



Report

Report on Higher Education - associations' cooperation

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Abstract

The AGILE project sets out to forge inclusive Higher Education systems, for all exiled students that will also be capable of adapting their responses to deal efficiently with emergency refugee crises such as the war in Ukraine. This report will thus explore the different initiatives developed by higher education institutions across Europe and beyond so as to share best practices and understand the barriers and levers affecting successful Higher Education integration.

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Statement of originality

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Project summary

This publication is a result of the Erasmus+-funded AGILE project (“Higher education resilience in refugee crises: forging social inclusion through capacity building, civic engagement and skills recognition”, <http://www.agileproject-erasmus.eu/>), whose aim is to increase the resilience of Higher Education (HE) systems to address the ongoing needs of refugees through social participation and skills recognition.

The AGILE project aims to enrich HE curricula by proposing new pedagogical designs that encourage grass roots and digitally enhanced actions in both formal and informal learning environments.

University Paris 8 coordinates the project. The consortium is made up of six universities (University Paris 8, Bordeaux Montaigne, University, University of Hamburg, University of Ljubljana, Lviv Polytechnic National University, Kaunas University of Technology), one think-tank (Polish Rectors Foundation) and one business partner (Web2Learn) specialized in open recognition systems and social learning.

Consortium

Partner n°	Name	Short name	Country	Logo
1.	University Paris 8	UP8	France	
2.	University Bordeaux Montaigne	UBM	France	
3.	Web2Learn	W2L	Greece	
4.	University of Ljubljana	UL	Slovenia	
5.	Polish Rectors Foundation	PRF	Poland	
6.	Lviv Polytechnic National University	LPNU	Ukraine	
7.	University of Hamburg	UH	Germany	
8.	Kaunas University of Technology	KTU	Lithuania	

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List of abbreviations

The following list presents the acronyms used in the deliverable in alphabetical order.

Abbreviation	Meaning
<i>FLE</i>	Français Langue Étrangère / French as a Foreign Language
<i>HE</i>	Higher Education
<i>HEI</i>	Higher Education Institution
<i>KTU</i>	Kaunas University of Technology
<i>LPNU</i>	Lviv Polytechnic National University
<i>MEnS</i>	Migrants dans l'Enseignement Supérieur / Migrants in Higher Education
<i>MESRI</i>	Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur, de la recherche et de l'innovation / Ministry for Higher Education
<i>PRF</i>	Polish Rectors Foundation
<i>UBM</i>	University Bordeaux Montaigne
<i>UH</i>	University of Hamburg
<i>UL</i>	University of Ljubljana
<i>UP8</i>	University Paris 8

Executive summary

This report highlights the importance of cooperation between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), associations, NGOs and the voluntary sector in its various legal forms in improving refugee integration in higher education and beyond the campus, building inclusive pathways within the wider community.

As we shall see, the support given to AGILE partner HEIs is varied. This support can include help implementing national integration policies and providing a vital link between ministries and the HEIs. Associations also work alongside HEIs help refugee students become independent and to feel part of a community. Through civic engagement, refugee students can benefit from language and culture training, receive professional integration support with a view to citizenship, social and psychological support.

A brief overview of existing cooperation, with concrete examples from each partner institution, will be followed by ideas and recommendations for developing the voluntary sectors' involvement in Higher Education (HE).

With regard to Greece, it is to be noted that while there are associations to help refugees, few seek to pursue their studies in Greek HEIs.

1. General introduction

The AGILE project aims to forge inclusive HE systems that will help all exiled students to better integrate their host HEIs. The different initiatives and programs must be adaptable and capable of dealing efficiently with emergency refugee crises such as the war in Ukraine. Hence, faced with an ever-challenging socio-political context, European HEIs need to be able to offer exiled students sustainable, multi-level and inclusive learning curricula if integration and social cohesion are to be attained¹.

In this report, we explore how different HEIs in AGILE partner countries work and interact with the voluntary sector in order to improve the integration of refugee students both inside and outside the university or HEI. Through these concrete examples we demonstrate the positive impact for integration of refugee students outside the campus and also the benefits for HEIs, students, refugee students and civil society.

Before beginning our report, it is important to note that the voluntary sector includes associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Both play a vital role in society in general, often intervening and taking action to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged groups, to promote human rights and to raise awareness, understanding and tolerance of various humanitarian and social causes.

Associations are informal, member-driven groups or organizations that people join voluntarily, often for social, recreational, or advocacy purposes. They are usually local, established and run by the members themselves without formal legal status or government oversight.

NGOs, on the other hand, are formal legal entities that are typically registered as non-profit organizations and they operate on a national or international level and have local branches. Although independent from governments, they may receive government funding or partner with government agencies for specific projects. They have a higher degree of legal, organizational, and financial structure than voluntary associations². The term "voluntary sector" encompasses both.

"Without the efforts of thousands of volunteers working in NGOs, member States would not be able to meet either their legal commitments regarding refugees and migrants or their daily humanitarian needs"³.

