offerings thematically, following the steps of an individual’s integration pathway.⁴⁵

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- 40 Comments by Julie Bodson, Advocacy Coordinator, DUO for a JOB, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24 January 2019. See also DUO for a JOB, *Annual Report 2017*.
- 41 Comments by Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 16–17 November 2017. Refugee 613 has made its participatory vision into a key institutional element: the organisation is led by a large stakeholder committee representing a cross-section of the city’s main players for refugee inclusion and open to all organisations working on refugee inclusion in Ottawa. See Refugee 613, ‘About Refugee 613’, accessed 22 April 2019, www.refugee613.ca/pages/about-refugee-613.
- 42 Besides its efforts to dovetail integration services and offerings in the city of Athens, in 2019 the Athens Coordination Center for Migrants and Refugees (ACCMR)—a partnership of 92 organisations operating in the city—also devised a Preparedness and Response Mechanism to quickly and effectively manage future refugee crises, based on a more effective exchange of information and on preparatory actions and systems. See Athens Partnership, ‘Athens City Council Ratifies ACCMR Proposals for Effective Refugee Response’, updated 27 February 2019, <http://athenspartnership.org/news/2019/2/27/athens-city-council-ratifies-accmr-proposals-for-effective-refugee-response>. For more information on the ACCMR, see Section IV.D.
- 43 For a description of CoRE, see Urban Innovative Actions, ‘CoRE – Centre of Refugee Empowerment’, accessed 22 April 2019, www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/vienna.
- 44 For a description of the Integreat app, see Integreat App, ‘Concept’, accessed 22 April 2019, <https://integreat-app.de/en/concept/>.
- 45 Thanks to a successful cooperation between IMMIGRA and local language-course providers, migrants and refugees can directly contribute to setting the topics and format of the next information fair during their language classes. See Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Ankommen in Deutschland: Geflüchtete in der Kommune integrieren* (Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018), www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/unsere-projekte/ankommen-in-deutschland/projektthemen/handbuch-ankommen-in-deutschland/.

For refugees with complex and interconnected support needs, simply making information available in one place might not go far enough. And mainstream services, which are standardised to assist large numbers of clients, often lack the flexibility to respond to individual needs by combining different types of support (e.g., vocational training and child care). Addressing this gap, some small-scale initiatives provide services in a more holistic and personalised way. In Canada, Carty House is a communal first home for refugee women that offers wrap-around support—ranging from language training to employment and health-care assistance—anchored in a space conducive to building trust and self-confidence.⁴⁶

Mainstream services, which are standardised to assist large numbers of clients, often lack the flexibility to respond to individual needs by combining different types of support.

One downside to coordination-focused initiatives is their excessive proliferation. In some European countries at the peak of the 2015–16 crisis, many organisations were keen to claim a coordinating role in a rapidly evolving service landscape. Yet as the pressure of the emergency has waned, stakeholders may come to view coordination as a hassle that distracts them from their core operations. Social innovators in this area must therefore tangibly convey the costs of noncoordination, including in terms of unnecessary duplication and missed opportunities. At the same time, it is important that they not underestimate the amount of effort good coordination requires, in terms of facilitating the continuous exchange of information, moderating conflicts, and finding common ground among different priorities.

C. Co-housing

In co-housing models, newly arrived refugees share their living space with members of the host community for a prolonged time (usually, at least one year). Locals living with refugees—often students interested in affordable housing and keen on engaging in intercultural dialogue—act as ‘buddies’: they help newcomers deal with administrative issues, access education and employment, grow their social networks, and improve their language skills. Such arrangements may even help alleviate the aftereffects of trauma for those who experienced harrowing journeys.⁴⁷ Some co-housing models go one step further by seeking to act as community hubs and offer integrated services. These may include training courses, networking events, and other community activities. Sharehaus Refugio in Germany, for instance, seeks to act as a neighbourhood hub for a mixed population of locals, EU and non-EU migrants, and refugees, who all have different support needs and resources to share. Similarly, the Adoma project in France houses refugees in different types of social housing along with other low-income groups, including young jobseekers, social income recipients, and retirees. It cooperates closely with civil society and other associations offering guidance for education, employment, and social integration.⁴⁸

Compared to other activities aimed at encouraging interaction between host communities and new arrivals, co-housing offers—and normalises—numerous opportunities for informal encounters. This model may also help ensure that housing meets refugees’ needs; for example, 12 per cent of residents in Amsterdam’s Startblok Riekerhaven co-housing project are paid community managers who live on site and work to identify and address specific needs and ensure a harmonious living environment.⁴⁹ The initiative helped meet the municipi-

46 Carty House, ‘Carty House’, accessed 22 April 2019, <http://cartyhouse.org/>.

47 Cohousing CURANT, ‘Word Buddy’, accessed 15 March 2019, www.antwerpen.be/nl/overzicht/cohousing-curant-1/word-buddy.

48 CDC Habitat, ‘Adoma – Demande de logement en ligne’, accessed 22 April 2019, www.adoma.cdc-habitat.fr/adoma/Accueil/p-704-Accueil.htm; author visit to newly renovated Adoma housing facilities in Toulouse, April 2019.

49 Startblok Riekerhaven, ‘Self-Managers’, accessed 15 March 2019, <https://startblokriekerhaven.nl/en/about-us/self-managers/>.

pality's goal of finding affordable accommodations for 2,400 refugees, as well as providing affordable accommodations to young people in the district.⁵⁰

Finding the right residents is a key ingredient of success. Some co-housing initiatives have struggled to balance finding enough locals to pair with refugees with recruiting the right people—specifically, those who know what they are signing up for, are willing to make a long-term commitment, and can speak the host-country language. For example, CURANT in Antwerp, which is careful to select participants who meet these criteria, is struggling to recruit locals, especially since there is a glut of social housing in the city.⁵¹ Startblok Riekerhaven, by contrast, has a long waiting list due to its relatively cheap rent and the high demand for social housing in Amsterdam.⁵²

As these initiatives mature, it will be possible to assess more fully their ability to deliver on their promise, and to be sustained and scaled up. It seems plausible that they may hit a ceiling in how many locals they can recruit as residents, especially since early evaluations indicate that those already recruited are among the most open and multiculturally minded.⁵³ It is unlikely, for instance, that such a model could be expanded to different age groups or to rural settings.⁵⁴ And while young city-dwellers are often the most open to such non-traditional living situations, they may also require intensive support both as they move in and on an ongoing basis since this is often the first time they have lived independently.⁵⁵ The high costs of this support could also prevent some initiatives from further expanding their operations.

