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The Urban Lab of Europe !

MiFriendly Cities project Journal N° 5

Project led by the City of Coventry



**INTEGRATION OF
MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**



The MiFriendly Cities project

The MiFRIENDLY CITIES project aims to facilitate and recognise the positive contribution of refugees and migrants to the city's civic, economic and social fabric. Refugees and migrants are key actors playing an important role in deciding what makes a "migrant friendly city" and driving the change on job creation, social entrepreneurship&innovation, active citizenship and communication. Through the creation of a Business Leaders' Forum, a toolkit for employers and intensive training in advanced digital manufacturing, the project aims to create the condition for new job opportunities for migrants and refugees and better match their skills with employers. At the same time it aims to enhance participation and active citizenship by providing a financial scheme, mentoring and support for up to 50 social enterprises and social innovation projects. Strong attention is given to communication and evaluation of the approaches tested. Over 100 refugees and migrants will be trained as Citizen Journalists to engage with the mainstream media, create their own stories and media channels while 30 will be mentored and supported to become Citizen Social Scientists in charge the project's qualitative evaluation.

Partnership:

- Coventry City Council
- Wolverhampton City Council
- Birmingham City Council
- Coventry University
- Interserve- multinational company
- Migrant Voice (MV)- local migration network
- Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC)
- The Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC)
- Coventry University Social Enterprises (CUSE)
- Central England Law Centre (CELC)- NGO
- Migration Work (MW)- NGO

Table of Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
2. THE GENERAL PROGRESS OF MIFRIENDLY CITIES	6
3. XXI CENTURY HEROES LEADING THE WAY	8
3.1 Social Enterprises	10
3.2 Social Innovation Projects	16
4. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED	21
5. UIA CHALLENGES	22
6. CONCLUSIONS – LOOKING TO THE FUTURE	25
POST SCRIPTUM	29

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The second phase of the lockdown caused by the COVID 19 pandemic is in full swing. However, these difficult months have shown the incredible resilience of many of the **MiFriendly Cities** partners and participants, who continue to find ways of responding to:

- the challenges of isolation,
- dealing with the unknown,
- fighting for the rights of migrants and refugees, becoming in some instances even more efficient than before.

This is true for the Health Champions and Share My Language strands of the project, but even more so concerning **social enterprises** and **social innovations**, which this edition of the journal is going to concentrate on. The persons leading these initiatives, our **XXI century heroes**, are all from migrant or refugee backgrounds, but are now firmly connected to West Midlands culture. Through their daily work, these changemakers show just how involved you can become in your local community and the incredible added value that follows when diversity is embraced.

These fantastic energies have been further stimulated by two outside factors:

- The **MiFriendly Cities** project has been chosen as a finalist in the **Human Rights** category of the **Innovation in Politics Awards 2020**. 1,058 jurors from 47 different countries selected the

project out of 398 entries. MiFriendly Cities is now recognised as one of the top ten projects in its field.

- The overall manager of the project **Peter Barnett**, from Coventry City Council has been awarded a **CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list**, which is, as he says, a great honour for all those participating in **MiFriendly Cities**.

Both successes have given the partners and participants involved even more energy to pursue their efforts in helping others to come to integrate in the UK during a global pandemic.



Peter Barnett

2. THE GENERAL PROGRESS OF MIFRIENDLY CITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns have not halted the **MiFriendly Cities** project. On the contrary, new ways of working and innovative solutions have allowed many of the project’s strands to evolve positively, often finding even more efficient ways of delivering activity. The coordination between the three partner cities has improved as the meetings have all become virtual – perhaps having to use less time to travel between the cities incites the partners to be more present. The Central England Law Centre has transmuted many of its services into virtual tutorials, which have been used in many more schools all over the West Midlands, than face to face meetings would have allowed. These sessions raise the awareness of young persons about the need to fulfil the administrative requirements of the UK, in order to be able to go into further education.