¹ In 2022, only 6% out of 108 million refugees had access to HE in their host countries: <https://www.unhcr.org/fr>

² <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-voluntary-association-and-NGO>

³ <https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/MIG/Pdf/TextesProvisoires/2020/20200907-MigrantsObligationsNGOs-EN.pdf>

2. Bridging the gap - How AGILE partner HEIs work and cooperate with the voluntary sector, examples

Through collaboration with the voluntary sector in general, HEIs are able to foster integration and facilitate academic success. In this report we will demonstrate that the voluntary sector is, for the moment, an important stakeholder in ensuring HEIs resilience in the face of growing numbers of refugee students.

Associations and NGOs can bridge the gap between campuses and civil society. They not only provide language learning structures a inclusive and secure spaces for expression but contribute to a holistic support system which would be otherwise impossible for HEIs to assume alone due to budget limitations and a lack of specific, professional knowledge in health care and administrative and financial support for refugees and refugee students. Associations and NGOs working in the public sphere may receive public funding at a national and/or local level. They also organize fundraising events, crowd funding and can solicit private donations.

As explained in the AGILE landscape analysis⁴, refugee students have very specific needs and face difficulties linked to their status and their personal journeys. Universities have limited funding and human resources and their primary function is to provide education. These two reasons mean that most international relations departments in HEIs are, for the most part, unable to provide appropriate help and solutions with regard to refugee rights, administration, housing and financial difficulties.

The voluntary sector, irrespective of its legal status, fills this gap to provide essential help by:

- providing access to and understanding of legal and administrative information and explaining the financial support available;
- promoting social inclusion, fighting isolation through the creation of a sense of “community” despite language barriers through a shared interest (art, creative writing, music, theatre etc.);
- promoting civic engagement, fostering tolerance and understanding, bridging the gap between HEIs and their local communities, helping with

⁴ Lawrance, L. (2023). Publication on findings. AGILE consortium (<https://agileproject-erasmus.eu/Landscape-analysis-of-HE-crisis-support-mechanisms-and-initiatives-for-refugee>)

cultural understanding and language acquisition, both necessary for successful integration;

- providing much-needed psychological support, teaching refugee students' resilience when faced with the unknown, with stress and uncertainty (Gordon, 2023).

Often, associations and NGOs provide several kinds of support, however, it is important to note that due to the specificity of any psychological support offered to refugee students, it is necessary to ensure that help given is professional, which means that it is, for the most part, outside the realm and expertise of HEIs. Refugees have often been forced to flee their country due to political conflict or other circumstances that threaten their personal security. The multiple potential traumas and disasters experienced by refugee youth tend to increase their risk of psychological deterioration and related problems. They do not know if they will ever be able to return to their home country and families, are faced with a loss of identity, of "home", of bearings, social position, family and often no longer share a common culture and language.

This need for psychological support has led HEIs to build bridges with hospitals and associations capable of giving professional psychological help. This support can come from hospitals (who often have specialized units dealing with trauma). In Bordeaux for example, the CHU and Bordeaux-Montaigne University have an agreement whereby refugee students can attend sessions with trained psychiatrists and, when necessary, interpreters. Due to the sheer number of refugees seeking psychological support, the university also works with an association set up by the doctor in charge of the psychological help unit at the hospital thus enabling students to benefit from workshops and support when the hospital cannot meet demand. At KTU, the library has also sought to provide psychological help and works with CARITAS and Lithuanian Red Cross organizations as we shall see later.

So, now we will look at specific examples of associations and NGOs working alongside AGILE partner HEIs. In doing so we will demonstrate how they fill the gap left by HEI systems, whose purpose is to provide teaching and training rather than to provide expert support to refugee students.

2.1. Lviv Polytechnic National University, Ukraine

Lviv Polytechnic National University's (LPNU) cooperation with various organizations in the context of the war in Ukraine was the direct result of this crisis and clearly demonstrates the importance of this cooperation.

Unlike the other AGILE partners, Ukraine does not have to deal with a refugee crisis as such but with displaced persons. Indeed, the war in Ukraine has meant that the country was rapidly faced with an urgent need for educational programs which would enable personnel who have returned from the war, or who have lost or been forced to change their usual place of residence to obtain qualifications and retraining where necessary. This has led to the provision of inclusive educational services and support for the development of science in Ukraine. The UN Refugee agency⁵ estimates that, at the end of 2023, 3.7 million people remained displaced within Ukraine.

Several associations and NGOs work with all displaced Ukrainians but are not solely devoted to students who have been displaced.

One example is the International Organization for Migration (IOM).⁶ This association works in Ukraine (and in neighbouring countries) to respond to the immense humanitarian needs of Ukrainians forced to flee the country, those internally displaced, and stranded third-country nationals.

Another example is HIAS⁷ which helped found Right to Protection (R2P), an independent Ukrainian NGO providing humanitarian aid to internally displaced people in Ukraine.

To complete this report, we asked LPNU to explain specifically how HEIs were helped. They spoke of the importance of cooperation with the [Council of Rectors of Higher Education Institutions](#)⁸ which seeks to help temporarily displaced teachers and students and which works to ensure continuity in education and research.