D. Community-building initiatives

Community-based initiatives seek to provide a space for dialogue and exchange to happen in a safe, informal way—often through leisure activities aimed at generating shared feelings of enjoyment, teamwork, and achievement. For example, in Berlin and 30 other cities worldwide, the nonprofit Über den Tellerrand brings together people with and without an asylum background for cooking activities (the project's trademark and source of its name), sporting events, and cultural get-togethers.⁵⁶

Due to their focus on leisure and recreation, such initiatives may appear nonessential. Beneath the surface, however, lies a compelling logic: they help refugees build social ties, access new information, hone language skills, pick up cultural codes, and feel appreciated and valued. Participating in voluntary activities can also help them become active and engaged community members. In Athens, the project Curing the Limbo—a partnership involving the city, an international organisation, local civil society, and a university—offers affordable housing for refugees and asylum seekers, alongside language training and psychosocial support. In return, they are encouraged to volunteer in local charitable and citizen initiatives, so as to contribute to a more liveable city and be perceived by the wider community as productive and generous neighbours.⁵⁷

50 Letty Reimerink, 'In Amsterdam, Dutch Youth and Refugees Run a Housing Project Together', CityLab, updated 9 December 2016, www.citylab.com/equity/2016/12/in-amsterdam-dutch-youth-and-refugees-run-a-housing-project-together/510125/.

51 Participants also have to pass rigorous assessments and contribute to daily activities. Presentation by Jolien De Crom, Project Manager, CURANT, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24 January 2019.

52 Presentation by Fleur Eymann, Communications Advisor, De Key, Startblok Riekerhaven, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24 January 2019.

53 Stiene Ravn et al., *Cohousing and Case Management for Unaccompanied Young Adult Refugees in Antwerp (CURANT): First Evaluation Report* (Antwerp: CeMIS, University of Antwerp, 2018), 1-84, www.uia-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2018-06/CURANT%20First%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf.

54 Participant discussion during the session 'Co-Housing: Does Inclusion Start in Shared Homes?' at the 2019 SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24 January 2019.

55 Comments by Jolien De Crom, Project Manager during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24 January 2019.

56 Über den Tellerrand, 'We Are Über den Tellerrand', accessed 3 June 2019, <https://ueberdentellerrand.org/en/about>.

57 Levante Polyak, *The Curing the Limbo Project Journal No. 1* (Athens: Urban Innovative Actions, 2018), 1-26, www.uia-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2018-12/Athens_Curing%20the%20Limbo_Journal.pdf.

Community-building initiatives are one of the most affordable, low-tech, democratic, and bottom-up models of social innovation. They place considerable emphasis on involving local communities in designing and implementing inclusion projects. For example, SINGA Belgium’s activities, which include cooking, sports, and art projects, are all initiated by local community members—a project feature that encourages a sense of ownership and responsibility for its success. The mobile Kitchen on the Run⁵⁸ has maintained momentum in each of the six German towns it has visited between 2017 and 2018 by providing ‘satellite’ communities the tools and support to continue organising activities on their own. The result has been the formation of core groups of up to ten volunteers in each town who organise events as often as twice per month for dozens of participants.⁵⁹

However, such initiatives still face challenges accessing hard-to-reach communities and those less open to newcomers, limiting their impact. A major question is whether they can be adapted to less cosmopolitan areas. Even though newcomers could help revitalise rural areas facing demographic and economic decline,⁶⁰ communities with little previous exposure to migrants are often wary of them, or may worry about competition for jobs. Additionally, limited public transportation can make organising accessible community activities more difficult in sparsely populated areas. And many refugees residing in small communities as a result of placement policies rather than by choice may plan to move on to cities, and thus have limited interest in these integration activities. Still, there are some promising models. In Gudbrandsdalen, a remote and sparsely inhabited valley in Norway, for example, the national trekking association and other partners joined forces to start a project to encourage newly arrived refugees to participate in hiking and outdoor activities, with the aim of fostering their physical and psychological wellbeing while introducing them to an important element of local culture.⁶¹

A major question is whether they can be adapted to less cosmopolitan areas.

In recent years, some programmes have developed toolkits to prepare host communities to facilitate refugee inclusion. In the United States, Welcoming America provides a toolkit of guidance, resources, and networks to small and rural communities, which are often less well connected to national networks and have fewer resources to invest.⁶² At the same time, some of these localities are keen on welcoming newcomers to counter rampant depopulation, and some offer interesting and accessible economic opportunities alongside affordable housing.⁶³ In Europe, the SHARE Network has similarly helped small communities become key players in refugee resettlement and integration. Many are relatively inexperienced with supporting newcomer integration, but dispersal policies in many countries have recently pushed them to take on greater responsibility. This

58 German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, ‘Begegnung am Küchentisch’, updated 27 September 2017, www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Projekte/DE/ProjekteDesMonats/170926-september-projekt-des-monats.html.

59 Author interview with Marieke Schöning, Project Coordinator, Kitchen on the Run, Über den Tellerrand, Berlin, 2 April 2019.

60 Comments by Mari Bjerck, Researcher, SIMRA project, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24 January 2019. Rural communities often have difficulties matching newcomers with available job opportunities, or empowering them to find creative, entrepreneurial ways to generate their own (and potentially, others’) jobs.

61 Presentation by Mari Bjerck, Researcher, SIMRA project, at the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24-25 January 2019.

62 Founded in 2009, Welcoming America is a network and platform for knowledge exchange that aims to help communities become more inclusive and tap into the benefits of diversity. The organisation has recently expanded its operations internationally. See Welcoming America, ‘Welcoming International’, accessed 23 April 2019, www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/welcoming-international. In its 2017 publication *Welcoming Refugees in Rural Communities*, Welcoming America highlights four community-based initiatives from across the United States to lay out four key strategies rural communities can use to create opportunities for new residents. These approaches factor in both the assets (e.g., reasonable cost of living) and constraints (e.g., limited financial and human resources) of rural areas. See Welcoming America, *Welcoming Refugees in Rural Communities* (Decatur, GA: Welcoming America, 2017), www.welcomingamerica.org/sites/default/files/RuralToolkit_FINAL_web.pdf.