If the Share My Language initiatives have been put on standby due to the wearing out of some participants due to overuse of the virtual system of communication, the Health Champions have made enormous headway, as they really touch very local communities and bring a life supporting direct element in these difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have a real chance to become a permanent feature of the health policies in the West Midlands. The situation of the social initiatives and social enterprises is mostly positive, even though they have all in some way been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project has made good headway in the area of legacy: a sounding board with the participation of other European cities was held on this subject, with very interesting experiences being shared.

The **MiFriendly Cities** project has been successfully extended by 3 months, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will end in May 2021, instead of February 2021. This agreement, with the managing body Urban Innovative Actions (UIA), will give more time to the latest additions to the MiFriendly Cities Team:

- **Ros Johnson**, who has joined MiFriendly Cities as the Legacy Officer. Ros will work to identify which actions are the most sustainable and could be continued beyond May 2021. She will also identify the financial resources which would be needed for them to continue.



Ros Johnson

- MigrantWork CIC has supported the Network of social innovation projects to employ a new team member, **Melvin Lyons**. Melvin will develop the network of social innovations, strengthening the networking capacities of these relatively new structures and associations.
- Programme Coordinator **Sunairah Miraj** has taken some well-deserved maternity leave to look after her newly born beautiful daughter and is replaced in this function by **Navjot Johal**.



Navjot Johal

3. XXI CENTURY HEROES LEADING THE WAY

The English language Wikipedia states that

“modern heroes – are persons – who perform great deeds or selfless acts for the common good instead of the classical goal of wealth, pride, and fame”.

This is indeed an appropriate description of the leaders of the social enterprises and social innovations that have been developed with the help of **MiFriendly Cities**. The directors of these have often had a very difficult time in their country of origin and have faced several barriers to integration in the UK but are now using their

lived experience and projects to support others from migrant backgrounds.

Seyedeh Naserniniaki comes from Iran and runs many activities in Coventry through her social enterprise, Chrysalis Craft CIC.

When talking about her social enterprise, Seyedeh recognises she is just one person, but reminds us of a story by Wangari Muta Maathai¹, a Kenyan environmental activist. In the film called **Dirt**, Maathai tells the story of the little drops of effort and energy we should all be making in favour of a better world:

‘We are constantly being bombarded by problems that we face and sometimes we can get completely overwhelmed.

*The story of the **hummingbird** is about this huge forest being consumed by a fire. All the animals in the forest come out and they are transfixed as they watch the forest burning and they feel very overwhelmed, very powerless, except this little hummingbird. It says, ‘I’m going to do something about the fire!’*

So, it flies to the nearest stream and takes a drop of water. It puts it on the fire, and goes up and down, up and down, up and down, as fast as it can. In the meantime, all the other animals, much bigger animals like the elephant with a big trunk that could bring much more water, they are standing there helpless.



Wangari Maathai, Copyright: s_bukley/ImageCollect

¹ Wangari Muta Maathai was a Kenyan environmental and political activist, who founded the Green Belt Movement, an environmental non-governmental organization focused on the planting of trees, environmental conservation, and women’s rights. In 2004 she became the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

And they are saying to the hummingbird, 'What do you think you can do? You are too little. This fire is too big. Your wings are too little, and your beak is so small that you can only bring a small drop of water at a time.'

But as they continue to discourage it, it turns to them without wasting any time and it tells them 'I am doing the best I can.'

And that to me is what all of us should do. We should always be like a hummingbird. I may be insignificant, but I certainly don't want to be like the animals watching as the planet goes down the drain. I will be a hummingbird, I will do the best I can."

And indeed, each one of MiFriendly Cities' social enterprises and innovations acts like Maathai's hummingbird, working with passion to create a better world for everyone.

Luc Ngolo Kone from the Ivory Coast has realized that to integrate, everyone must learn and be capable of acting within what he calls "**Britology**". That is to say, the science of becoming a little British, without losing your own identity. This includes loving your children and listening to them for at least an hour a week, even if, like most immigrants, you work very hard at more than one job.