As well as ensuring the implementation of state policy in the field of education, the council also protects the rights of participants in the educational process, considering the difficult humanitarian, political and socio-economic situations

⁵ <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/ukraine-situation>

⁶ <https://www.iom.int/ukraine-iom-response-2022-2024>

⁷ <https://hias.org/who/>

⁸ This council includes 17 rectors of HEIs from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and principally involves educational and scientific cooperation.

in certain territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and the special conditions of such HEIs. It also works to enable displaced universities to continue their research activities. To do this, the council coordinates work with displaced universities to implement open science in Ukraine as part of the OPTIMA project⁹.

For the LPNU, this cooperation involves highlighting the results of all scientific research of displaced universities (in the form of conferences) and supporting participants in the educational process in the context of war. Between October 2023 and May 2024, 12 conferences were held (<https://peers.international/>), which were attended by more than 700 participants and 5 more conferences are planned. The results of the conferences include 684 papers in the form of conference abstracts. The research topics are wide-ranging and includes topics such as:

- Computer Modelling and Information Technology in Engineering;
- Application of Information and Communication Technologies in the Scientific and Educational Process in the Conditions of Digitalization of Society;
- Humanitarian components as an important link in training competitive professionals within the context of contemporary labor market needs;
- Training of future professionals in HEIs;
- Ukraine as the risk society;
- Analysis of the difficulties linked to the reconstruction and the development of Ukraine.

Despite all that has been achieved, this cooperation faces bureaucratic obstacles and insufficient state funding, as obviously the war-related crisis has affected all spheres of social, economic and political life in Ukraine.

The [International Center for Professional Partnership “Integration”](#) (hereinafter referred to as the Center)¹⁰ has been established at LPNU. The Center operates in the fields of inclusive education and international cooperation in accordance with the priority areas of education and science development at LPNU. The **structural and functional model of the International “Integration” Centre for Professional Partnerships** can be found in Appendix n^o1.

The Center develops social, educational and scientific interaction and cooperation as well as the implementation of the principles of inclusion in the

⁹ <https://lpnu.ua/en/optima>

¹⁰ <https://lpnu.ua/integration>

educational process.

The Center's activities concentrate on:

- raising awareness and developing an inclusive consciousness and educational environment, ensuring architectural and social accessibility for educational opportunities at LPNU for people with special educational needs;
- ensuring further development of LPNU's network of interdisciplinary partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations in Lviv and other partner organizations both in Ukraine and abroad.

The activities organized go beyond the purely academic community and extend to the city community and involve the exchange of experiences in educational, professional and practical activities at international, national, regional and local levels. The Center also participates in the development and implementation of joint international educational and professional initiatives and social and humanitarian projects and programs. It facilitates the exchange of teachers, students and postgraduate students, organizes participation in international scientific and practical conferences, forums, symposia, seminars, and training courses. Other important contributions are providing access to the scientific source base of foreign HEIs and other cultural and educational institutions, such as resource centres, archives, libraries, for teachers, students and postgraduates and promoting the joint publication of scientific and methodological collections and scientific papers.

The Center also participates in the implementation of university-wide programs. For example, the Center cooperates with two universities:

- the University of Manitoba (Winnipeg, Canada) with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
- the University of Noordland (hereinafter referred to as NORD University, Norway) with the financial support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

As a result of the cooperation between the LPNU with the University of Manitoba (Winnipeg, Canada)¹¹ a common project "Reforming Social Services" was implemented. The factors of the project's uniqueness in terms of inclusion include a student-centred educational program (interactive learning, vocational education in the context of social development, taking into account the needs of the labor market in Ukraine, etc.). In the context of the

¹¹ <https://lpnu.ua/integration/spivpratsia-z-kanadoiu>

international Ukrainian-Canadian partnership, research internships for LPNU teachers at the University of Manitoba and the formation of a university-community system of professional training for social workers were conducted.

Ukrainian-Norwegian cooperation¹² aims to retrain and socially adapt military personnel, veterans and their families in Ukraine. It also includes the integration of the Norway-Ukraine cooperation model into the state system.

The cooperation is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and aims to:

- provide assistance in the areas of professional retraining, social adaptation and employment assistance to discharged military personnel, veterans and their families and family members of the deceased;
- improve and formalize the cooperation model and its transfer to the Ukrainian authorities for use as an effective model of work with military personnel, veterans and their families to provide professional retraining, social adaptation and employment assistance.

An important condition for this project is the requirement to attract co-financing from Ukrainian authorities at all levels and Ukrainian and foreign organizations. These requirements are included in all levels of agreements between the Norwegian and Ukrainian partners involved in the implementation of the cooperation.

The cooperation provides:

- professional retraining of military personnel and their family members in civilian specialties in accordance with the needs of the labour market, lasting 500 academic hours;
- psychological adaptation of participants in the project to increase their motivation to take active steps to improve their family's well-being;
- legal adaptation of military personnel to improve their legal literacy and social security.

As a result of this cooperation, 428 people received training in the English Language and Digital Communications programme. The participants are servicemen and women who have been discharged and their families. Participants also receive assistance in legal, psychological, and social

¹² <https://lpnu.ua/integration/spivpratsia-z-norvegiieiu>

adaptation, as well as in facilitating employment and setting up their own businesses.

