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SUSTAINABILITY

Regional Integration Accelerators

International Project for the fast track integration

into the labour market of refugees and asylum seekers



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RIAC

Refugees and asylum seekers, even when included in a reception system, encounter many obstacles in accessing the regional labour market. Despite active policies in their favour having increased in recent years, they are still today one of the most vulnerable and most exposed groups to poverty, long lasting unemployment and social exclusion.

The long waiting times for asylum applications, the lack of social and informal networks that facilitate the search for work, the poor knowledge of the language and widespread discrimination all contribute to making it even more difficult for asylum seekers and refugees present in the different EU states to have access to dignified and sustainable forms of work.

To address these critical issues, reduce initial inequalities and make integration effective, based on the EU program for employment and social innovation (EaSI) and organising a mixed public-private partnership Pro Arbeit Offenbach has set up and implemented with its partners **Regional Integration Accelerators (RIAC)**.

According to the objectives of the EaSI program, the main goals of the RIAC project is to create (accessibility to) high-quality and sustainable jobs, promote social protection and support the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in **Germany, Denmark, Italy and Turkey**. The RIAC project aims to develop tools, expertise and a common strategy for accelerated integration in the labour market for refugees and asylum seekers in the above-mentioned countries, which could and should be transferable to any other country or region in Europe as well as in the mentioned countries in other places.

RIACs are small, clear focused, and practical units aimed at facilitating and speeding up the socio-economic integration of asylum seekers and refugees through the activation of personalized pathways that take into account both personal

aspirations and the needs of the marketplace.

RIACs operate on a regional or local level, in defined geographical areas.

They are co-designed and launched in specific economic sectors and in close collaboration with employers. The latter contribute uniquely by orienting and offering professional training towards the satisfaction of specific employment needs that are often unheeded, with the aim of reducing the imbalances between supply and demand for work.

The RIAC Project involves the performance of **21 actions (RIACs)** in the four partner countries (Germany, Italy, Denmark and Turkey). The actions are defined in the project, both in terms of organizational aspects and of contents. In order to ensure the sustainability, the scalability and the transnational relevance of our approach, it is crucial to provide the **standardization and documentation of the functionality** and the results of the RIACs.



TARGET, OUTCOME AND OUTPUT

Target: Who	<p>The RIAC project reached more than 1000 refugees and asylum seekers in the 4 implementing countries. Of these, 224 have found stable employment until the end of the project.</p> <p>More than 50 companies cooperated in the project- from very large to very small.</p> <p>Each project partner has established contacts and cooperation with local public authorities.</p>
Outcome: How	<p>The project has ensured the implementation of a model that has been increasingly refined and adapted to local situations in different countries in an often very dynamic scenario, with strong political and financial pressures in several countries and the Pandemic in its last year implementing RIAC.</p> <p>We consider the adaptability, transferability and scalability of the project as an outcome and not only as an output. The combination of different elements and experiences and the way they were made available for the growth and affirmation of a model through communication, dissemination and sharing of intermediate objectives is for us the main outcome of the project.</p> <p>RIAC modifies the logic, methodology and timing of the standard integration process by ensuring that the different pathways and integration elements/measures are implemented simultaneously and not in sequence.</p> <p>The Speed Manager is a central figure, who has the role of managing the processes and ensuring the integration and coordination of technical and linguistic training, bureaucracy procedures, mentoring, orientation, and job placement activities. So, in the different areas of the process, the individual participants achieve, in compliance with their progress, the best possible results.</p> <p>Focus on employability and not primarily on placement: Employability is an objective that cannot be achieved by all participants at the same time. In RIAC, the acceleration of socio-labour integration processes is not intended as a race for employment.</p> <p>Instead, it consists of anticipating and synthesizing the various activities useful for integration, to make the participants ready to face the labour market autonomously and in a reduced timeframe. RIACs, designed for both asylum seekers and refugees, have proved particularly useful for asylum seekers, who are generally excluded from socio-labour pathways due to the precariousness of their legal status and the uncertainty around their stay in the territory.</p> <p>RIACs are designed to take place in specific economic sectors, chosen based on a careful analysis of the needs of the territory, the driving sectors of the local economy, the skills and professional roles required by the market. The RIAC's sectorialisation methodology makes it possible to faster and better match between supply and demand for work.</p> <p>The accurate evaluation of the required professional profiles and the selection of the most suitable tools and channels to search for jobs help to increase the chances of successful matching. Small numbers, targeted measures, and the processing of emotional experiences ensure greater effectiveness of integration strategies.</p>
Output: What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 RIACs done • more than 1000 refugees reached on voluntary base • 224 placements on the job, • creation of 2 cooperatives (1 in Italy, 1 in Turkey) • more than 25 start-ups (Turkey/Germany) • handbook • toolkit "How to RIAC" • Strong dissemination action (newsletters, website, films, brochures in several languages) • Strong focus on transferability and scalability (Blueprint) • Sustainability plan • Continuous presence on media, social medias, conferences and events at local, national and international level in all project's countries.