Ake Achi, migrant rights activist, uses his legal training and lived experience as a migrant from the Ivory Coast to encourage others to stand up for their rights. Through his social innovation 'Migrants at Work', he addresses the intersect between immigration and employment law (both are separate silos) and how the gaps here are "*creating and exacerbating vulnerability to labour exploitation and race discrimination*". He is a strong believer in questioning employment practices, citing the rules and regulations that exist in the UK as a protective factor that should be exercised.

"If I see someone's life changing, it's good enough for me", says social innovator **Biniam Haddish**.

Biniam's 'Transitions' project has been bringing the Eritrean community together for online information sessions and much more. The project recognises that working below the level of qualification that you have can be demotivating and limiting. So now, as a senior executive for a large company, Biniam uses his position to encourage others to become more ambitious and therefore more enterprising for themselves and for their community.

Ali Aldube was already a well-qualified PC and telephone repairer when he came to the UK but could not find work because of a language barrier. He now owns a social enterprise - a repair shop of his own! Moreover, acknowledging the difficulties that newcomers have in obtaining a first phone, he rents recuperated ones, helping migrants and refugees to make a start.

Faye Yussuf has worked with MiFriendly Cities to establish 'Ona Creations' – an initiative selling beautifully crafted leather shoes and handbags. She sources the leather from villages in Kenya and Tanzania, where she is originally from. This supports women's collectives that use the money to send children to school, build wells, and most recently, establish a dispensary. Additionally, it provides a 'safe place' for women to start their professional careers in the UK, supporting them in their steps towards integration.

3.1 Social Enterprises

To fully understand the impact of these initiatives, we must first consider what ‘social enterprises’ and ‘social innovations’ are. This section will address the definition and aims of social enterprises within the European Union (EU) and how MiFriendly Cities has worked with migrant communities to deliver such projects.

Within the **MiFriendly Cities** project, social enterprises are supported by a professional team of advisors and mentors of the [Coventry University Social Enterprise](#) (CUSE), the only one of its kind in the UK. As this structure says on its Internet page:

“Our remit is to maximise Coventry University’s role as an anchor institution by finding ways of benefitting the local community and achieving true social value”.

As an ‘**anchor institution**’, CUSE secures local jobs for local people, in a way that benefits the local area in some other way.

Social Value is a well-known concept in the UK, which has been brought into a legislative reality through the [Social Value Act](#), voted in by parliament in 2013. This Act essentially stimulates all public spending to be as valuable as possible

in the locality from the social, economic and environmental point of view.

Mariama Njie-Ceesay, the CUSE social enterprise development coordinator, asserts that language and lack of knowledge about the UK ways of doing things are the biggest obstacles to be overcome by migrant social enterprise creators. Despite these barriers, CUSE achievements within the **MiFriendly Cities** project are impressive: in the last year the programme invested 80,000 euros in migrant social entrepreneurs, 16 social enterprises were registered as businesses, an initial 45 jobs were created, and 2,361 beneficiaries have been supported. To date, 44% of the social enterprises have been able to adapt and continue throughout the lockdown (See 2018-2019 report [here](#)), with many more planning for an uncertain future.

“I felt valued to be able to participate in this programme alongside other migrants and refugees “- Dzenana Masic (participant)

Social enterprises have a legal status in nearly all the member states of the European Union (EU). In fact, the EU defines a social enterprise as:

Social enterprises combine societal goals with an entrepreneurial spirit. These organisations focus on achieving wider social, environmental or community objectives. The European Commission aims to create a favourable financial, administrative and legal environment for these enterprises so that they can operate on an equal footing with other types of enterprises in the same sector. The Social Business Initiative, launched in 2011 identified actions to make a real difference and improve the situation on the ground for social enterprises.

What are social enterprises?