The main obstacles to the implementation of these types of cooperation are bureaucratic principles and insufficient financial support from the state. The psychological state of military personnel is also an important factor.

2.2. The University of Hamburg, Germany

The University of Hamburg (UHH) has a long tradition of cooperation with external institutions, namely by engaging in service-learning and making service-learning part of its programs. The University of Hamburg has a list of projects that are directed towards civic engagement and participation called #UHHengagiert.

For example, under the coordination of Prof. Silke Boenig, the project *Service Learning – Entwicklung von Management Strategien für Praxispartner im Public und Nonprofit Management* was put into place¹³.

This specific project has associated partners which are both instructional and ONGs, which might have very different interests, such as education for sustainable development (association Oikos) or the integration of migrants and refugees (associations Why Not?, Freiwilligennetzwerk Harburg and AKTIVOLI Wandsbek Freiwilligenzentrum). Depending on the type of association and how they are financially supported, the challenges for collaboration might vary: these are either financial, depending on private donors, or even related to the aims of the association, such as triggering kids' interest for science and investigation. When depending on volunteer work, one challenge might be the lack of volunteers and volunteer fluctuation.

As stated in the website of the project, Prof. Dr Silke Boenigk's Service Learning project seminar has been offered regularly every year at the UH since the 2009 summer semester. Service Learning is a form of teaching originating in the USA that combines academic seminar content and practical experience with civil commitment. Participants in a service-learning seminar regularly attend a seminar ('learning') at the UH and also perform a voluntary, charitable service ('service'), for example with a non-profit organization, such as those named above. The project thus could be said to be based on a tripartite cooperation, the UH being the mediator between the student body and the associations.

Another project that can be mentioned is the *Transnational Service Learning in Contexts of Higher Education*, a binational project between Hamburg and Jordan, aiming at comparing the refugee and migrant situation in both sites and which collaborates at a local level with different associations as stated below.

¹³ <https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fachbereich-sozoek/professuren/boenigk/lehre/service-learning.html>

In the website of the project¹⁴, it is stated that both Jordan and Germany are immigration countries with a large number of people with refugee experience. While immigration to Germany in recent years has mainly been characterized by people from Ukraine, Russia, Afghanistan, Syria and Sudan, Jordan has taken in a large number of refugees from Syria and Iraq due to its geographical proximity. At the same time, around 50% of Jordan's population has Palestinian roots. The aim of this institutional and educational cooperation, with financial support from the DAAD (German academic exchange service), is to shed light on inclusion in the context of migration and flight in the two countries. Among the activities promoted are off-campus excursions in Jordan to employment projects for refugee women (Collateral Repair Project) and to a refugee centre for women.

¹⁴ <https://www.ew.uni-hamburg.de/internationales/projekte/service-learning-gju.html>

2.3. Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania

Kaunas University of Technology (KTU) libraries, like all HEIs' libraries, are places of learning and so are intrinsically spaces for inclusion and exchanges between staff and students. At KTU, the library also uses its' HEI's in-house research and teaching skills (in psychology for example) to organize meditation sessions and art therapy sessions.

They also work with the [CARITAS](#) and [Lithuanian Red Cross organizations](#)¹⁵ the purposes of which are to protect people's lives and dignity and provide humanitarian aid, alleviate human suffering and provide assistance to people in distress in Lithuania and beyond.

KTU initiated this cooperation because of their initiatives aimed at representing and defending the interests of the poor in international and state institutions in order to build a more socially just society. This vision of their role in society coincided with KTU's humanitarian values and its desire to promote tolerance and understanding in the student community.

KTU initiated this collaboration with CARITAS and the Lithuanian Red Cross by organizing an informative event for students to explain exactly how humanitarian aid could be given to Ukrainians. This enabled KTU students to understand how humanitarian aid works, the different forms that aid can take and how each person can contribute.

KTU also cooperates with [LERA association](#) (Lithuanian Educational Research Association)¹⁶ which organizes conferences, symposiums, seminars and other events to develop educational research related to aspects of integration. It is an educational association, so dissemination of their research allows for a better understanding of the researched objects, while at the same time providing experience in working with refugees.

¹⁵ <https://www.caritas.org/ou-nous-trouver/europa/lituanie/?lang=fr>

¹⁶ <https://lera.lt/en/home/>

2.4. The Polish Rectors foundation, an NGO linking ministries and HEIs in Poland and Ukraine, Poland

With the Polish Rectors Foundation we can see how a national organization can influence policies and provide a vital link between ministries and HEIs.

The Polish Rectors Foundation (PRF) is a think tank specializing in research in HE. It has a strategic partnership with the key academic stakeholder, the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland and the Union of HEIs Rectors in Ukraine. PRF manages Polish-Ukrainian cooperation at the level of national rectors' conferences.

The focus of this NGO is unique and works towards the development of policy solutions and recommendations for both Ministries and universities. This includes actions for refugees and at the same time support for Ukrainian HEIs.

PRF was a member of the CRASP (Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland) bodies involved in the crisis management in Poland: CRASP Emergency Network for help for Ukraine, CRASP Crisis Committee, CRASP Committee on International Cooperation, Committee of Publishers under CRASP (contribution to the actions for editors and publishers from Ukraine).

