

Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg, Germany



## Empowerment – Project OF refugees FOR refugees



Keyword(s):

**Migration and Integration**

**Empowerment**

### Introduction

Around 10,000 refugees currently live in Stuttgart. Politics, administration, and civil society work hand in hand to open pathways to a smooth integration process.

The City of Stuttgart implements a large number of tailor-made strategies of integration. Among others, it established a most innovative approach: in a programme called “Empowerment”, educational offers are initiated and run by refugees themselves - and supported by local stakeholders with view to general organisational aspects, rooms and other facilities. Like this, the initiative incorporates elements of education and capacity building both among refugees and civil society. Moreover, offers are tailored to the needs of the refugees and, as a consequence, a rich and diverse range of activities could be established. The idea of empowerment among refugees was born in Sweden and further developed by the City of Stuttgart that also provides budgets for the implementation of educational, social and cultural offers.



## **Main challenge**

The first challenge was to motivate refugees to take responsibility for their own integration process – this challenge, however, could be tackled with great success. In a process of refugees' dialogues, a first step of engagement both of refugees and stakeholders was initiated. In addition, various meetings and conferences with refugees and stakeholders were organised to further develop the idea of empowerment. Today, a core group of refugees steers empowerment activities in Stuttgart and many sub-groups are active that run activities according to their needs.

On the other hand, stakeholders from the region had to learn that the refugees take the leading role in empowerment initiatives while regional partners are just supporting the activities. This development included an organisational and structural learning process among the stakeholders.

## **Timing**

The initiative was started in the course of the 2015 refugees flows to Europe. Integration processes at that time were backed-up by civil society - volunteers were committed to ensure support and participation of the newcomers in Stuttgart. In addition to the indispensable support of the volunteers, Stuttgart also started empowerment projects FROM refugees FOR refugees. Empowerment in Stuttgart means that the refugees take responsibility for integration initiatives and take an active role in urban society.

## **Objective**

The new "Stuttgarters" bring resources, competencies and skills with them. To ensure that these do not get lost and, moreover, that they can be explored and used for the benefit of Stuttgart the immigrants are encouraged to make use of their talents and enrich the local neighborhoods.

The general idea of more than 300 small projects, activities and courses in the framework of the empowerment initiative is to involve the target group of refugees into the creation and implementation of learning offers and to empower immigrants to take a coordinating and a teaching role. As a positive side effect, educational offers that are planned by the refugees themselves are very close to refugees needs and interests.

## **Target group**

Target groups were adult immigrants of all ages with all kinds of backgrounds. In addition, stakeholders and citizens from the host society were involved in the initiative.

## **Geographical range**

The empowerment initiatives are implemented in the municipality of Stuttgart. Stuttgart has around 600,000 inhabitants. Similar initiatives exist in some Swedish regions and in other countries.

## **Stakeholders and partners**

The empowerment initiative is implemented with the help of more than 20 stakeholders working with refugees like civil society organisations, adult education centres, churches, sports clubs etc. The City of Stuttgart's public administration and political bodies are involved, too.

The cooperation between refugees' initiatives and stakeholders from civil society is one of the key success factors of the empowerment projects. The close collaboration ensures, on the one hand, the active role of the newcomers from the beginning and, on the other hand, the close link to the local society - which is an important precondition for the inclusion of immigrants in a diverse society like Stuttgart where more than 45 % of the population has a migration background.

## **Strategy / materials**

The project partners in Stuttgart adopted a Swedish empowerment model developed by a group of refugees at Restad Gård, the biggest refugee camp in Sweden. Within several weeks after their arrival in Europe, the refugees in Sweden developed a thorough offer of educational courses and leisure activities by themselves. After two years of performing activities and projects, the group became an officially licensed non-profit organization, called the Support Group Network (SGN). SGN is a non-profit NGO initiated by refugees. It collaborates with local societies in Sweden since 2014. A group of staff of the City of Stuttgart as well as of adult educators from Baden-Württemberg visited Restad Gård in 2016 in the framework of an ERASMUS+ KA1 study visit and brought the idea of empowerment initiatives back to Stuttgart.

Based on the Swedish model and experiences, the empowerment initiatives in Stuttgart contribute to better integration and inclusion programmes by offering needs-based, meaningful projects that are characterised by self-organisation and

strategic cooperation. A Stuttgart branch of the Support Group Network was founded.

In the framework of the “Empowerment” initiative, activities and educational offers are implemented in different fields like social, cultural and educational areas as well as in fields like health and psychological care. Empowerment projects include:

- the development of concepts and curricula
- the establishment of regional working structures and processes
- the definition of roles and tasks of different stakeholders involved in carrying out local offers
- the design of common material to advertise the offers on a local level (leaflets, information on websites, social media activities)
- advocacy concerning the needs of refugees in Stuttgart

Mailings, leaflets, communication through stakeholders (e.g. via language classes of AE centres, social workers dealing with refugees etc.) and – above all – communication among the target group’s social networks (mouth-to-mouth, social media) are used to promote the empowerment activities and to motivate more people to contribute.

The initiative was most participatory as the target group took the leading role in designing projects - both men and women. Local stakeholders and the local population are involved, too.

## **Resources**

The city offers yearly budgets for the initiatives (high six-figure sums, split to the different activities)

## **Compliance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

The project is in line with SDG 4 and others.

## **Innovation(s)**

The approach was and is still innovative as target groups that might be considered as being disadvantaged take a leading role in their own development and the creation of learning environments. Main elements of innovation are:

- the approach of empowerment and the support of self-efficacy of disadvantaged target-groups

- capacity building among refugees and other target groups (supporting organisational skills, discussion, moderation and teaching skills, creativity, knowledge on campaigning and advocacy etc.)
- capacity building among stakeholders (knowledge on how to implement the empowerment and the support of self-efficacy of disadvantaged target-groups)
- the creation of needs-based adult education offers through the involvement of target groups

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation is carried out through the constant reporting on the projects' results and the collection of data on the number of events, the number of participants and the qualitative reporting of specific outcomes. The following report summarises background information and the main results of the initiative:

<https://www.stuttgart.de/medien/ibs/Stuttgarter-Empowerment-Brochuere.pdf>

## **Success parameters**

Number of activities and persons involved.

## **Impact**

The idea of empowerment changed the municipality of Stuttgart's approach to the integration of refugees fundamentally. Through the large number of activities as well as through capacity building and training among stakeholders a clearly visible impact could be achieved.

Moreover, the City of Stuttgart discovered a new way of working with citizens that was meanwhile extended to other target groups like persons with handicaps, seniors etc.

## **Impediments**

Open-minded public and private institutions are essential to implement an innovative approach like this. To ensure long-term financial resources and the engagement of all partners, At the moment, this is achieved through successful work and visible results in Stuttgart.

## Replicability

The idea of empowerment and the education from refugees for refugees can be implemented in many ways. It has already been replicated in various European regions and in different regional contexts, with bigger and smaller budgets. First of all, enthusiasm of different partners and stakeholders is needed, secondly some financial and structural support is necessary.

## Concluding remarks

The new approach of empowerment was an eye-opener and game-changer for many partners in Stuttgart. To make refugees actors and stakeholders for their own matters in all fields: (social, cultural, educational, sports, health and psychological care) is a promising approach with many positive long-term effects.

## Website/Social Media profile(s) of the initiative

<https://www.stuttgart.de/medien/ibs/Stuttgarter-Empowerment-Brochuere.pdf>

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