63 Job opportunities in U.S. rural areas are often available in agriculture, but migrant entrepreneurship projects have also been introduced successfully some such communities. Presentation by Christina Pope, Network Director, Welcoming America, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 16-17 November 2017.

is where SHARE comes in, offering soft-landing packages, capacity building, and a new programme tailored to the specific needs of smaller communities.⁶⁴

Whether these toolkits and programmes will help smaller destination communities develop their own forms of social innovation and ‘own’ them will depend on their ability to leverage these areas’ distinct assets—including tight-knit social networks, closeness of services, and affordable housing—and resist the temptation to simply transplant urban solutions. In small and rural communities, social innovation is often much closer than it seems: it often finds fertile ground in new and diverse partnerships between local players, rather than through the introduction of sophisticated tech tools or event formats.⁶⁵ Success will also rest on social innovators’ ability to tap into local residents’ values, everyday experiences, and concerns about the future of their communities.

Another challenge for innovators is how to convince refugees and members of host communities who are still dealing with more basic needs—such as housing and employment—to take part in community-building measures, which are often perceived as a lower priority. While a few countries have sought to encourage participation in these programmes by linking them to financial incentives,⁶⁶ most governments prioritise employment. Finding ways to communicate the potential indirect benefits of programming that fosters a sense of empowerment and wellbeing, including, ultimately, for job chances, can thus help community-building initiatives raise their profile in the eyes of government and other stakeholders, and of potential participants.⁶⁷

IV. THE NEXT PHASE: DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

The most activist phase of social innovation for refugee inclusion may have passed, at least for the time being. With smaller numbers of asylum seekers entering Europe and attention directed to other issues, it is unclear whether the creativity of recent years will be able to maintain its momentum or lose steam. Translating small success stories into lasting lessons, and doing so in a way that goes beyond a handful of beneficiaries to change whole systems, will require a concerted strategy. Now that the sense of urgency experienced in 2015–16 has gone and social innovators’ ambitions to change the status quo may be met with more resistance, it will require institutional mechanisms more stable than the goodwill of individuals to create lasting impact. Such a process will need to weave together bottom-up, community-based innovations and top-down, policy-driven efforts. This section presents four sets of tools that could help.

64 Presentation by Magdalena Böhm, Programme Manager, International Catholic Migration Commission Europe, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 16-17 November 2017. In recognition of small communities’ specific needs and resources as well as their relative inexperience in welcoming and integrating refugees, in 2018 the SHARE Network launched SHARE Integration to promote partnerships for refugee inclusion in small communities, involving ten partners in nine European countries. See European Resettlement Network, ‘Welcome to the SHARE Network!’, accessed 23 April 2019, www.resettlement.eu/page/welcome-share-network.

65 Comments by Magdalena Böhm during the 2017 SI4RI conference.

66 Norway, for example, grants economic support to refugees who participate in the two-year introductory programme. While this programme is similar to many other national schemes in that it aims to help newcomers succeed in education and employment, it takes a more holistic approach, including leisure activities, sports, and cultural engagement. This is especially important in rural communities interested in retaining newcomers to counteract depopulation. See Nordic Welfare Centre, ‘Holistic Approach to Integration in Northern Norway’, updated 20 August 2018, <https://nordicwelfare.org/integration-norden/en/exempel/holistic-approach-to-integration-in-northern-norway-2/>.

67 Participant discussion during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 25 January 2019. A participant from Cyprus inquired about incentives to motivate refugees still struggling with basic needs to participate in more ‘leisurely’ projects (such as hiking or cooking), and suggested that these offerings may be better suited to countries that have already successfully addressed initial challenges such as housing and employment, and less fitting to many Southern European countries still struggling with the basics.

A. Designing innovative partnerships

As innovative approaches to newcomer integration move beyond the ideas phase, promising initiatives will need to find ways to integrate with mainstream services. And as Sorcha Edwards, Secretary General of the Housing Europe network of social housing providers, noted in her closing remarks to the 2019 SI4RI conference, while initiatives attract the hype, real social innovation takes the form of innovative partnerships.⁶⁸

Partnerships can address a number of problems. First, they can improve coordination between initiatives, something that became especially crucial following the 2015–16 spike in arrivals and proliferation of projects. For instance, the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee Issues has helped share good practices and bring together different actors for strategic planning, and also acts as the interlocutor for the national government.⁶⁹ Second, partnerships can help relevant players come together to tackle integration challenges in concert—from organising accommodations and language courses, to fostering positive interaction with locals. In Belgium, the national agency for the reception of asylum seekers, Fedasil, addresses the complex needs of especially vulnerable newcomers (such as single mothers with children) by partnering with nongovernmental organisations and a wide network of service providers, including lawyers, psychologists, doctors, police, and training institutions providing courses on site. Third, partnerships can help find common ground among stakeholders with different interests, leading to more agile pathways to inclusion. In Sweden, in 2015, the government, employers’ organisations, and trade unions agreed to launch fast tracks to help refugees in 31 professions gain recognised credentials quickly; the tripartite cooperation made it possible to simplify credentialing procedures while taking into account each party’s expectations about quality.⁷⁰ Lastly, partnerships can allow local innovations to scale—whether that means growing an organisation’s operations, or rather making their model available for transfer⁷¹—and to connect up to mainstream services.

For governments looking for more effective approaches to refugee inclusion, partnering up with ‘unusual suspects’ from the social innovation field can bring in creative ideas and new solutions. The risk, however, is that fostering innovation or community-led approaches becomes an excuse for budget cuts, especially for vulnerable groups such as refugees who may be at particular risk of falling through the gaps in public services.⁷² Ideally, partnerships help government tap into the experimentation of social innovation without becoming a substitute for baseline services. An example of one such feedback loop comes from Germany, where Network IQ, a publicly funded programme with a wide variety of partners (from nongovernmental organisations and

68 Comments by Sorcha Edwards, Secretary General of the Housing Europe, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 25 January 2019.