PRF participates in high-level meetings dedicated to cooperation and support for Ukraine (led by the Ministry) and by Polish Forum of Academic-Economic cooperation (sessions on Ukraine).

PRF together with Warsaw University of Technology has managed the Polish-Ukrainian Rectors' Project, funded by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science of Poland since 2018. It organizes joint meetings, studies and events to find commonly beneficial solutions, boost Polish-Ukrainian academic cooperation and build the capacity of the Ukrainian rectors' community thus contributing to the recovery and modernisation of Ukraine.

The Polish-Ukrainian School for Strategic Governance in HE for Ukrainian rectors and vice-rectors was organized in 2024. PRF experts were invited to national and international events dedicated to the refugee crisis and support for Ukraine in Poland, Ukraine and Europe, including training sessions to facilitate adaptation to Polish academic culture and students' rights in Poland.

The PRF also organizes study visits for representatives of the Ukrainian academic community in Poland. For example, together with the Polish-American Freedom Foundation a study visit of leaders from internally displaced universities in Ukraine was organized in Warsaw, dedicated to new

study programs on social work and post-trauma psychological rehabilitation, re-socializing and adaptation of veterans, etc.

The PRF like the HEIs it seeks to help, faces the same barriers to creating/development of the partnerships. The difficulties are linked to:

- Funding. The limitation of resources for strategic actions, the lack of programs to support the Ukrainian academic community mean choices have to be made. PRF tends to focus on purely humanitarian support or educational support for children rather than support for universities or policy/strategic cooperation;
- Limited human resources mean that not all the necessary activities can be implemented;
- Time limitations. Obviously emergency actions need urgent implementation and crisis management is optimal. However, more sustainable solutions require a longer period of time and a long-term perspective;
- Huge fragmentation of activities. The PRF is aware of the need for more synergy and the synchronisation of activities rather than separate actions for refugees in HE. This systematization of activities would also be beneficial in elaborating stable long-term solutions.

2.5. The University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Slovenian NGOs that address migrant-related topics do not focus explicitly on helping students with migrant backgrounds, yet they contribute to the well-being of the whole community through their various programs. They provide diverse activities, such as language teaching, learning support, self-advocacy workshops, psychosocial support, and help to find accommodation.

[Slovene Philanthropy](#) (Slovenska filantropija), for example, connects volunteers and those searching for learning assistance for specific subjects, which could include assistance with HE topics. They also assist with the enrolment process. In addition to Slovene Philanthropy, other NGOs such as ADRA, Infokolpa, KD Gmajna, Karitas Slovenia (Slovenska Karitas), ODNOS society (Društvo Odnos) and Slovenian Red Cross (Rdeči križ Slovenije) also provide support.

However, cooperation between the University of Ljubljana (UL) and NGOs in the field of migrant-related topics is diverse and sporadic, yet essential for bridging the gap between science and civil society.

Each partner faculty of the UL has its own way of networking with NGOs, depending on its field and needs. There are two different forms of cooperation: formal and non-formal. The second form is based on voluntarism, collegiality between professors, researchers and NGO employees, and activism.

UL cooperates with the [Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth](#) (Zveza prijateljev mladine Slovenije) on a project [Heartful University](#) (Srčna UL). This project solves the short-term financial problems of students at UL who, due to the current situation, cannot cover their living expenses or expenses related to their studies with their income. The project reacted very quickly and effectively to the Ukrainian crisis.

In their second campaign, they decided to raise financial aid for students who fled Ukraine. In the first round of the fundraising campaign, they collected around 11.000 Euros and thus helped 13 students to co-finance their rental costs, purchase study and daily necessities, payment of bills, etc. This kind of help was extremely important, as many students were left without basic means of survival due to the events in Ukraine.

The Faculty of Social Sciences collaborates with Slovenian NGOs on various projects, including the AGILE project. In the case of the AGILE project, NGOs have been particularly helpful in connecting refugee students to our events. In other cases, they disseminated our surveys to specific groups. With their suggestions from the experiences from the fieldwork, they improved our survey about integration of Ukrainian refugees in Slovenia.

As students represent the UL, it is important to highlight their active involvement in various socially critical actions and initiatives within the framework of cooperation between the university and NGOs. As well as raising awareness about social injustices they participate in a range of different actions. One recent example of this cooperation involved two NGOs, the [Iskra Society](#) (Društvo Iskra)¹ and the [List of Democratic Students](#) (Lista demokratičnega študentstva).² As part of this collaboration, our students have been addressing the genocide in Gaza with various actions, such as reading Palestinian poetry, organizing round table discussions and peacefully occupying one of the classrooms at the Faculty of social sciences (FDV) for their public interventions and awareness campaigning.³ They call for aid for Palestinian students, whereby the University of Ljubljana should establish a housing and financing assistance system.

1. The Iskra Society is a progressive youth organisation focused on tackling the systemic problems of the youth. They work on the principles of feminist theories, solidarity and democracy.
2. The list of Democratic Students is a voluntary, independent, non-governmental and non-profit association of students, pupils and employees whose field of interest is student issues and the broader social issues of the youth.
3. In response to the student occupation, FDV issued a statement supporting the students' requests and condemning the genocide in Gaza.