A social enterprise is an operator in the social economy whose main objective is to have a social impact rather than make a profit for their owners or shareholders. It operates by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative fashion and uses its profits primarily to achieve social objectives. It is managed in an open and responsible manner and, in particular, involves employees, consumers and stakeholders affected by its commercial activities.

The Commission uses the term ‘social enterprise’ to cover the following types of business

- Those for who the social or societal objective of the common good is the reason for the commercial activity, often in the form of a high level of social innovation
- Those whose profits are mainly reinvested to achieve this social objective
- Those where the method of organisation or the ownership system reflects the enterprise’s mission, using democratic or participatory principles or focusing on social justice

There is no single legal form for social enterprises. Many social enterprises operate in the form of social cooperatives, some are registered as private companies limited by guarantee, some are mutual, and a lot of them are non-profit-distributing organisations like provident societies, associations, voluntary organisations, charities or foundations.

Despite their diversity, social enterprises mainly operate in the following 4 fields

- Work integration - training and integration of people with disabilities and unemployed people
- Personal social services - health, well-being and medical care, professional training, education, health services, childcare services, services for elderly people, or aid for disadvantaged people
- Local development of disadvantaged areas - social enterprises in remote rural areas, neighbourhood development/rehabilitation schemes in urban areas, development aid and development cooperation with third countries
- Other - including recycling, environmental protection, sports, arts, culture or historical preservation, science, research and innovation, consumer protection and amateur sports

In the UK the short definition of a social enterprise is:

“Businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners.”

Social enterprises, like CUSE itself, also try to work on the challenges proposed by the **17 Social Development Goals** defined by the United Nations.

They are especially sensitive to goals related to a social, environmental and economic balance. In some cases, they also try to stimulate their surroundings to take on challenges such as those proposed in the doughnut economy by Kate Raworth, and her recently initiated collaborative platform: <https://www.kateraworth.com/deal/>.

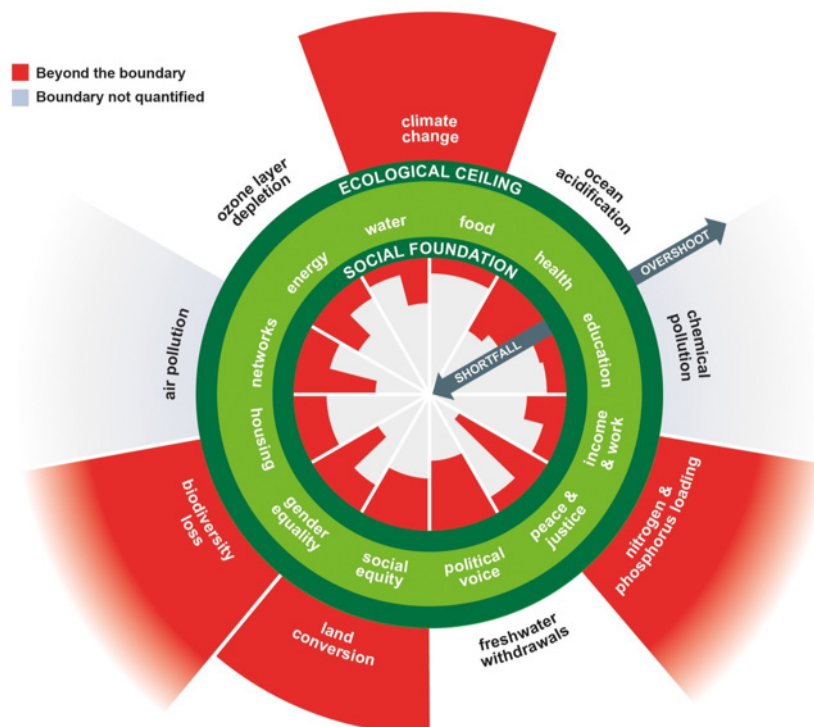
Raworth invites all active citizens to take part in this platform, as to maximise the possibility for a development of the planet, which is in accordance with its possibilities and the needs of the population. In the picture below can be seen



UN SDGs

the outer layers which correspond to the needs of our planet Earth, while inside the circle we see the social elements needed for humanity, where the shortfall is clearly visible.