Creating a **methodology** that allows refugees and asylum seekers to enter the labour market as quickly as possible is the aim of the RIAC project. In particular, the project tries to deal with a series of phenomena that potentially slow down the placement of a group of apparently fragile, unemployed individuals who nevertheless demonstrate great motivation in general.

RIAC target groups

The target group of refugees and asylum seekers presents particularities that we wanted to consider in the modelling of the RIAC structure. Most participants have a strong motivation and often an objective need to make themselves economically independent. Often this need is linked to the guarantee of permanence in the host country, but it can also be linked to the need to repay debts incurred to undertake the journey or to send money to the families left behind in the countries of origin.

The willingness to find concrete answers quickly can push these people to risk social exclusion, to accept poorly paid jobs, with little or no guarantees, to join criminal organizations, or to completely fail the integration process in the host country.

In contexts that they frequently do not fully understand, often in situations of lack of legal clarity on their status, with language skills not yet adequate, refugees and asylum seekers hope for a quick solution to their doubts and specific support for their needs. Their strong personal motivation can become a double-edged sword if impatience exposes them to defenseless behavior. By working promptly on socioeconomic autonomy and activating the personal resources available, it is possible to avoid the behavior of dependence and lack of responsibility.

A target in the target: women.

Improving the employability of women refugees and asylum seekers is one of the main topics of the RIAC project.

The definition of the topic in the project forecast the specific support to the target group in providing and implementing family services assuming that the main obstacle to a better employability of women lies essentially in their role as caregivers in families as mothers, wives, daughters, daughters-in-law and so on.

The work in the field and its declination across different ethnic groups and different geographical contexts has instead shown greater complexity.

The target group of the women in the RIAC Project is not homogeneous: Refugee women from Arab countries and women arriving from Africa show very different attitudes towards their roles and build their migration project in the home countries starting from diverse expectations.

About the role: The definition of roles is always a question of expectations; what do these women expect from the host society? What does the host society expect from them? The analysis of this divergences – also among the partners – always has to be the starting point for planning any activity.

Employers

Acceleration through focusing on employers implies the involvement of potential and committed employers into a RIAC in order to accelerate the integration process of refugees into the labor market. Instead of qualifying refugees according to their interests, the process is reversed. Employers in the area of a specific sector/activity of a RIAC are involved ahead of the start of a RIAC. The objective is to qualify refugees for available positions. This way the program has higher chances to produce long-lasting matches of (between?) participants and employers.



Finding and committing employers for the project is a very important step in designing a RIAC unit. Ideally a cooperation is established with the local chamber of crafts, the chamber of commerce or the local chapter of an industry association. Through these organizations, individual employers are contacted and information sessions are organized to find interested parties to engage with a RIAC. If this is not possible, companies located in the region need to be contacted and invited individually.

The experience made by all partners shows that committed employers need to be involved from the start; and the more the better. This can best be facilitated by some type of employer, industry or sector organization.

A RIAC could also include different types of jobs or apprenticeships. Such a multi-job type RIAC makes it easier to attract a critical number of refugee participants to the opportunity workshop. In a mono-employment-oriented RIAC, the number of interested candidates might be exhausted after a single RIAC, while there might be still more demand and some limited interest.

