



C.1 Evaluation System

Case study Milan
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Introduction

The project “FAB: Fast Track Action Boost” aims at improving the provision of services related to labour market integration for refugees and third-country nationals with a special focus on women. To this end, it initiates the cooperation of six European cities or regions: the cities of Milan, Berlin, Stockholm, Vienna and Madrid and the Republic of Serbia.

The objectives of the project as defined in the description of the action are

- Improve integration of the refugee, asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection populations in the target contexts, through mainstreaming of relevant and tested policies, measures and practices (Service Delivery);
- Improve the capacities and knowledge of key actors at the city-level to plan, implement and mainstream the measures, service delivery mechanisms and practices most relevant and effective as responses to the specific challenges emerging in the different contexts (Capacity Building);
- Develop innovative European models of policy approaches, practices, methods, and guidelines flowing from project results on fast track mechanisms for refugee integration and on women integration in the labour markets (Dissemination and Learning).

As part of the evaluation process, SÖSTRA is carrying out five case studies in order to find out to what extent these objectives have been reached. The case study in Milan will put a specific focus on Capacity Building. The central questions to be answered are

- What can be learned from inter-regional and international exchange?
- Who benefits from this kind of exchange? How can the benefit be maximized?

1 Background situation in Milan

Italy’s Mediterranean borders are a major route for EU of migrants. Between 2014 and 2020, the number of migrants entering Italy peaked in 2016 at 181,000 persons and has decreased in the last years.¹ Nevertheless, Italy remained the third country of first arrival in Europe in 2020, after Greece and Spain. After entering the EU through Italy, many migrants used to head to other European countries, such as France or Germany.² However, stricter border protection blocked the way into Northern Europe, so that the share of migrants who stayed in Italy increased.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/623514/migrant-arrivals-to-italy/>

² <https://www.france24.com/en/20200807-migrants-adrift-after-camp-at-france-italy-border-shut>

Approximately 44 % of Italy's immigrants are between 18 and 40 years old.³ In 2019, 73 % (32,085) men and 26 % women (11,698) applied for asylum in Italy.⁴ A refugee status was granted to 11 % of the applicants, the subsidiary rate was 7 % and the special protection rate 1 % of all applications. After all, 81 % of applications were rejected. The largest number of asylum applications in the year 2020 were from Pakistan, followed by Nigeria. Besides, many unaccompanied minors reached the Italian coast in the last years. For instance, in 2020, more than 4,000 children migrated into the country without their parents. According to estimates, around 560,000 migrants were living in Italy without work permits or residency documents in 2019.⁵

Milan has a population of 1,380,873 of which 266,862 are foreign residents. The metropolitan area of Milan hosts Italy's largest non-EU citizens' community with 474,818 people, accounting for 12 % of the national non-EU residents. With 68,661 people, the Egyptian community is the largest foreign community in Milan, which accounts for approximately half of all Egyptian residents in the country, followed by people from the Philippines (49,096) and China (46,260). Until 2014, arrivals from Syrian refugees were prevalent, while in 2018 the biggest group of refugees living in Milan were Eritreans.

The Italian job market is characterized by a combination of a low employment rate (in 2016: 57 %) and a high unemployment rate (in 2016: 11.4 %) co-existing with a shortage of workers in key sectors like manufacturing, agriculture, building, healthcare and personal care. Workers from non-European countries need a recognition of their academic qualifications achieved abroad, which is issued by schools and universities. Professional qualifications are validated by the ministries in charge. In Milan's metropolitan area, the employment rate of non-EU residents is 67.8 %, which is higher than the general rate in Italy (56.9 %), while the unemployment rate is lower in the metropolitan area of Milan with 11.9 % versus 16.7 % in the whole country.

2. Designing the pilot

The project partners from Milan initially planned to draw on two good practices from different cities and to combine them in order to obtain a new practice that fits Milan's needs. However, it became clear already during the study visits that settings and framework conditions differed widely across partner regions, so that a lot of conceptual work and adjustment would be necessary to adapt just one practice. Therefore, they chose to focus on one practice to be transferred.

The most pronounced differences in setting and context in Milan, compared to most other partner regions (especially Berlin, Vienna and Stockholm), was in terms of existing structures and support systems. The practice to be transferred was therefore chosen such that it did not depend

³ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/emigration-asylum-destination-italy-navigates-shifting-migration-tides>

⁴ <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/italy/statistics/>

⁵ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/05/14/Italy-undocumented-migrants-work-permits>

on specific framework settings, but was innovative in terms of content. This applied to the practice “Swedish for Professionals” (SFX) from Stockholm.

