



## **BEST project: show must go on!**

Despite COVID-19 and all the challenges and difficulties related to the pandemic, during this period the BEST project team has been determined to get through the activities and plans, using online tools and coming up with creative and safe solutions. We are happy to say we succeeded, and opened new paths for the effective integration of third-country nationals in Austria, Italy, Slovenia and Croatia!

## **COVID19 challenges**



Social entrepreneurs are facing an especially ambivalent situation at the moment: on the one hand entrepreneurial solutions to societal challenges are needed more than ever and on the other hand it is hard to get funding for new projects due to high unemployment and approaching financial crisis. At the project BEST we support our potential social business start ups with training, coaching and networking in these rough times as much as we can. One of our partners from the Austrian Network, namely [Impact HUB Vienna](#) has started a great initiative to fund social entrepreneurs

nowadays. They have established a [Solidarity Fund](#) to make sure that the livelihoods of the many social entrepreneurs that are part of our beautiful network are secured. Watch the explainer video to find out more about the Solidarity Fund's story!

## BEST Brunch to share experience



In Graz, [FH JOANNEUM](#) organized its first BEST business brunch on 12th of December 2019. The event was conceptualized in such a way that we were able to find synergize with similar current projects in Styria dealing with social entrepreneurship, migrants issues and intercultural communication in a broader sense. Thus, participants of the BEST Brunch not only gained an insight into the content and background of the BEST project and the services of [Gain & Sustain Europe](#), the lead partner of BEST project, who is committed to the integration of migrants into the labor market but were additionally provided with the main activities of the Styrian Project NoHate@WebStyria, that includes the development of online tools for the testing of intercultural competencies of social workers and institutions.

We shared these results not only with participants of the first edition of our social entrepreneurship course and representatives of local companies, but also native students & students with migrant background, with prominent and relevant local stakeholders of Styria, dealing with the issues of migration, discrimination, intercultural exchange & communication in their professional environment and daily work.

During and after the presentations, the participants enjoyed the opportunity to ask questions immediately and to dive into lively discussions. There was a vibrant exchange between the participants and the results were considered to be highly informative.

## Inspiring local cooperation in Slovenia

When it comes to the integration of migrants, the component of the local community is of extreme importance. Organizations that operate on the local level have a higher understanding of the current situation and circumstances of the people they work with, which enables them to plan and implement activities according to their needs. Consequently, that can result in a better and easier social and economic integration of migrants.

In the BEST course implemented in Slovenia, [Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts](#) organized two round tables, in Maribor and Ljubljana, to strengthen the

cooperation between local organizations that are active in the field of migrant integration (NGOs, public libraries and cultural centres, employment services, cultural mediators, regional authorities etc.) and also to emphasize their dialogue with refugees and other migrants.

One of the key findings at the round table in Maribor was the importance of good coordination between government and non-government organizations. Recognition of activities from both sides and mutual support reflects in better integration activities for migrants. We also found out there is a lack of such events where organizations can exchange their experiences and challenges, so we are already looking forward to furthering gatherings with them.

The debate in Ljubljana, on the other hand, circled the importance of local economic integration of migrants. Economic emancipation is one of the core foundations of independent life, however, language barriers, bureaucratic hindrances, and tight legislation generally tend to curb the desire in migrant workers to open a new business and to self-employ. Still, the participants of the first entrepreneurship course that attended the round table came with intriguing and feasible ideas on how to expand their business opportunities, and to brighten and diversify life in the city.



## When dreams come to life

In March 2020, COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges, but new visions and perspectives as well. It brought a gift to the working group of the BEST project: the enhanced awareness of how important it is to accompany people in bringing out their dreams from the drawer, finding together the right way to empower them, gradually transforming the ideas into concrete and sustainable projects.

On the eve of the start of the course on entrepreneurship with social impact, [Oikos onlus](#) together with the [Friuli Innovazione Consortium](#), partner of the project and the [University of Udine](#) – because of the lockdown, had to rethink and reprogram the training initiative, transforming it remotely, online, in a zoom version.