2.6. Paris 8 University and Bordeaux Montaigne University, France

Before looking at concrete examples it is important to understand that France has a long tradition of working with associations and has an estimated 1.3 million associations¹⁷, half of which are dedicated to sport and culture. The Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, estimated that in the early 2000s 1,300 associations were state partners in the field of integration, to which should be added "9,000 associations funded by the Agence Nationale pour la Cohésion Sociale et l'Égalité des Chances (French Agency for Social Cohesion and Equal Opportunities: ACSE) and the General Secretariat of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Towns and Cities (SG-CIV) as part of urban policy".

The Ministry of Home Affairs website in France confirms that nearly 1,500 associations contribute to the implementation of the policy for the reception and integration of newcomers to France¹⁸.

Both Paris 8 and Bordeaux Montaigne universities have welcomed refugee students since 2016 and have worked alongside associations to facilitate integration. Indeed, HEIs alone cannot ensure that individual students gradually come to be a part of society. They can ensure language proficiency, help understand French culture and help students to pursue their studies so as to be able to access employment but the range of support needed (with regards to housing, psychological, administrative and financial support) is not the area of expertise of higher education institutions.

It is this belief in the importance of social and educational integration that has led HEIs to work closely with a range of associations in order to build a holistic support system. Perhaps the most telling example is the fact that working with associations is compulsory for all HEIs in France wishing to develop a bridge diploma.

In France, in order for the bridge diploma to be accredited by the Ministry of HE, it has to include activities which involve the voluntary sector, associations and civil society and so, since 2019, partnerships have been created and developed. Although it would be impossible to include an exhaustive list of all the associations that we work with, we have listed a few of the main ones.

¹⁷ Volunteer Associations and Integration of Immigrants in France, William Berthomière, Mathilde Maurel et Yann Richard : <https://doi.org/10.4000/cyberge0.31814>

¹⁸ <https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/fr/Integration-et-Acces-a-la-nationalite/Les-acteurs-de-l-integration/Les-associations>

These partnerships are wide-ranging and tend to cover the following areas:

- career advice, HE advice and administrative help;
- psychological support for refugees;
- language learning and culture;
- art and culture.

All the associations welcome refugee students in workshops both inside and outside the campus. These workshops can have allocated hours within the bridge diploma which means that often they are an integral part of student timetables.

Both University Paris 8 (UP8) and University Bordeaux Montaigne (UBM) work with national associations and NGOs but also establish close links with specific local associations thus helping refugee students to integrate the community in which they live.

Both UP8, UBM are active members of both local and national initiatives supporting refugees' integration through HE programs. At a national level both UP8 and UBM work closely with the [MEnS-Migrants dans l'Enseignement Supérieur](#)¹⁹ (Migrants in HE), the [UEE - Union des étudiants exiles](#) (the Union for Exiled Students)²⁰ and UniR (Universities and refugees) which helps refugees and asylum seekers in their academic and socio-professional integration in France. Both accompany exiles into HE, helping them to enroll and integrate HEIs, giving them the keys to their own success.

The [MEnS](#) network was founded in September 2017 with the support of the Conference of University Presidents (CPU). It federates and coordinates HEIs (universities, schools, institutes) and associations, committed to welcoming and integrating students and researchers in exile in France. The members of the MEnS network share the same desire to amplify their integration actions in favour of migrant students and work to share experiences, pool information and tools as well as dialogue with political institutions.

Whereas the MEnS works to help universities develop bridge diplomas and find funding, the UEE, composed entirely of exiled students who are currently studying in France, provides peer help and offers information on professional integration programs, access to universities and scholarships. It also offers cultural, wellness activities and social spaces for sharing life experiences and

¹⁹ <https://reseau-mens.org/>

²⁰ <https://uniondesetudiantsexiles.org/en/home-page>

getting to know the city they live in.

At both universities, 2-3 members of the UEE are invited on campus every year (over two consecutive half days) as part of the bridge diploma activities, to come and talk to refugee students about pursuing HE once they have learnt sufficient French. These meetings are both instructive and provide peer support. The students from the UEE speak from first-hand experience about the difficulties involved and the experience of integrating a degree course after having only followed language classes in the rather protected environment of the bridge diploma.

For refugee students in UP8 and UBM, these exchanges enable them to fully realize the realities and difficulties they face. Since the information comes from their peers who have similar experiences, the information is better integrated than when it is given by teachers or careers advisers. The fact that the meetings are conducted without local members of staff also enables students to feel more at ease and to ask all the questions that worry them in total confidence.

Both universities also work closely with another association, [Action Emploi Réfugiés](https://actionemploirefugies.com/) (refugee employment action)²¹. The association organizes its activities around 2 flagship support programs for refugees (SOCLE and AVEC), and develops proactive actions to mobilize companies towards inclusive recruitment. Based in Paris since 2016 and in Bordeaux since the end of 2017, the association supports between 350 and 450 people every year, mobilizing a large number of employers ranging from local companies to multinationals and provides more than 700 job opportunities a year.