In the information session with interested employers or individual visits, a clear value proposition needs to be made to employers to participate, such as the integration of their criteria in the initial candidate selection process, the organization of short internships to test a candidate's suitability, support with the collection/submission of relevant documents and continued support to the refugees when they start their employment with the employers

Local authorities

In the German and Danish case, Pro Arbeit and Esbjerg Kommune as jobcentres supported the process as employers register open positions with them. Searches in local newspapers and online fora can also help to identify companies with

open jobs. The proximity to the entrepreneurial landscape of the region was an advantage in identifying the segments of the labour market looking for employment.

One of the most significant points of the intervention in the jobcentre function was the raising awareness of employers and unemployed people on the issue of qualification as a privileged gateway to sustainable and long-term labour market placement. Where the jobcentre invests in training, the job placement will have better sustainability and a better cost-benefit ratio for the community. Qualification must, however, intercept the needs of employers: in this sense the jobcentres have played a connecting role between entrepreneurs, trainers and users of the offer.

Other project partners experienced different institutional landscapes: in Italy, cooperation with local authorities focused on issues related to the legal status of refugees. Here qualifications and vacancies listed by the Jobcentre are often linked to targeted projects that refugees cannot access, due both to their status and to their insufficient skills. Moreover, access to the Jobcentre is precluded to asylum seekers/refugees seeking to obtain residence documents for the territory.

In Turkey, the situation seems to be even more complex, as refugees do not enjoy any protection.

Participating organisations

The project was characterised and enriched by the experience of different roles, contexts and types of organizations. Each partner has created its own network, trying to create room for manoeuvre and experimentation in accordance with the potential of the specific territory. In Turkey there was a strong link with the world of volunteering, in Italy with the world of small and medium-sized enterprises, in Germany and Denmark institutional partners played a leading and guiding role for other sectors the public administration.

For the public, third sector and private social stakeholders, RIAC has facilitated greater discussion and dialogue between public and private bodies on the barriers that asylum seekers and refugees face when entering the labour market. This dialogue has contributed to the adoption of effective strategies and the consolidation of services that are more targeted and responsive to the unexpressed wishes and needs of migrants.

Transferability and sustainability of the model

The RIAC project has produced a number of deliverables describing it and its results from different perspectives.

- In our **handbook** (<http://riac-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/blueprint-italian-EN-3.pdf>) we have compiled the standardisation of practices implemented during the project with practical suggestions from our specific experience with the project's target group.
- In the **Blueprint** (http://riac-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/RIAC_Handbook_EN.pdf) brochure we have generalised our model by proposing its methodologies to potential decision-makers and local stakeholders active in policies for the integration in the labour market of vulnerable groups.
- At this point it seemed appropriate to widen the horizon further and with the support of external consultants try to answer the question: **how our project – i.e. its findings, developed methods and contents - will be sustained in the long term sparking sustainable change which has a long-term effect?**

RIAC's approach to Sustainability

The name sustainability is derived from the Latin *sustinere*. Sustain can mean „maintain“, „support“, „uphold“ or „endure“.

If we assume Sustainability as the ability to exist

constantly, sustainability for the RIAC model is in our case the ability to adapt the methodology to possible scenarios different in time and space while maintaining its identity, integrity and intrinsic logic.

The prediction of future scenarios possible in time and space is a matter for futurologists, meteorologists and fortune tellers, all of whom have skills that we do not have. Nevertheless, during the years of the project's implementation we have witnessed unexpected and surprising scenarios unfold, ranging from the rise of sovereignty in several European regions, to financial and diplomatic crises and even a pandemic. In each of these scenarios - often a real combination of different events at the same time - our partners continued their work, creating innovative processes and coming up with concepts that had not been foreseen in the initial project draft. This ability to think beyond the grant - in order to acquire the project outputs - generated a large number of outcomes: from each scenario a series of practices were generated that led to the expected objective – but it results in sometime unexpected ways.

In this sustainability plan we do not intend to focus on answers but rather on questions: we will collect a repertoire of issues that have guided us in our practice and in transferring it to other contexts.