69 The ACCMR brings together 92 organisations (including local and international nongovernmental organisations, municipal bodies, and labour-market actors). This coordination led to a Strategic Action Plan for inclusion as well as to a Preparedness and Response Mechanism for future refugee-related emergencies. The model is now being replicated in other municipalities. See ACCMR, ‘About Athens Coordination Center’, accessed 18 March 2019, www.accmr.gr/en/the-athens-coordination-center.html. Comments by George Sarelakos, Project Manager, ACCMR, at the second SI4RI advisory board meeting, Brussels, 21 March 2019. Antigone Kotanidis of Curing the Limbo, an innovative organisation that works closely with the ACCMR, Athens Municipality, and other civil-society organisations, noted that the ‘political context and financial crisis [in Greece] made it impossible to work without creating synergies’. Participant comments during the ‘Innovative Partnerships’ session of the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24–25 January 2019.

70 These fast tracks include a mix of guidance, skill assessment, validation, internships, and language training. See Regina Konle-Seidl, *Integration of Refugees in Austria, Germany, and Sweden: Comparative Analysis* (Brussels: European Parliament, 2018), [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/614200/IPOL_STU\(2018\)614200_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/614200/IPOL_STU(2018)614200_EN.pdf).

71 In the social economy, ‘scaling’ can have very different meanings than organisational growth—‘a concept from the mass production age’. Growing and spreading innovations often happens ‘through inspiration and emulation, or through the provision of support and know-how from one to another in a more organic and adaptive kind of growth’. See Robin Murray, Julie Caulier-Grice, and Geoff Mulgan, *The Open Book of Social Innovation* (London: The Young Foundation and NESTA, 2010), <https://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/The-Open-Book-of-Social-Innovation.pdf>.

72 Francesco Grisolia and Emanuele Ferragina, ‘Social Innovation on the Rise: Yet Another Buzzword in Time of Austerity?’ *Salute e Società* (2015): 71–84, www.researchgate.net/publication/282930889_Social_innovation_on_the_rise_Yet_another_buzzword_in_a_time_of_austerity.

chambers of industry and commerce to migrant community groups), developed innovative bridging courses that help refugees and other migrants get their professional qualifications recognised; some of these courses are now part of the standard catalogue of public employment support services.⁷³

Ideally, partnerships help government tap into the experimentation of social innovation without becoming a substitute for baseline services.

Despite the popularity and ubiquity of the term, effective partnerships are a rare and delicate breed. Some struggle to bring together stakeholders with different interests, constraints, and institutional cultures, while others may unintentionally exclude those with more limited resources, including time, or reinforce uneven power dynamics. Many projects have struggled to get off the ground for lack of solid partner relationships: differences in pace and institutional agility can lead to misunderstandings;⁷⁴ contradictory goals may disrupt planned integration trajectories;⁷⁵ and some established charities may be reluctant to work with new entrants in the field, who they may see as potential competitors.

To ensure that all partners interact as equals and that trust is maintained, partnerships need clear communication, designated interlocutors, and a well-planned division of labour and responsibilities that draws on the comparative advantages of each actor (such as the agility and flexibility of social innovators to test new ideas, coupled with the resources and networks of established public- and private-sector actors).⁷⁶ A shared vision and long-term perspective are further factors of success.⁷⁷ Launched in 2016, the Urban Agenda Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees has laid out a blueprint for how dialogue among a large, diverse, and international group of stakeholders can lead to concrete action—a very clear roadmap that includes notes on methodology and frequent opportunities for moderated exchange.

73 Interviews with Maja Rentrop-Klewitz, Senior Officer, Unit 316 on Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and Rudolf Bünte, Director of Coordination Office on Migration, German Federal Employment Agency, in *IQ konkret Fachmagazin* 3 (2018): 24–26, www.netzwerk-iq.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Downloads/IQ_Publikationen/IQ_konkret/2018_03_IQ_konkret.pdf.

74 Mason, Schwedersky, and Alfawakheeri, *Digital Routes to Integration*.

75 In Germany, some initiatives for migrant and refugee entrepreneurship have had to cope with sudden dropouts after public employment services urged participants to go into dependent employment. Participant discussion during a meeting of the IQ Competence Centre for Migrant Entrepreneurship, Erfurt, Germany, March 2019.

76 For instance, the co-housing project Startblok Riekerhaven owes its success to a well-designed distribution of responsibilities between the Municipality of Amsterdam's policy coordination role (which itself brings together several city departments, from housing to economic participation and youth support), expertise in local housing markets from the housing corporation De Key, and long-standing experience with shared housing and tenants' self-management from social housing association Socius Wonen. Additional partners, such as a refugee council and an industry chamber, round off the model with refugee counselling and skills building. Presentation by Fleur Eymann, Communications Advisor, De Key, Startblok Riekerhaven, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 24 January 2019.

77 Participant discussion during the 'Innovative Partnerships' breakout session of the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 25 January 2019.

Box 2. The private sector and social innovation

The growing involvement of the private sector in immigrant integration efforts holds particular promise for stimulating innovation and bringing it to the next level. Businesses hold several key levers of refugee inclusion. As donors and investors, businesses can fund experimental approaches in areas such as education and health care. As hubs of technical expertise, they can directly nurture innovation, as in the case of IT giants partnering with social enterprises to pilot digital solutions; for example, Cisco has partnered with civil society and international relief organisations to open its Networking Academy to tens of thousands of refugees, training them for tech jobs. And as employers, private companies hold the keys to one central dimension of inclusion: employment. For instance, Accenture is working to open up their hiring practices to high-skilled refugees as part of their Untapped Talent initiative.

While examples of initiatives targeting high-skilled refugees are more common, some hospitality and postal firms are recruiting and training lower-wage workers. The hotel chain Scandic Hotels, for example, is exploring the use of untraditional job applications, such as videos, that may better capture the skills of diverse candidates and has a training programme for its housekeepers. And both BPost in Belgium and PostNord in Scandinavia have launched programmes to train and recruit refugees, for instance as mail carriers—not just out of corporate social responsibility, but as a way to respond to growing labour shortages.

However, the private sector's engagement in this field can be somewhat mercurial, often characterised by one-off donations or small-scale mentoring or internship programmes, rather than more sustainable investment models. In some cases at least, businesses appear to be pursuing good publicity rather than genuine change, and they may as a result choose visible partners over high-quality ones. In the rush to show engagement, they also risk replicating each other's efforts and not adding much in the way of innovation to the field.