The red areas are where we have already gone over the boundaries. The pull of this model is that whilst it is already being taken on board by several large European agglomerations (e.g. Hamburg, Amsterdam), it can be equally creative and stimulating when worked through by local communities and smaller city areas. This is based on the idea, which is even stronger in these times of confinement, of local autonomy and self-sufficiency, which can produce strength locally and increase the resilience of local communities.



Doughnut economy

Social enterprises are an important element of community development, very often they can be created by the community itself to satisfy its needs and become irreversible and non-transferable assets of daily life.

MiFriendly Cities, through its partner CUSE, has based part of its development in helping migrants and refugees through the creation of social enterprises. By doing so, it has empowered most of these individuals to forge themselves a way of existing economically, socially and environmentally beyond the end of MiFriendly Cities.

Whilst this paper has previously outlined some of the ways in which this has been achieved, here are some more detailed examples of MiFriendly Cities' contemporary heroes:

Akwaba CIC, Luc Ngolo Kone, Coventry

Concept: Britology and empowerment of migrant and refugee parents

Akwaba CIC is a social enterprise, which creates community spaces for children breakfast & afterschool clubs, alongside math tutoring. Akwaba means "Welcome" in the Ashanti language and the centre has a warm and family-like atmosphere working from the saying 'it takes a village to raise a child', which underlines the importance of empowering parents in this education. Its creator, Luc Ngolo Kone was an asylum seeker from the Ivory Coast, resettling in the UK in 2012 and suffering from post-traumatic disorder. After going through the bureaucratic process of getting his documents in the UK, Luc

WHAT IS BRITOLOGY?

Britology is the study of modern British socio-economic tradition.
It is composed of three major units:
1. British civilities
2. British systems
3. British professionalism

"...ANYBODY COMING IN THIS COUNTRY IS EXPECTED TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THE BRITISH VALUES AND SYSTEMS AND ALSO BE EQUIPPED ENOUGH TO ADOPT BRITISH STANDARDS. THIS WILL ENABLE THEM TO PROFICIENTLY INTERACT WITHIN THE SOCIAL FABRIC AND EFFICIENTLY ADAPT TO THE BRITISH ECONOMY AS THEY WILL..."

...MICHAEL COVE
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM




WHO IS BRITOLOGY DESIGNED FOR?

- Britology is designed for any immigrant regardless of their status or their origins
- Britology does not require any educational background

WHY BRITOLOGY?

- Immigrants are classed as an "at risk" population. Their integration is sometimes challenging because of their misunderstanding of British society.
- To date, there are only two formal learning opportunities for immigrants
 1. A test for the naturalisation Life in UK
 2. A language course ESOL
- Successful integration of the immigrants is vital to the social and economic of the hosting country. Integration for an immigrant is multifaceted. It includes yet language fluency but also civism. Follow a passion or build a career, in a hosting country requires to professional tradition and regulation. for this, in United Kingdom, YOU NEED BRITOLOGY

PROGRAMME CONTENT

BRITISH CIVILITIES

- LIVING TOGETHER
- BRITISH VALUES
- POLITNESS
- MANNERS

BRITISH SYSTEMS

- WELFARE ESTATE
- POLITCS SYSTEM
- PUBLIC HEALTH SYTEM
- EDUCATION SYSTEM
- JUSTICE SYTSEM

BRITISH PROFESSIONALISM

- ETIQUETTE
- COMPANY & BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT
- BUSINESS COMMUNICATION
- BRITISH STANDARD



Britology

taught maths to children. He soon stopped doing this profession, as he realised, that it was not motivating for the pupils.