We will connect on the scenarios that in our experience have been most significant and that at a probabilistic level can be recurrent in time and in different territorial contexts.

We add a short excursus on how Pro Arbeit as the lead partners is taking care of the local, national and international sustainability of the RIAC project while stressing that also the other partners in Italy, Turkey and Denmark are at the moment engaged in living the results of the project beyond its implementation period.



The general background conditions that most impacted the implementation of the project in the different partner countries were:

- Institutional stability
- Continued operation and maintenance of project goals
- Continuous flow of networking at national and at European level
- Continued community participation
- Continuous sharing and transfer of project outputs and outcomes

Institutional stability in the different countries played a key role in creating or preventing the basic conditions for project implementation. In countries such as Turkey and Italy the impact of this component was so strong that it induced a continuous re-adjustment of the working methods. This on the one hand interfered negatively with the initial phases, creating disorientation among the partners, but on the other hand they were able to generate creative and effective responses in the later phases.

The focus on the project's objectives included the commitment to secure work positions that were as sustainable as possible for an objectively very fragile target group. This objective was achieved by means of very diversified operations at partnership level: in some realities- especially northern European ones- local institutions supported the placement by financially contributing to the vocational training of participants. In other realities with a fragmented labour market characterised by small and medium-sized enterprises, especially artisans and family-run businesses, the placement was made possible by the capillary acquisition of small businesses and the continuous accompaniment and tutoring of employers and refugees.

In such a dynamic project context, managing the flow of information at all levels-partners at local level, between partners at consortium level, between lead partners and European institutions- was of fundamental importance.

The local implementation of the project was possible thanks to the degree of formalised and non-formalised involvement of the stakeholders. The ability of the consortium to maintain active networking, respecting roles and functions, and adapting to the characteristics of social dialogue in the individual countries was very significant also in order to ensure the local communities' participation.

In a historical moment characterised by a political discussion not always in favour of reception, the theme of social cohesion and correct information on the facts linked to the phenomenon of migration proved to be of great significance in supporting a favourable attitude towards the implementation of the project on the part of institutions and employers.

Thanks to a continuous exchange with the regions, between partners and with European players, it was possible to convey ideas, practices, innovations and impulses by adapting them to the regional contexts of our partners.

In the light of the above, when outlining the actions that can lead to the sustainability of the project, we would like to point out that the following dimensions must absolutely be taken into account:

- Economic / Financial
- Social
- Political

What are the most important conditions requirements (internal and external) for ensuring the sustainability and upscaling of RIAC?

INTERNAL

- Willingness and motivation of partners to continue this “journey”, in case of new partners to join the methodology and the values of the project.
- Are only local/national pathways for RIAC’s sustainability possible?

EXTERNAL

Political willingness

- Are there any political conditions that must be met for the continuation of RIAC?
- Which levels of stakeholders are involved? And which are those most relevant for RIAC’s continuation?
- How important is the role of the local or regional public opinion for deciding if “backing” RIAC or not for a public authority?
- What can RIAC partners do to prevent from being so reliant to politicians?

EXTERNAL

Availability of resources

- What are the costs for RIAC’s continuation?
- Are there any project actions/elements that can be downsized/removed?
- Are there any project actions/elements that

should be improved, and therefore more investments should be foreseen?

- What are the possible sources of funding?

EXTERNAL

Commitment of employers

- How important is the commitment of employers for RIAC’s sustainability?
- Can we narrow down the type of employers (e.g. size, sector) with whom working in RIAC’s phase 2?
- Are there any ways in which employers/companies can support RIAC’s sustainability? Which role for them?