A more sustainable model of private-sector engagement is when businesses support promising social innovators by mentoring them and giving them business acumen. Accenture, for example, has partnered with Ashoka—an international organisation that supports social entrepreneurship—to launch an Impact Programme in Belgium. As part of the programme, social entrepreneurs are matched with business experts who coach them for four months, helping them think through their business plans and identify strategies for greater impact. However, as the business models of the for-profit economy are rarely perfect fits for efforts to promote social change, this mentorship works best if an organisation with sound social-innovation expertise acts as a mediator between businesses and social enterprises.

Bridgebuilders—individuals with experience in two or more sectors, familiar with their logics and able to function as 'interpreters'—can greatly increase the likelihood of success for unconventional partnerships. While this currently happens serendipitously as professionals find work in adjacent fields, recruitment practices in the public, private, and third sectors could be more systematically adapted to favour cross-over profiles for strategic positions—corporate social responsibility officers in large businesses being the obvious one.

Sources: Discussion during dinner with business leaders hosted by Canada's Ambassador to the European Union, Brussels, 24 January 2019; comments by Luisa Seiler, Co-founder of SINGA Germany, and Pastora Valero, Vice President of Government Affairs at Cisco, during the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 16–17 November 2017; comments by Magali Frankl, Corporate Citizenship Lead, Accenture Belgium and Luxembourg, at the second SI4RI advisory board meeting, 21 March 2019; Magali Frankl, 'Ashoka/Accenture Partnership to Accelerate Social Impact', Accenture, 11 January 2018, www.accenture-insights.be/en-us/articles/ashokaaccenture-partnership-to-accelerate-social-impact; Tulin Erdem, Vishal Singh, Çağdaş Şirin, and Poppy Zhang, *How Helping Refugees Helps Brands* (New York: New York University, 2018), 1–34, www.tent.org/resources/helping-refugees-helps-brands/; Cities of Migration, 'Entry Hub – Because Integration Is Local', accessed 23 April 2019, http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/entry-hub-because-integration-is-local/; Le Soir, 'Bpost s'intéresse aux réfugiés reconnus pour pourvoir des postes vacants', Le Soir, 27 November 2018, www.lesoir.be/192444/article/2018-11-27/bpost-sinteresse-aux-refugies-reconnus-pour-pourvoir-des-postes-vacants.

B. Improving impact assessment and evaluation

Generating better evidence about impact is essential for social innovators to keep learning and adapting their models. Such information also allows government—and other important players, such as multinationals and large philanthropies—to identify which models have the potential to scale. But building solid data collection systems and designing robust evaluations is resource intensive, especially for small-scale community initiatives that may rely on volunteers. For such organisations, impact assessments might divert human and financial resources away from their bread-and-butter operations—leading to a paradoxical situation where a gain in impact measurement causes a drop in actual impact.

Any effort to measure the success of refugee inclusion is also likely to face some tough design questions. While policymakers often have a preference for hard quantitative indicators—for instance, employment rates—the added value of many innovative refugee inclusion initiatives is in supporting a sense of dignity, self-worth, and agency among participants, or in fostering trust among social groups.⁷⁸ These benefits are much harder to capture in standard evaluations, although there have been some efforts to do so. For example, the interim evaluation of Plan Einstein in the Netherlands used both quantitative evaluations of the project’s impact on neighbourhood relations and qualitative insights from participating residents and young people to generate recommendations.⁷⁹

In a context where the media are hungry for individual stories of success, initiatives may find it tempting to look for the candidates most likely to succeed.

Policymakers have important reasons to focus on hard metrics, including minimising risk and ensuring they are getting value for money. But focusing narrowly on quantifiable outcomes to the exclusion of other goals can create perverse incentives for programmes to ‘cream’ beneficiaries, serving only those closest to the labour market rather than those most in need of help. This is especially a concern where evaluation designs focus on one-size-fits-all outcomes (e.g., successful entry into education or work) rather than on the extent of a programme’s impact on individual beneficiaries.⁸⁰ Similarly, in a context where the media are hungry for individual stories of success, initiatives may find it tempting to look for the candidates most likely to succeed—those who already possess valuable skills and resources.

Promoting a scientific approach to evaluation can help correct some of these imbalances. The introduction of funding programmes aimed specifically at building better monitoring and evaluation could support small organisations in measuring their impact, as could partnerships in which research institutes perform evaluations for social innovation projects, following the example of co-housing projects in Antwerp and Utrecht.⁸¹ An encouraging sign comes from the EU-funded Urban Innovative Actions programme, which in 2019 will review the impact assessment efforts of its projects—some of which work on improving refugee inclusion at the local level; it will then create a catalogue of evaluation approaches that other cities may use.⁸²

To nudge the field in this direction, policymakers should focus on carrots rather than sticks: stricter policy levers that make robust evaluation a condition of accessing funding, competitions, or partnerships could place undue

78 Participant discussion during the ‘Defining Success’ session of the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 25 January 2019.

79 Caroline Oliver, Rianne Dekker, and Karin Geuijen, *The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad Evaluation Interim Report* (Oxford: University of Roehampton and University of Oxford, Centre on Migration, Policy, and Society, 2018), 1-57, www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/URLP-interim-report-july-2018.docx.pdf; Cohousing CURANT, ‘Evaluation’, accessed 15 March 2019, www.antwerpen.be/nl/overzicht/cohousing-curant-1/evaluatie.

80 While robust evaluation methods such as randomised controlled trials overcome this risk by requiring participants to be randomly selected, this may create the opposite problem, since programmes that previously selected the most disadvantaged are no longer able to do so.

81 Oliver, Dekker, and Geuijen, *The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad Evaluation*; Cohousing CURANT, ‘Evaluation’.