2.2 Process of learning about SFX

SFX is a programme that aims at accelerating labour market integration of migrants with a pre-established professional background by combining language and professional training: professional know-how is taught in Swedish in teams of a professional teacher and a language teacher. Depending on the target job or sector, the programme also comprises an internship or a certificate required for the specific job (e. g. driving licence). SFX runs over 5 to 18 months, with 20-30 teaching hours per week.

The Milan project partners identified SFX as the practice to be transferred already during the study visit in Stockholm. It fit their needs since in previous projects, the operative partner in Milan, who has a long-standing experience in providing professional training, had learned that it is very difficult for migrants to successfully operate in a working environment due to a lack of professional language. While they had initially planned to deal with this problem by raising awareness among employers and by supporting companies with language training, SFX suggested a new approach, which took its starting point at level of the job-seekers rather than the companies.

While the study visit in Stockholm had given a first impression of the project, the subsequent Local Empowerment Workshops (LEW) then helped to further understand the core components of the practice. Both LEWs took place in Milan. This allowed to include a lot of local professionals who were later supposed to implement the project to the workshops, providing valuable input to the adaptation process.

2.2 Adapting SFX

One major task when adapting SFX to the situation in Milan was to define the appropriate target group. SFX is directed towards pre-qualified migrants from various contexts, including EU citizens who have moved to Sweden as well as refugees who live in Sweden under protective laws. In Milan, according to the objective of FAB project, the project was to address refugees and third-country nationals only. In Italy, these tend to have a relatively low level of professional education. Ultimately, the target group of the pilot practice in Milan was defined to be refugees and third-country nationals with a basic proficiency of the Italian language, but with no requirements in terms of previous professional training or work experience.

Due to the time frame of FAB project, the pilot was designed to be much shorter than SFX in Stockholm: It was to take six weeks only, while SFX has a duration of up to 18 months. This means that the Milan project could not provide a full professional training, but rather deliver certain skills recognized in the labour market. The professional sector to target was chosen to be cooking. This choice was based on two considerations: First, the hospitality sector is one with a high potential of employment for migrants in Milan. Second, cooking activities require communication

and teamwork, thus training soft skills as well as offering a stimulus for activity-related language training. Third, producing food allowed for an immediate evaluation of one's own result and a self-assessment of the learning success.

The training was strongly activity-based. The courses took place in a training kitchen and were led by Italian chefs. These were paired with language trainers, thus implementing the team teaching approach from SFX. Language acquisition therefore was to be activity-oriented, picking up language-related topics that emerge during the practical training. Recruiting language teachers for this task turned out to be challenging, even though the operative partner disposed of a large network of freelance trainers, since the typical approach to teaching Italian as a foreign language is a "scholastic" one, starting out from the basics, rather than the activity-driven approach employed in the pilot.

Due to the specific composition of the classes, the Milan project also featured a cultural mediator who was present at all times and had the task to provide guidance on active citizenship as well as enable the dialogue within the group, which was composed of participants from different cultural backgrounds.

3. Implementing Italian for Professionals

3.2 Addressing potential participants

The training was to be delivered in two editions, the first one starting in early 2020. Following the goals of FAB project, a total 50 to 75 participants were to be recruited, of which a share of 25 to 50 % was supposed to be female. To this end, contact to potential participants was established through reception centres, via non-profit organizations and religious communities. This way, 24 participants were recruited for the first edition, of which 18 were women (75 %). For the second edition, there were 41 participants, of which 14 were female (34 %). Thus, a total of 65 persons participated in the pilot project, about half of them women.

The participants came from 19 different countries of origin, most of them (41 participants; 63 %) from sub-Saharan Africa. Almost half of them (31 participants; 48 %) were under 30 years. The educational background was diverse: About half of the participants (33 participants; 51 %) held at least a high-school degree. On the other hand, 19 participants (29 %) had a level of education no higher than primary school.

3.3 Service delivery

The training had a volume of 80 hours, divided between vocational training (40 hours) and classroom training covering Italian language, transversal skills and safety and hygiene measures (40 hours). It was to be delivered over six weeks with a part-time schedule. All activities were planned to be carried out in presence, since interaction with the trainers, but also among the participants, was considered crucial in order to create an effective working atmosphere. However, in February 2020, half way into the first edition of the training, the first Covid-19 induced lockdown came into effect in Milan, bringing all on-site activities to a halt. They re-started as late

as June 2020, but only under strict safety rules. This break as well as the subsequent restrictions made it difficult to properly resume the course once the situation allowed for on-site activities.

