

INSIGHTS INTO YOUTH-LED EXPERIENCES FOR LOCAL POLICY-MAKING IN MIGRATION ISSUES

This paper is part of a selection of good practices gathered from the E-LoCUM partner countries. These examples showcase successful models and mechanisms for fostering youth participation in migration-related initiatives. The initiatives described serve as practical references for youth workers, educators, and practitioners, offering real-world examples of how youth engagement can be effectively structured and implemented.

These practices are designed not only to inspire but also to encourage creative thinking about how similar models could be adapted to your own local contexts. Furthermore, the practical insights from these models will provide additional "food for thought" to deepen discussions on migration and democratic participation.

Social Emergency Centre Suceava (Romania)

- **Location:** City of Suceava - Romania
- **Year of creation:** 2022
- **Status:** Informal (grassroots) initiative

Context and background: At the time of implementing our initiative, the socio-political context was defined by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began in February 2022. This situation resulted in a massive influx of Ukrainian refugees, including children and families, seeking shelter in neighbouring countries, including Romania. In this context, the Romanian government, non-governmental organizations, and local communities had to respond swiftly and effectively to provide necessary support for these refugees. While initially there was a wave of solidarity and support, over time, resources and interest began to wane, leading many organizations to reduce their support. In this environment, the Bucovina Institute Association decided to intensify its efforts to continue offering comprehensive services, focusing on the education and social inclusion of Ukrainian refugees.

The local community in Suceava responded positively and with solidarity to our initiative. Residents provided donations and volunteered in various capacities, including translation, transportation, and assistance in conducting activities. Additionally, we hired migrants to help us deliver services.

Youth engagement strategies: To engage young people in migrant affairs, the Bucovina Institute Association implemented a range of strategies tailored to youth interests and needs. These included educational initiatives like language courses in Romanian and English, ICT courses for youngsters and adults and afterschool programs for Ukrainian children, focusing on arts and

language skills. Creative activities such as painting and music workshops provided avenues for self-expression and cultural integration. Additionally, targeted outreach efforts ensured inclusivity by offering multilingual resources, collaborating with local schools and NGOs, and creating safe spaces for discussion and support. These efforts not only aimed to address immediate needs but also fostered long-term integration and empowerment among young migrants in the community.

Partnerships and collaboration: The initiative led by Asociația Institutul Bucovina to support Ukrainian refugees in Suceava prominently involved partnerships with local NGOs, government agencies, and international organizations. Collaborations with entities such as Fundația Heks Eper, Federația Organizațiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Servicii Sociale (FONSS), and World Vision were pivotal in expanding the reach and impact of their efforts. These partnerships were established through mutual recognition of shared goals in providing comprehensive support to refugees, encompassing educational, social, and livelihood aspects. Local NGOs contributed expertise and local knowledge, while international organizations brought in resources and global perspectives. Government agencies played a crucial role in facilitating access to services and advocating for the rights of refugees within the broader community. Together, these stakeholders formed a cohesive network that ensured sustained support and holistic assistance to Ukrainian refugees in Suceava, underscoring the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing complex humanitarian challenges.

Capacity building: Young people were equipped with essential skills and knowledge to participate effectively through structured training programs and workshops organized by Asociația Institutul Bucovina in collaboration with partners and volunteers. These initiatives focused on integrating Ukrainian refugee children into educational and social activities tailored to their needs, such as afterschool programs, arts and crafts workshops, language courses, and interactive play sessions. Specialized educators, including Mihai Pânzaru-PIM, alongside volunteers and center specialists, facilitated activities that not only nurtured artistic abilities but also fostered language development and practical skills. By creating a supportive environment at Clever Children Suceava and partnering with local schools like Școala Gimnazială "Mihail Sadoveanu" in Fălticeni, the association ensured that young participants received holistic support to thrive despite their challenging circumstances. These efforts underscored the commitment to providing continuous educational opportunities, reinforcing the importance of education as a fundamental right and a pathway to integration and empowerment for refugee children.

Inclusivity and diversity: The initiative led by Asociația Institutul Bucovina demonstrated a proactive approach to addressing the diversity within the youth population, encompassing various migrant backgrounds, particularly Ukrainian refugees. Specific measures were implemented to ensure inclusivity and representation from different communities, such as tailored educational programs that incorporated cultural sensitivity and language support. By offering bilingual courses in Romanian and English, along with activities like arts workshops and afterschool programs at Clever Children Suceava, the association created spaces where children from diverse backgrounds could develop skills and integrate comfortably.

Decision-making processes: The organization ensured their active participation through various channels. First, regular feedback sessions and surveys were conducted to gather insights directly from young migrants and their families about their needs, challenges, and aspirations. These inputs were crucial in shaping the design and adaptation of educational programs, afterschool activities, and social integration initiatives offered by the Centrul de Urgențe Sociale Suceava.

Moreover, special emphasis was placed on creating safe spaces within the activities where young migrants could freely express their perspectives and concerns. This inclusive approach not only empowered young people to voice their opinions but also fostered a sense of ownership and belonging within the community initiatives. By integrating their feedback into policy discussions and program development, the organization ensured that the services provided were responsive to the diverse needs of the youth population affected by the Ukrainian refugee crisis in Suceava.

Communication and outreach: In reaching and engaging young people affected by the Ukrainian refugee crisis, Asociația Institutul Bucovina utilized diverse communication channels tailored to their needs and preferences. Social media platforms such as Facebook was particularly effective for disseminating information about ongoing programs, activities, and updates related to services offered at the Centrul de Urgențe Sociale Suceava. This platform not only provided a space for real-time interaction but also allowed for the sharing of stories and testimonials from beneficiaries, fostering a sense of community and solidarity. And we also use flyers, events for dissemination. This multi-channel approach was essential in maintaining engagement, transparency, and accessibility, thereby strengthening the connection between the organization and its beneficiaries during a critical time of need.

Feedback mechanisms: Feedback and suggestions from the participating youth at the Centrul de Urgențe Sociale Suceava were collected through structured weekly support group meetings, where direct feedback was solicited. This feedback was systematically reviewed and incorporated into policy discussions and service improvements, ensuring that the services offered were tailored to the evolving needs of the youth. This structured feedback loop not only empowered the participants by giving them a voice in the decision-making process but also enhanced the relevance and effectiveness of the support provided

Challenges faced: During the implementation of the initiative, the Bucovina Institute Association faced several challenges, including the withdrawal of funders, difficulties in intercultural and linguistic communication, and limited resources to meet the complex needs of refugees. These obstacles were addressed by diversifying funding sources, recruiting volunteers for translation and transportation, and hiring migrants to help deliver services. Weekly feedback sessions were crucial for adjusting services based on the expressed needs of the beneficiaries, allowing for continuous and effective adaptation. The lessons learned include the importance of constant communication with the beneficiary community and flexibility in addressing emerging challenges.

Sustainability and impact: The initiative by the Bucovina Institute Association has evolved significantly since its inception in the spring of 2022, expanding its range of services and increasing its impact on the refugee community in Suceava. To ensure sustainability, the association diversified its funding sources, engaged volunteers, and formed strategic partnerships with organizations like FONSS, World Vision, and Heks Eper. These measures have allowed for the consistent provision of educational, social, and material support to refugees. The measurable impact includes improved language skills and social integration for approximately 1,400 refugees, enhanced educational opportunities for over 150 children, and strengthened community ties through various support and socialization activities. This initiative has led to increased self-reliance and resilience among the refugees, fostering their active participation in the local community.