82 Urban Innovative Actions, ‘2019: It’s Time to Start Sharing the Fisr UIA Lessons and Findings’, updated 7 March 2019, [www.uia-initiative.eu/fr/news-events/2019-its-time-start-sharing-first-uia-lessons-and-findings](http://uia-initiative.eu/fr/news-events/2019-its-time-start-sharing-first-uia-lessons-and-findings).

strain on small organisations and stifle innovation, particularly in the early stages.⁸³ Governments and other donors should also avoid placing unrealistic expectations on individual programmes vis-à-vis metrics such as job-market success, which often depend on a host of factors beyond the control of social enterprises.⁸⁴

Before collecting and analysing data, social innovators should take one step back, identify the change they want to see, what progress towards this goal could look like, and therefore what they need to measure. This reflection process should be part of a feedback loop that improves the broader evidence culture in the field. Ideally, social entrepreneurs could help policymakers expand their definitions of ‘success’, exposing them to new and more diverse indicators of impact, rather than trying to design initiatives to fit goals imposed from the top down. Including the perspectives of project beneficiaries and their understanding of what ‘success’ means more systematically into evaluation designs could also round out these models.⁸⁵

C. Supporting innovative funding models

Social innovation initiatives often fall through the gaps of traditional public and private funding. While they often aspire to whole-system change (regardless of whether this is realistic), their paths towards that goal and the models they use are very diverse. And viewpoints on who should fund social innovation for refugee inclusion may depend on historical and geographical context; in Europe, refugee inclusion is generally seen as the purview of government, while in North America nongovernmental actors take the lead and are more accustomed to seeking out diverse funding sources, for instance by engaging strategically with companies’ corporate social responsibility offices.⁸⁶ Views as to whether refugees’ needs are best tackled by government vs. nongovernmental players, or by nonprofit vs. for-profit models, thus vary greatly.⁸⁷ In addition to the risk that encouraging social innovation becomes a cover for governments looking to outsource responsibilities and cut budgets, alternative sources of funding may become more important as the costs of supporting ageing populations rise and, in some quarters, spending on refugees and migrants is met with backlash.

Public funding is often needed to kickstart a project. But complex regulations may dissuade risk-takers from applying for public funds, and shifting political and budgetary priorities mean that even successful projects cannot count on continued support once a funding period ends. For instance, while a considerable amount of funding is available for refugee inclusion through the European Union’s European Social Fund and its Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund, overly bureaucratic requirements can act as a deterrent, especially for people without experience navigating such systems and those with innovative ideas they want to get off the ground quickly.⁸⁸ Designated innovation funding can offer an alternative, since it tends to come with more flexible criteria. However, it is often highly competitive, and bids may consume a considerable amount of ap-

83 Presentation of Jolien De Crom, Project Manager, CURANT during the session ‘Defining Success’, SI4RI conference, Brussels, 25 January 2019.

84 Comments by Petra Hueck, Head of International Catholic Migration Commission Europe, at the first SI4RI advisory board meeting, 16 November 2018.

85 For instance, in its first evaluation of the co-housing project CURANT, the University of Antwerp included the perspectives of refugees and was therefore able to uncover some tensions between the expectations of participants and those of project partners, ultimately triggering improvements in the model. To solve the tension between the goal of many refugees of finding work quickly and CURANT’s goal of guiding them into educational opportunities, for example, the project began to emphasise shorter, more tailored educational opportunities to fill skill gaps in a more time-effective fashion. See Ravn et al., *CURANT*.

86 Comments by Michelle Lee, Humanitarian and Migration Officer, U.S. Mission to the European Union, at the second SI4RI advisory board meeting, 21 March 2019.

87 Edward Grom and Teresa Chahine, ‘Applying Social Enterprise to Refugee Settings’, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 27 September 2017, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/applying_social_enterprise_to_refugee_settings.

88 For a more in-depth discussion on this point, see Hanne Beirens and Aliyyah Ahad, *Money Wise: Improving How EU Funds Support Migration and Integration Policy Objectives* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2019), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/eu-funds-migration-integration-policy-objectives.

plicants' time.⁸⁹ As a result, access to public funding is often limited to larger, more experienced organisations with dedicated administrative resources.

As government spending shifts away from migration-related projects as the sense of crisis abates, many initiatives that have become reliant on government and EU funds will need to diversify their funding strategies to survive. One option is to broaden the pool of beneficiaries they target with their services, applying insights from refugee-targeted programming to benefit other groups that may struggle with similar challenges, such as the need to acquire language skills or access the labour market. This type of shift is well illustrated by the Digital Career Institute (DCI) in Germany, which went from being a coding programme specifically for refugees (launched in 2016 as Devugees) to a certified provider of specialist training for unemployed people of any background. This transition into the mainstream can be cumbersome—especially when certification procedures are involved—but it can make an enterprise's business model more sustainable while also promoting social ties between refugees, migrants, and other local residents.⁹⁰

Meanwhile, migration, displacement, and social inclusion are now on the map of private investors. Some impact investors have channelled capital into building the entrepreneurial talent of refugees—such as the insurance company Generali, which aims to support refugees in setting up 500 new businesses by 2020.⁹¹ And in France, Simplon.co, a coding programme for refugees and other vulnerable youth, went from relying mainly on public grants during its first years to gaining the financial backing of seven investors, raising nearly 5 million euros in capital.⁹² But in the vibrant landscape of private investment, it can be challenging to strike the right balance between making an initiative attractive to investors to secure funds and staying true to one's original mission. The for-profit economy has different goals than the social economy, and directly translating business models from one to the other may fail or set inventive structures that can be dangerous, especially when working with vulnerable populations such as refugees.

Promising alternatives may come from the growing field of social investment and include models such as hybrid financing, which combines the best of philanthropic grants and for-profit investments.⁹³ In Portugal, SPEAK, a social enterprise promoting language and cultural exchange to boost the inclusion of refugees and migrants, shifted from being purely grant based to a hybrid model that combines grants and equity; it is now able to rely exclusively on private investment. The hybrid phase was key in the development of the enterprise, allowing it to shift from a donation-based to an enterprise model, while still using grant money when taking new risks. A generous co-investment incentive introduced by the Portuguese government in 2018 helped attract private capital.⁹⁴

89 The EU initiative Urban Innovative Actions has provided cities across Europe with funds to test new and unproven solutions in a range of fields, including the inclusion of migrants and refugees. The European Commission's Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme offers 919,469,000 euros in the 2014–20 period for innovations in areas such as social entrepreneurship, modernisation of social policies, and job mobility. See Urban Innovative Actions, 'What Is Urban Innovative Actions?', accessed 1 April 2019, www.uia-initiative.eu/en/about-us/what-urban-innovative-actions.

90 Alex Cruickshank, 'Spotlight on the Digital Career Institute, Berlin', updated July 2018, www.computerweekly.com/news/252445185/Spotlight-on-the-Digital-Career-Institute-Berlin.

91 Tent Partnership for Refugees, 'Investing in Enterprises to Enhance the Economic Inclusion of Refugees', accessed 22 April 2019, www.tent.org/our-work/impact-investment/.