He has understood that integrating into British society requires some knowledge of how it functions, in addition to the language itself, which remains the main barrier. He has called this **Britology**, which is a way of easing people from other countries into the intricacies of the UK culture, especially when qualified persons are attempting to enter the labour market. He knows, as a refugee himself, how hard you must work to make a living at the beginning. This often results in too little time being consecrated for the children in migrant families. So, one of the central elements of Akwaba's method is to oblige parents to spend at least 1 hour per week just listening to their children.

As he says himself, he would have been able to tackle the transition to fatherhood better, if he had done that when his first child was born. He underlines that for the children it is also very difficult, as they must juggle with 2 cultures at the same time.

“Playing with children allows me to retrieve my own childhood. I love it.”

He now employs 6 people and has 2 students who run afterschool clubs. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced him to change his activities and the afterschool clubs have ceased to function. But this, he remarks, has had very negative effects on the children, as confinement has in some cases led to more family violence. In other families it has led to a lot of progress and mutual understanding around living together.

Through the training from CUSE, Luc has benefited from the help of a mentor. It was this mentor who identified that Luc's building was not serving the interests of Akwaba, as it was rather dilapidated. Getting it up to scratch with pro bono help from mobilised companies has given more strength to the social enterprise.

AKWABA CIC
"we are with you in your integration process"

01 PORTAL FOR SKILLED IMMIGRANT
this project is the core means of Akwaba cic. it meant to be an open source learning platform to inform whoever want to come and settle in UK

02 "B STAMP"
holistic approach of the British culture at work. A curriculum proposed to skilled immigrant to insure the British employer on the transferred skills and guarantee the translated skills imported from overseas

03 ADULT EDUCATION CONSULTING
Adult Education consulting for newly arrived ... career progression and CPD

04 MY MOMENT WITH MY KIDS
integration stages tracking programme for newly arrived families. A home based emotional weekly tracking session held by parents to support their kids in their integration process

JOIN US ... CALL US ON 02477670415 / 07914825102

Logos: Akwaba CIC, POS Integration Via Ed, B Stamp, Adult Education Consulting, My Moment with My Kids, SAsA?, wolflair, CU Social Enterprise, ININI

AKWABA CIC

Ali Aldube, Wolverhampton

Concept: helping new migrants and refugees with access free or affordable communication tools

Ali came to the UK, after a very long journey, and had almost no English language capacities. However, he was an expert in PC and telephone repairs. Having grasped a basic level of English he has now put together his own repair shop in Wolverhampton, where he works with his son.

However, this repair shop is unusual, as Ali wants to help low income families and those who don't have access to smartphones when they first

arrive in the city. So, this social enterprise also deals in second-hand PCs and phones for those who can't afford them. The devices are given out, whilst the company earns its money on repairs.

Way Forward, Farisai Dzemwa, Birmingham

Concept: Creativity going into making jewellery and different artefacts

Farisai Dzemwa is not only a Health Champion, very well established in her community, but has created her social enterprise 'Way Forward'. This enormous energy has come from a personal crisis (serious car accident) which produced a loss of confidence. After many challenges however Farisai started to do creative workshops which channelled her anxieties. As a result, Farisai's social enterprise proposes jewellery making workshops as well as other forms of craft therapy. Since the COVID-19 crisis everything has had to be done online and it has become evident, that "Facebook is her best friend".

Masai Shoe Hub, Faye Yussuf, Birmingham

Concept: from safety and mutual support to "make and sell"

Ona Creations is a social enterprise, which links the country of origin to the migrants and refugees established in the UK, whilst making it safe, especially for women, to be able to start working and earn a salary. This way of tackling social isolation is original, as it gives the employed persons a tangible skill (assembling shoes), with components, which come from Kenya. The leather is supplied by the Masai tribes who breed the animals and cure the hides sustainably. Some of the profits are also supporting school children in Tanzania and villages to implement wells.