EXTERNAL

Engagement / motivation of participants

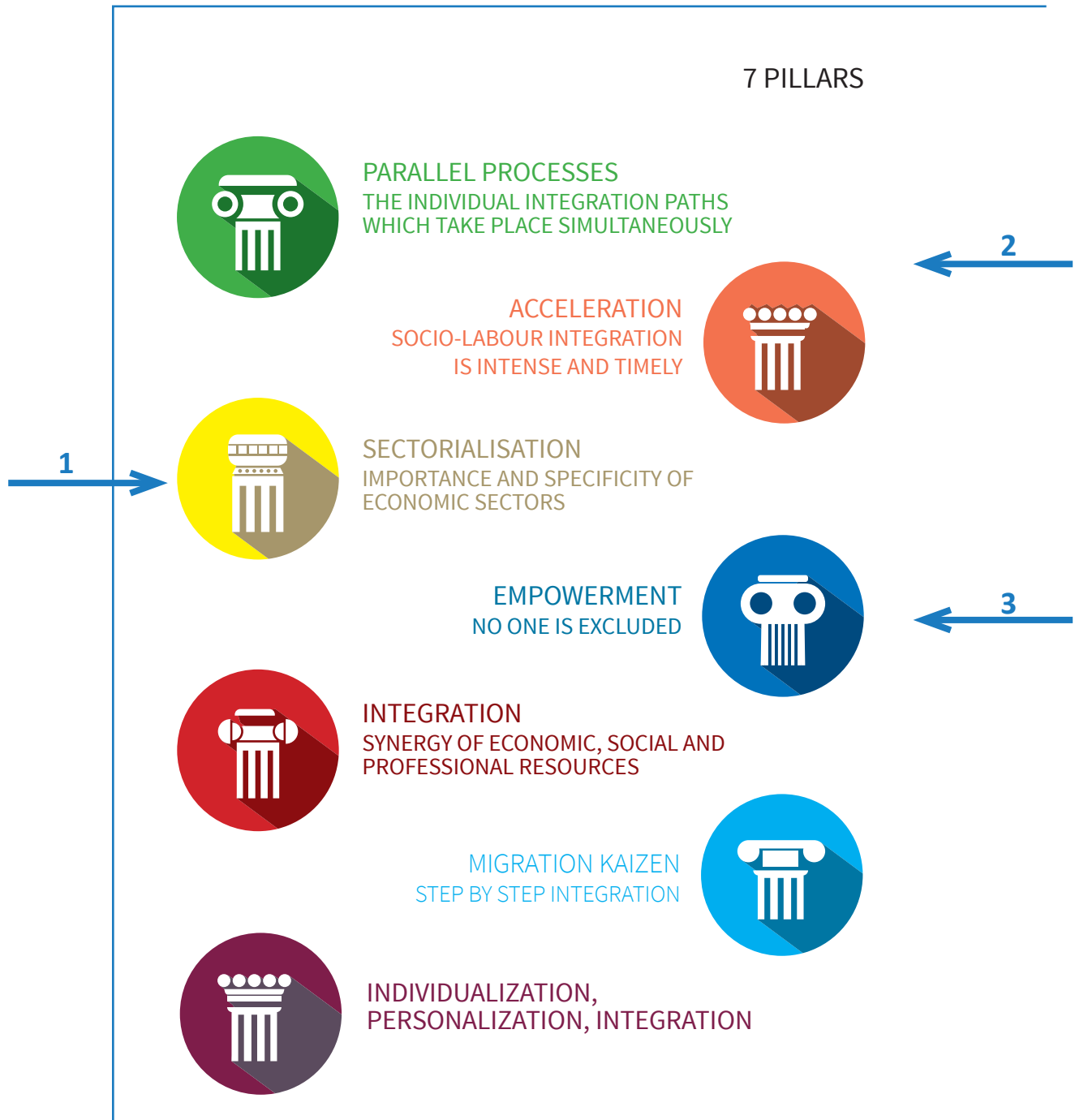
- How to motivate participants to join RIAC’s actions and process?
- What can we learn from RIAC?
- How important is the role of the local community for RIAC’s success?
- Are there any ways to prepare the ground at local level for RIAC’s success?
- Are there any specific actions that RIAC’s partners can carry out to steer the pre-conditions? Either as a consortium, or individually

Which are the most important factors / pre-conditions for RIAC Phase 2?

Starting from the aggregation of information and experiences gained during the project we were able to write a handbook and a blueprint-brochure.

We want to keep in mind the impressions that guided us in summarizing the RIAC experience and relate them to the possible scenarios taking them as a background for the sustainability of the project.