The first unexpected result consisted of the participation in the course of people who under normal conditions would not have been able to reach Udine, mainly women from Africa, from other cities of the region involved even in the care of their children. The strong cohesion of the

class group was also unexpected: even though the classroom was virtual, the students, shared their own project ideas, exchanged constructive critics and suggestions, even modifying them on the basis of the knowledge and work tools gradually acquired during lectures.

The case of Assetou, a Burkinabè woman, who has been living in Pordenone, the mother of four children for over 23 years, is emblematic.

*"When I learned about the course - she says - I immediately enrolled. I thought it was a good opportunity to try to put an idea I had on my mind black and white, and it was just like that. Together with the teachers, tutors, mentors and other participants, I began to sort out the various pieces of that idea, and then reconstruct it on the basis of a real business plan".*

Even watching several documentaries about his country, Assetou realized that an important food product such as the potato is not transformed in the least and therefore preserved. The result is that although the production is good, the potatoes are actually sold off on the market and subsequently, at the end of the season, to meet domestic demand they are imported at expensive prices. *"I thought - she explains - that it would be interesting to start a company that transforms potatoes, producing chips in bags and frozen. For me, this is not just a possibility of making me able to return to Burkina Faso, but it would satisfy a concrete need of the country with positive economic repercussions on the territory. My company would not only buy potatoes from the local farmers at fair and profitable prices, but it would also employ a number of women in production, emancipating them economically and enabling them to have their children study. I feel comfortable in Pordenone, we have been welcomed and integrated into the social fabric of the city, but my dream is to be able to return home, actively contributing to the growth of Burkina Faso".*

The sustainability design Assetou's idea is such that an application for participation in a regional development cooperation call has been submitted through Oikos Onlus.

## Networking with organisations and institutions



Between May and June 2020, Friuli Innovazione in collaboration with OIKOS Onlus organized three on-line meetings with different local stakeholders, aiming at involving these actors in concrete project activities and at promoting social entrepreneurship spirit and competences of Third Country Nationals present on the territory of Italy.

Each on-line meeting was adapted for specific stakeholders: from public institution, vocational training centers to representative associations of cooperatives. We have reached out to 7 external institutions on local and regional level, working in small groups and limited numbers of participants. In this way, we made possible an active participation of each stakeholder in the debate in order to explore their needs and interest in the project and show them the advantages of our actions and project results.

Considering the interest and the determination of certain stakeholders, Friuli Innovazione is

engaged now in setting up the first cooperation agreement with the Chamber of Commerce Pordenone – Udine, a way to formalize their involvement in entrepreneurship courses implemented during and beyond the project lifetime.

## Celebrating innovative and sustainable ideas



With the awarding of diplomas on Tuesday, July 7, [Centre for Peace Studies](#) and [Impact Hub Zagreb](#) celebrated the implementation of courses on social entrepreneurship for refugees and other migrants.

Women and men from all over the world presented their business pitches to the public, showing their deep motivation to pursue social entrepreneurial goals and start new activities and business. Thanks to the courses organized by Impact Hub Zagreb, and thanks to the MeetUps and roundtable organized, more and more people in Croatia are understanding the importance of networking and sharing innovative and socially sustainable ideas. Through these activities, CPS and IHZ bring together organizations and refugees and other migrants, in order to learn how to navigate the challenges of turning their ideas into real and successful social entrepreneurship.

Congratulations to all course participants who presented their future plans and ideas! We wish them good luck in the realization!

## What's next?

With the experience gathered during our courses on social entrepreneurship in Austria, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia, BEST project will share the knowledge and methods through two sessions of train-the-trainer courses, in order to transfer the know-how towards other interested parties: organizations, cooperatives, individuals. We will show you the BEST methodology to implement our social business education modules and introduce you to our online learning platform. The courses will be free of charge to any interested party. You can already contact the local partner organizations in order to register!

*BEST project is a joint endeavour of 7 partners from Austria (Gain&Sustain: Europe, FH Joanneum), Slovenia (ZRC SAZU), Croatia (CPS, Impact HUB Zagreb) and Italy (FINN, OIKOS) that have the common motivation of improving the effective integration of third-country nationals (TCN) into the labour market through cooperation between public and private institutions.*

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