92 European Venture Philanthropy Association (EVPA), 'Simplon – France Active: Inclusive and Digital Training for All', accessed 22 April 2019, <https://stories.evpa.eu.com/simplon-france-active/>.

93 EVPA, *Financing for Social Impact: The Key Role of Tailored Financing and Hybrid Financing* (Brussels: EVPA, 2017), <https://evpa.eu.com/knowledge-centre/publications/financing-for-social-impact>.

94 Under this strategy designed to boost start-up growth, a ratio of 30 per cent private investment can be matched by up to 70 per cent from the government over a ten-year investment period. Private investors can also support budding social entrepreneurs outside of direct financing, such as by giving weight and legitimacy to the organisation, unlocking partnerships with other actors, and supporting future business investment. Presentation by Hugo Menino Aguiar, CEO and Co-Founder, SPEAK, at the roundtable 'Unlocking Funding Opportunities to Boost Growth', Impact House, Brussels, 3 April 2019; presentation by Joana Cruz Ferreira, Impact Investment Manager, Laboratório de Investimento Social, 'SPEAK – An Example of the Use of Hybrid Finance', Brussels, October 2016, https://evpa.eu.com/uploads/documents/2016_10_13-D.-Hybrid-Funding-of-SPEAK_PT_JCFLIS.pdf.

New financial instruments such as social impact bonds (SIBs) can also help fund preventative initiatives that are unlikely to yield a short-term payoff (see Box 3). In this increasingly popular model, nongovernmental entities such as foundations or private-sector actors assume the risks inherent to investing in unpopular or novel projects, and governments provide financial rewards only if certain results are achieved. Hence, it is sometimes called a ‘payment-by-results’ model. For governments, SIBs have the advantage of ‘outsourcing’ the tricky early investment and measurement stages. And because the model is based on demonstrating impact, they encourage robust evaluations that can be learnt from in the future; projects are generally required to report on outcomes such as employment rates, as opposed to outputs that give no indication of success, such as number of beneficiaries served.

Box 3. Social impact bonds for inclusion

In the area of immigrant integration, social impact bonds (SIBs) can help fund programmes that might otherwise struggle to find the needed financial or political backing because they are viewed as too risky, take time to yield results, or lack support from immigration-sceptic publics. In these schemes, private investors fund a social service, usually delivered by a community-based organisation, such as housing, language courses, or employment programming. SIBs can thus help governments afford expensive early interventions that in the long term result in cost-savings, even when public budgets are tight.

DUO for a JOB in Belgium was the first integration-related programme to be financed by a SIB (launched in 2014). It was made possible by public-sector partner Actiris, the public employment service for Brussels, and impact-investment company Kois Invest. The pilot project, which matched newcomers with retired professionals to develop their networks and help them find work and other opportunities, proved successful; as of 2017, 74 per cent of the 648 ‘duos’ had resulted in positive outcomes, including a short-term or permanent contract, traineeship, or further studies. The SIB also allowed DUO to build sustainable relationships with the public sector; initially sceptical of the partnership, Actiris now looks to DUO to provide expertise and training on working with marginalised groups.

Sources: Nicolas Denoël, *Developing Social Impact Bonds in Belgium* (Louvain, Belgium: Louvain School of Management, Université Catholique de Louvain, 2014), 1–77, https://philoma.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/2014/Nicolas_Denoel_UCL_Developing_S_IBs_in_Belgium.pdf; DUO for a JOB, *Annual Report 2017* (Brussels: DUO for a JOB, 2018), www.duoforajob.be/en/blog/annual-report-2017-is-out/.

However, SIBs come with their own set of challenges. For one, they are complex and expensive to develop, and they require significant investment from all partners involved—to understand the tools, identify potential implementing partners, and set up viable partnerships between stakeholders not used to working together. Moreover, SIBs tend to privilege more established third-sector organisations and thus fail to address the funding gap that young social enterprises often experience in their earliest stages.⁹⁵ Because SIBs are closely focused on achieving results (often framed in terms of public savings), they may also favour initiatives structured around a financial logic based on cost-benefit calculations rather than those pursuing social goods—something that can encourage service providers to chase numbers rather than build services around human needs.⁹⁶ But in spite of these limitations, SIBs can be an exceptional springboard for social enterprises, pushing them to measure their work’s impact and to collaborate with larger players (both public and private), thus helping them gain greater legitimacy.⁹⁷

95 Presentation by Chris Clements, Director, Social Finance, at the SI4RI conference, Brussels, 16–17 November 2017.

96 Government Outcomes Lab, ‘An Introduction to Social Impact Bonds (SIBs)’, accessed 22 April 2019, <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/knowledge/basics/introduction-social-impact-bonds/>.

97 Comments by Julie Bodson, Advocacy Coordinator, DUO for a JOB, at the second SI4RI advisory board meeting, 21 March 2019.

Social innovation for refugee inclusion could greatly profit from an improved learning ecosystem—infrastructure for exchange, guidance, and support. This type of environment can encourage experimentation as social entrepreneurs are more likely to take risks if there is a safety net to fall back on should they make mistakes. At the peak of the 2015–16 crisis, several forums were launched to bring together social innovators for refugee inclusion and systematise their initiatives, while encouraging dialogue with policymakers, businesses, and other nongovernmental actors. Many of these have focused on a specific industry or professional community, trying to coordinate its response to displacement and migrant inclusion. For the tech industry, there is Techfugees; for local authorities, EUROCITIES’ Solidarity Cities initiative, the Urban Agenda Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, and Cities of Migration; the private sector has Tent Partnership for Refugees and Employers Together for Integration; and social entrepreneurs have gathered via Ashoka’s Hello Europe and SI4RI. Some of these forums also try to foster exchange between groups: SI4RI and Hello Europe, for instance, seek to encourage social innovators to turn a critical eye to their models and openly discuss challenges with peers, while fostering links between practitioners and policymakers.⁹⁸

But by and large, the field suffers from a lack of coordination and overview. Exchange between peers in different countries is sporadic rather than systematic. Repositories of good practices, which could increase transparency and build a common evidence base, are becoming outdated. And many platforms for exchange are struggling to shift from showcasing positive examples to promoting deeper, more critical conversations. Prizes and competitions, for example, can give visibility to impactful practices, but they risk reinforcing overly positive messages rather than helping innovators learn from their and others’ mistakes. To build an environment in which innovators can be candid with and learn from one another, noncompetitive (and partially media-free) spaces are important; they allow for the expression of doubts and limitations, which can be worked through and translated into options for how to progress. More hands-on types of exchange, such as incubators, accelerators, and peer-mentoring initiatives,⁹⁹ hold particular promise in convincing actors in this field that there are clear practical gains from openly discussing problems.