From the Blueprint our project we see the most important issues related to:



In the following table we discuss the 3 major issues we see as crucial for the sustainability of the project: the specific economic sectors, the factor time and the empowerment of all participants. The other factors are included in the steps mentioned in the table.

The program take places in different sectors of LM

Macro-Action	Sectorialisation on the labour market	Actions	6 Months	12 Months	18 Months
Precondition 1	Employers are interested in co-operation but do not have realistic and time-bound plans.	Offensive employers' search by JC or other organisations.	Asap	Continuous	Continuous
		Coaching and advisory.	A program starts in JC	The program take places in different sectors of LM	The program can be reflected. Operations from different segments lead to an overview of the general results
		Dissemination Call to after social responsibility.	Involving Employers and other stakeholders	Supported by networking	The Program is able to connect to other Employers
Precondition 2	Employers' associations are uncertain about how to cooperate with other actors.	Political involvement	Endorsement from public authorities in public events with big dissemination	Creating interest and sharing also by trade unions and other stakeholders	The Program is seen as a good practice and can be transferred to other Regions and segments
		Dissemination			
		Multiplying events			
Precondition 3	Jobcenters are able to reach their clients, but some of them are far away from labour market	Jobcenters/ organisations reach employers with open vacancies.	Raising awareness on the opportunity to hire persons from Target Group	Creating tools and framework for the cooperation with employers	Tools and framework can become a policy
		Jobseekers are coached about rights and duties.	Profiling and coaching.	Mentoring activity, Mediation	Network supporting the actions is created and works as a platform
		Assessment for matching with open vacancies	Traineeships	Matching	System is consolidated



Macro-Action	Time optimisation Parallel processes	Actions	6 Months	12 Months	18 Months
Precondition 1	Employers are interested in co-operation but do not have realistic and time-bound plans.	Fast training on the job	traineeship and casting	Follow up and check about the sustainability of the placement	Placements in the labour market are stable and consolidated. In the event of a loss of the job, the participant is able to be relocated in a short time.
		Coaching and advisory about conditions and requirements	Raising awareness on typology of contracts possible for the target group	The program take places in different sectors of LM	The program can be reflected. Operations from different segments lead to an overview of the general results
		Co-design on training activities for employees	Involving Employers and other stakeholders	Supported by networking in the same labour segment	The Program is able to connect to other Employers
Precondition 2	Jobcenters are able to reach their clients, but some of them are far away from labour market	Check on individual conditions	Creating concrete and realistic visions	Creating tools and framework for the co-operation with employers	Tools and framework can become a policy
		Jobcoaching about values and expectations	Profiling and coaching.	Mentoring activity, Mediation	Network supporting the actions is created and works as a platform
		Assessment for matching with open vacancies.	Traineeships checking the compatibility with own life-style	Matching	System is consolidated

Macro-Action	Empowerment of all actors included in the program	Actions	6 Months	12 Months	18 Months
Precondition		Creating the network	Some public organisations are able to take a lead role in consortia of similar organisations and create awareness and capacity to implement programmes.	The program take place in different sectors of LM	Network enlarges to other realities
	Widespread but not linked interventions: Local and national authorities are not able to implement the program and start projects not linked to each other's.	Sharing the goal of diversity	RIAC was born as a methodology for the professional integration of refugees but can be implemented also for other target groups of people at risk of social exclusion	The program take places in different sectors of LM	Local and national authorities are able to implement the program. NGOs and local partners will apply the RIAC methodology enlarging the spectrum of their activities, producing economies of scale: once started, it will be easier and less costly to continue
		Ensuring financial sustainability of the program	Looking for resources available at European and local level.	Linking to other sources of funding available by national governments and local authorities.	The program is able to connect funding from different financiers by maintaining its identity.



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SOCIAL MEDIA

Scanning the QR code will take you to the RIAC-website. Here you will find various teaching materials from our partners that have been produced as part of the RIAC-project and the handbook you have in front of you as a digital version.



QR Code RIAC-website

Social Media channels and RIAC-website:

RIAC-PROJECT.EU

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