For bridge diploma students, meeting this association means that some will be able to get to know companies interested in their skills (and perhaps find a company for vocational training placements). Students who have completed their courses can also contact this association, which then helps them with their job search and recruitment. Support is both individual and in the form of workshops. It also offers professional French workshops if required.

²¹ <https://actionemploirefugies.com/>

Learning the French language

The integration of refugees into society is a serious challenge for HEIs due to insufficient human resources and a lack of funding. As the bridge diploma often demands an A1/A2 level of French both UP8 and UBM also work with associations who provide French language lessons. This enables new arrivals to acquire the necessary level of French to integrate the Bridge diploma or other HEI courses.

Language learning is the primary prerequisite for students as they need to be able to communicate rapidly. Indeed, it is widely recognized that “before being able to reconcile the past self and the present self and regain hope, they have to be able to communicate” (Akthar & Lovell, 2019; Gordon, 2023).

In UP8, *La Maison des Langues et des Cultures d’Aubervilliers* (MLCA) is a place for interaction and exchange between residents and structures involved in multilingualism and openness to different cultures. It is destined to become a linguistic resource center. Its ambition is to forge strong links with its cultural, community, school and university environment, and in particular with the Condorcet campus, on issues of multilingualism and interculturality, by building projects involving local residents, the local community network and teacher-researchers. It seeks to promote the learning of the French language (through language coordination, conversation workshops for the general public, courses...).

Support is also given to municipal services (registry office, social services, police, etc.) to enable them to better welcome users with no command of the French language. A partner for educational research into language and cultural practices in Aubervilliers, it experiments with innovative techniques, tools and media.

Through its work, it makes visible the rich linguistic diversity of Aubervilliers and the language skills of its inhabitants and promotes knowledge of the cultural traditions associated with it. Students can take part in activities proposed by this association, such as: the “world tour of languages and cultures” (food tasting, art exhibition, language workshops, dances and music, games, films, clothes, crafts, theater, round table on the literature of the countries in question).

Another example is *Le Resome (Réseau d’études supérieures et orientation des migrant.e.s et exilé.e.s / HE and guidance network for migrants and exiles)*²² in Paris which is also a collective of students, teachers, supporters,

²² <https://www.resome.org/en>

associations and informal groups working alongside refugees and migrants to promote access to HE and facilitate guidance for all exiled students, as well as learning French for all.

Since 2015, it has helped dozens of institutions and student groups to set up welcome programs and support groups. It raises awareness and produces documentation for those concerned. In UP8, Resome held a weekly meeting to inform people about their rights to return to study and about existing schemes.

In Bordeaux, a similar association, [A.I.M.E. \(Accueil et Insertion des Migrant.e.s et des Exilé.e.s / Welcoming and integrating migrants and exiles\)](#)²³, was created in 2017 by a group of active and retired staff and students from universities and HEIs, engineering schools and research bodies in the Bordeaux area. The association's activities complement and coordinate those of Bordeaux's public HEIs. Students can also support refugee students by accepting to be a part of the buddy programme developed by the association, French students and colleagues attend information sessions about what it means to be a refugee student and their role is clearly limited to socializing and helping them to understand French culture and how French universities work. Should the refugee buddy need more specific help, the French student or member of staff knows where to send the students for information. This association also provides language classes for future refugee students who do not yet have the required language level for universities. This association like many similar ones all over France means that students, faculty, and community members can engage in meaningful dialogue, exchanging ideas and perspectives.

Another partner in the Nouvelle Aquitaine region is the [Illiteracy Resource Centre \(CLAP SUD-OUEST / CRIA Nouvelle-Aquitaine\)](#). It provides methodological and educational support for training organizations, associations, host networks and companies. UBM has formed a partnership with this association to provide professional training for volunteers who teach French to refugees. The idea is to help volunteers who have no prior experience in teaching and two training programs take place each year with 20 participants from associations throughout the region.

²³ http://reseau-aime.fr/?page_id=1302

Arts and culture for integration

Both UP8 and UBM organize different workshops within the framework of their bridge diplomas. Here are just two examples:

UP8 regularly brings in associations to organize workshops on building group spirit and introducing students to university life. This university also collaborates with artists from various associations to organize workshops on written and/or oral expression. One such workshop was held in 2023/24 as part of the oral expression course on the Ithaque project. It consisted of co-animations (theatre artist, Moez Awled Ahmed, and French language teacher, Alexandra Doulgeris) which took place throughout the year and led to the production of a short film, *Le ciel est bleu partout* (*The sky is blue everywhere*), a collective and experimental creation, with two complementary objectives from the outset: to perfect oral expression in French and to promote well-being and self-confidence through theatrical practice.

UBM works with the [Maison de la poésie](#) in Bordeaux, an association which promotes poetry. A workshop led by a poet took place over three days on campus. The students of an A2 level wrote short poems and worked on pronunciation and eloquence before spending an afternoon rehearsing for a public recitation organized in the centre of Bordeaux alongside professional poets.

3. Insights on how to expand HE-associations' cooperation in the field of refugee students

Creating a community of support through local/regional coordination committees

One way to ensure that cooperation is optimal and constantly evolving to meet the needs of students and HEIs and so increase the resilience of HEIs is to make sure that all parties are aware of the help and possibilities available. One way of ensuring fluidity is to set up a coordination committee between the different associations and the HEI.