In order to meet the strict rules of distancing and avoiding larger groups of people, the second edition of the course, starting in November 2020, resorted to distance learning for all classroom activities. The vocational training still took place on-site, in compliance with all safety regulations required. Distance, i. e. online learning was challenging for a number of reasons: First, the technical equipment many participants disposed of (usually a smartphone) was not adequate for longer online training sessions, and / or the internet connection was poor. Second, some participants lacked the digital skills to participate in online trainings – however, this could be resolved in an additional training session which left them with additional competences. Third, since some participants still lived in reception centres or cramped confines, it was difficult for them to find a quiet place to join the training sessions. Finally, the dynamics of interaction were inhibited, while at the same time, most participants were not used to prolonged uni-directional interactions, resulting in a poor attention span.

3.4 Outcomes and Impact

Out of 65 participants, 46 attended the course regularly so that they obtained the attendance certificate (70 %). Among the remaining 19 participants, 10 were not able to obtain the certificate due to Covid-19 quarantine, 9 for other reasons.

3. Reciprocal Learning

The partners from Milan (City of Milan and AFOL Met) were involved in three different transfers of practice: They adapted the practice “Swedish for Professionals” from Stockholm, and they transferred the practice “Essagono” to Vienna and the info app for refugees ([www. mygrants.it](http://www.mygrants.it)) to Serbia. Thus, they participated in numerous learning activities: They attended the Local Empowerment Workshops for their own pilot project (July and October 2019) as well as the ones for the Vienna project (February and March 2019) and the Serbian project (October 2019 and January 2020); they were mentees in their own mentoring process with Stockholm as well as mentors for Vienna and Serbia.

These activities revealed once more the vast differences in settings and structures in each partner region. Still, inter-regional and international exchange can raise awareness of what is taking place not only on the national level and help to find new ideas, fill in gaps, and find new inspiration. In this sense, inter-regional exchange can provide valuable input with regard to a theoretical background and foundation of certain practices. When it comes to implementing them in a new context, however, it is necessary to explore the new settings in depth. This task has to be carried out by professionals from the new context, while experts from other contexts are of minor support. Still, it was considered helpful to have the partner from the transferring region as a sparring partner who evaluates and friendly criticises the project design:

“Explaining their project design to us clarified a lot to themselves.” (project partner, Stockholm)

Mentoring visits were postponed at first, when travel bans due to Covid-19 pandemic came into effect, hoping for these bans to be suspended. Once it became clear that on-site mentoring visits would not be feasible within the duration of FAB project, mentoring activities were carried out remotely via email, phone, and video conferences. However, this meant that most mentoring activities happened at a rather late point of pilot implementation. Therefore, they took the form of a final and comprehensive review of the pilot practice, presenting the mentors with what their input had been turned into. The mentors remarked that it was an exciting experience to learn what parts of their own practice was considered useful and universal enough so that they could be implemented in a totally different setting. In some cases, this also sparked the idea of further developing the initial approach in the direction it had taken in the transferring region, in the sense of a re-transferral of the transferred practice.

4. Lessons Learned

The project activities in Milan provide valuable insights with regard to two objectives of the FAB, namely improving integration of the refugees, asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection populations in the target contexts, through mainstreaming of relevant and tested policies, measures and practices (Service Delivery) and improving the capacities and knowledge of key actors at the city-level to plan, implement and mainstream the measures, service delivery mechanisms and practices most relevant and effective as responses to the specific challenges emerging in the different contexts (Capacity Building).

4.1 Service delivery

The practice Italian for Professionals revealed the high potential of combining language and vocational training, since it allows for practical, activity-related language acquisition. The experience from the Milan project also indicates that it is advisable to design the vocational training in the most applied way possible in order to combine hands-on activities with theoretical learning. However, the pilot project also showed that this implies a change in paradigm of language teaching, which can be challenging for language teachers used to a more “scholastic” approach. It might be necessary to spell out this approach in more detail in order to enable more language trainers to adopt it.

The forced switch to distance learning in the second edition of the training revealed the serious obstacles the target group faces with regard to using online tools. On the one hand, this includes a lack of technical equipment and broadband capacity as well as the absence of a quiet place to participate in online activities. On the other hand, participants often had little experience with

online training and found it difficult to follow the training without any personal interaction. Here, a specific period of familiarization needs to be designed and carried out.

4.2 Capacity building

The case study in Milan has shown that inter-regional and international exchange can be a useful stimulus to develop new ideas: Based on good practices from other contexts, one's own context is re-evaluated and new starting-points for action are detected. This process has its limitations, though, when it comes to implementing specific practices in a new context. Here, learning from other contexts is hardly possible due to vast differences in settings and structures. Instead, a lot of conceptual work is necessary to properly adapt a practice and to fit into the new framework conditions.