Another element that is currently missing is in-depth analysis of failures and bad practices. While such exercises run somewhat counter to the DNA of a field more inclined to highlight stories of success, frank assessment of areas that lack social innovation or where inclusion initiatives have floundered could hold the keys to realising change at a greater scale. Efforts to collect and showcase good practices remain important and have room to grow—for example, by bringing in examples from less-discussed regions of the world. Strengthening understanding of the nuts and bolts of both successful and failed projects could help innovators pinpoint factors that facilitate or prohibit growth and transferability.

On the upside, the current drop in the public buzz around refugee issues—at least in Europe—may prevent social innovation for refugee inclusion from becoming an ‘elephant graveyard for short-term stories’.¹⁰⁰ Instead, this moment could be used to shift the focus of discussion in the field from exciting, new enterprises (loved by the media) to those more mature initiatives that have proven resilient and adaptive. Creating exchange platforms with incentives that encourage honest conversations about setbacks and challenges—for instance, by offering concrete support through skill-building or peer-to-peer mentoring, or by guaranteeing some level of confidentiality—would be a major leap towards maturity for a field in which survival has often depended on reporting positive results.¹⁰¹

98 Reducing the distance between policymakers and innovative initiatives at the grassroots, for example by creating opportunities for direct or moderated conversations, can help reduce the perception of risk that can prevent some public-sector decisionmakers from channelling limited integration funds to project models perceived as unfamiliar and untested. Discussion at the SI4RI advisory board meeting, Brussels, 21 March 2019.

99 Kenneth Lee Clewett, ‘How “Hello Europe” Is Enabling Systems Change for Migrants and Refugees’, Ashoka, 18 December 2018, www.ashoka.org/de-DE/story/how-%E2%80%9Chello-europe%E2%80%9D-enabling-systems-change-migrants-and-refugees.

100 Kyle Zimmer and Kristine Pearson, ‘Social Entrepreneurs Can Change the World – but These 6 Things Are Holding Us Back’, World Economic Forum, 2 August 2018, www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/08/six-challenges-social-entrepreneurs-need-to-overcome/.

101 Zimmer and Pearson, ‘Social Entrepreneurs Can Change the World’.

V. FINAL REFLECTIONS

To give social innovation a chance at realising its promise of whole-systems change, government actors will have to do more than just support social entrepreneurs—they will have to look inward and adjust how they view and address social challenges. The first challenge will be maintaining the sense of urgency that sparked innovation during the 2015–16 crisis, even though the number of new arrivals has declined. While a lot of progress has been achieved in this area—with challenge prizes, new funding programmes, financing innovations, innovative partnerships, and platforms for dialogue—there is still considerable room for improvement. It would be short-sighted for governments to turn away after such an intense period of experimentation.

Resisting the temptation to focus exclusively on short-term challenges and opportunities will also be key. To maintain momentum, policymakers, the private sector, and social entrepreneurs—from community-based initiatives to large accelerators—should turn their attention to sustaining programmes and partnerships that work; rebuilding such projects and relationships from scratch would be much more expensive than the upfront investments of time, energy, and money needed to keep them going. To some extent, this push for sustainability will depend on these actors' ability to systematically present refugee inclusion as an issue cutting across policy areas (a fact the 2015–16 crisis cast into sharp relief) and to sell the point that innovation for refugee inclusion is actually innovation for more inclusive societies. These messages are likely to resonate with much larger audiences, as the spectre of widening inequalities casts its shadow across Europe.

To some extent, this push for sustainability will depend on these actors' ability ... to sell the point that innovation for refugee inclusion is actually innovation for more inclusive societies.

True transformation in the field of inclusion will also depend on opening up the design and operation of integration services to refugees and other migrants themselves. To give newcomers a stronger expert role in shaping inclusion pathways, policymakers could build consultation and co-creation approaches into decision-making processes in all policy areas affected by growing demographic diversity. Moreover, funding programmes for refugee social entrepreneurs could be expanded to harness newcomers' first-hand experiences and to develop pragmatic solutions for inclusion.

Finally, efforts to cultivate greater receptiveness, openness, and understanding of social innovation within government is essential. Introducing multidisciplinary insights into ministries and other decision-making bodies, from social psychology to behavioural insights,¹⁰² may help deepen understanding of integration's many dimensions, lead to the design of policies and services that are more in tune with clients' needs and service-use habits, and build the ability to foresee challenges before they hit. To get there, social innovation specialists could consider offering training for public officials in relevant ministries, or pilot exchange and work shadowing programmes between public officials and key players in the social innovation ecosystem.

Refugee inclusion is a litmus test for many other structural challenges in decades to come: European societies and public services are likely to face similar challenges as the world of work transforms, populations age, urbanisation and rural decline continue, bottlenecks build in housing and health care, and social tensions emerge as a consequence of growing cultural diversity. To a large extent, maintaining the momentum to tackle these future challenges will depend on the ability of all involved stakeholders to think about the long term and explore how to mainstream social innovations that currently have a limited reach.

¹⁰² For more on how this could be done, see Benton, Silva, and Somerville, *Applying Behavioural Insights*.

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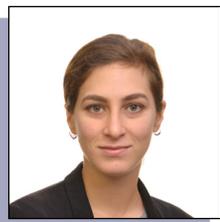
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Migration Policy Institute Europe, established in Brussels in 2011, is a non-profit, independent research institute that aims to provide a better understanding of migration in Europe and thus promote effective policymaking. Building upon the experience and resources of the Migration Policy Institute, which operates internationally, MPI Europe provides authoritative research and practical policy design to governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders who seek more effective management of immigration, immigrant integration, and asylum systems as well as successful outcomes for newcomers, families of immigrant background, and receiving communities throughout Europe. MPI Europe also provides a forum for the exchange of information on migration and immigrant integration practices within the European Union and Europe more generally.

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