When UBM realized just how many associations were working to help refugees, it was decided to initiate a meeting between them and our university. Indeed, the first meeting brought together 15 representatives of different organizations. As each participant (UBM included) presented its actions it became obvious that we all knew too little about each other and the help we could provide. Many did not know that UBM offered a bridge diploma and as a result, a local coordination committee was set up to facilitate exchanges and make sure that all parties knew about the different possibilities on offer. This committee has definitely contributed to enhancing the circulation of information, facilitating exchanges and finding solutions to various problems. Joint information events have been organized and common areas for future collaboration identified. Twice yearly meetings are organized to ensure that all information is up to date and a contact person clearly identified.

Giving visibility to all the voluntary sector support available

Another need is to ensure that all refugee students and administrative staff dealing with exiled students have a comprehensive and up-to-date list of the associations available to help them. This can take the form of a booklet with contacts or a page on the university website dedicated to refugee students.

The advantage of this local committee is that everyone is aware of the specificities of the refugee population and so the solutions proposed are suitable.

Workshops for staff and refugee students at the beginning of the academic year are also a good way to present all the different associations and NGOs.

Student Associations like *Paroles d'Exil* (words from exile)²⁴ can also contribute to raising awareness about migration issues within HEIs and contribute to a more cohesive community beyond the campus. The association was founded on the belief that immigration and integration issues are very much part of the public debate, but that the voices of immigrants are often under-represented. To address these issues, students decided to organize awareness-raising workshops in classes (mainly in secondary schools), to give immigrants the opportunity to talk about their experiences, with the aim of creating a dialogue between students and speakers.

At a European level, a compilation of the NGOs and associations working all over Europe would facilitate exchanges and help ideas to circulate.

Barriers

The main obstacles to the implementation of these types of cooperation are:

- ➔ bureaucratic barriers both within and outside HEIs;
- ➔ insufficient stable, financial support from the state meaning that associations can only provide limited help;
- ➔ the lack of volunteers and volunteer fluctuation;
- ➔ time limitations. Obviously emergency actions need urgent implementation and crisis management is optimal. However, more sustainable solutions require a longer period of time and a long-term perspective;
- ➔ fragmentation of activities. Partners are aware of the need for more synergy and the synchronisation of activities in order to build stable long-term solutions.

Understanding just how important this cooperation is if HEIs are to be truly resilient and capable of acting in an emergency is vital. Engaging staff and students in each HEI is also something to be developed.

²⁴ <https://parolesexil.wixsite.com/website>

4. Conclusion

It is impossible in a limited report to list all the associations and NGOs contributing to the social integration of refugee students. Despite all the efforts made, there is a definite need to increase the visibility of civil society actors and to acknowledge their significant contributions in increasing the resilience of inclusive HE systems to address ongoing needs of refugees through social participation.

Associations both within HEIs and in the larger civic community act as niches of social cohesion. By creating or using existing associations with HEIs, the latter reinforce their role as inclusive, engaging, and supportive environments, and they contribute directly to the social fabric of their communities. These associations ensure safe, inclusive environments where diverse communities can engage and collaborate for a more cohesive society helping refugees to overcome language barriers and cultural differences. Refugees often participate actively in associations and, as was the case of the Union for exiled students, even create them themselves in order to help newly arrived refugees.

As our Slovenian partner points out, HEIs and NGOs should establish regular cooperation and exchange of experiences in the future, as both actors have much to gain. On the one hand, universities would gain insight into the situation on site, and ONGs would gain insight into scientific research and new findings.

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6. Appendix 1: The structural-functional model of the International “Integration” Centre for Professional Partnerships

The structural-functional model of the International “Integration” Centre for Professional Partnerships

Expert support, supervisory, administrative, educational, supportive	Administration of the International “Integration” Centre for Professional Partnerships								
	Human Resources (HRD): advisors, staff and volunteers								
	International network of partnerships “Without Limits”								
	Canada	Poland	Germany	Portugal	Latvia	USA	Norway	Israel	Australia
	SERVICES						PROGRAMS	PROJECTS	
	Service of accessibility to learning opportunities “Without Limits”		Consulting and Coordination Service “Lviv Polytechnic Community Health Clinic”		Veteran service for war veterans, their families and internally displaced persons		PD program “Inclusive Education”	Project “Norway-Ukraine” “Retraining and social adaptation of military personnel and their families in Ukraine”	
	Lviv Polytechnic Ombudsman for Social Inclusion and Inclusive Education	Lviv Polytechnic Multidisciplinary Group on the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy	Social work in the field of mental health				Student and postgraduate exchange program	Project “Inclusive and Healthy University” (University of Würzburg)	
			Prevention and addictions therapy				Peace and Conflict Studies Program	Project “Ukraine-Poland” “Training of personnel for the development of the educational system of addiction therapy”	
			Adaptive physical activity						
			Rehabilitation activities						
Cabinet of Understanding									
National network of partnerships “Without Limits” at the local, regional and national levels									
Community health: Research and Development Laboratory. Research platform “ Without Limits”									

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