Chrysalis Craft Coventry CIC, Seyedeh Naserniniaki, Coventry

Concept: connecting people through art

Seyedeh, has a doctorate and notwithstanding her own health difficulties has devoted herself to helping others. She has been nominated among 100 women for the **WISE** prize. A real community champion, she works on the social inclusion of lonely individuals and isolated communities through creative activities and sustainable projects in a safe environment.

"I forget the outside, I see inside you, I see your personality. You are someone else for me now."

she says, arguing that

"art does not require language"

but develops language with small steps, thus increasing the confidence and trust of newcomers.

At the same time, she says very strongly that the digital divide is very harmful for migrants and refugees, especially during confinement periods, as many of them do not have the technical equipment needed and cannot afford the monthly payments.

"Creative redoing" is her motto and in this she is expert, especially when it comes to fashion. Recently in her crafts workshops she made glue out of flower and sugar, describing it as *"cheap and fun"*. They are run using recycled materials and producing products that will be sold to support minority groups in Coventry.

The confidence that she needed to assume a social enterprise came from the mentor that CUSE allotted her, showing the importance of the **MiFriendly Cities** funding in the direction of migrants and refugees.

3.2 Social Innovation Projects

Now let us turn our attention to the concept of 'social innovations' and how MiFriendly Cities have supported migrant communities and the wider West Midlands' communities through this strand of the project.

The MiFriendly Cities project has initiated a deep process of creation and recognition of social initiatives. At first a call was announced, and a certain number of projects were submitted and were given the chance to present at one of several 'pitching days'.

At present 13 projects are at different stages of development, trying to collaborate to create a 'network'. An animator of this network has been engaged by the leading projects, to consolidate the network and ensure that all the actors can really participate. The aim of the network is to allow the projects to share and support each other and on the other hand to be able to benefit from further funding. This is most challenging for the smallest and newest initiatives.



A pitching session in Birmingham (March 2019)

Biniam Haddish – PITP

“My life changes, because I decided to be the best for myself. You can be much more than you think” says Biniam, now a proud Senior Power System Engineer at National Grid ESO (see his recent story [here](#)).

He is not content just to look after himself, his family and to do his job, but on the basis of his life experience (see description of his flight from Eritrea and difficulties of qualifying and getting a job in the UK [here](#)), he encourages other migrants and refugees not to remain in jobs that do not give them the fulfilment that they deserve. As a result, he has created the [Professional Immigrants Transition Platform](#) (PITP), which helps young migrants and refugees who struggle to get a job in the UK.

PITP bases its actions on the knowledge that many persons who come from another country will work at low paid unqualified jobs, for quite some time, before they sometimes manage to get work that corresponds to their level of qualification and their aspirations. Very often it’s the aspirations which must be supported and this is done by peer support, which fights the loneliness that can often diminish ambition and motivation. It’s through discussion that obstacles can be overcome, and motivation can increase.

For Biniam, in some companies there is still not a diverse leadership team, but in National Grid he always tries to say to senior managers, to give people with a minority background a chance. If



Biniam Haddish

there is a diversity of backgrounds, there are more chances for solutions:

“We also want to raise awareness with employers – says Biniam – that refugees have international skills and knowledge with an ambition to be successful in life. This is an unexplored pool of expertise where employers could use as another avenue of recruitment”.

Biniam is not working alone. He has established very interesting partnerships not only with [Transitions](#), a London based company helping refugees in the employment area, but also Aké Achi, specialising in migrant and refugees’ rights and with the [Central England Law Centre](#). At present the COVID 19 pandemic has obliged PITP to do more online work, keeps on helping newcomers, of all origins with the paperwork which is necessary and is motivating people who can to help others, reinforcing the team in this way.



PITP Limited: Unlocking the Skills of Refugee ...

Biniam leading training

Aké Achi – Migrants at Work Ltd and What I Need to Know (WINK)

Not knowing your rights, or not being able to use the laws, rules and regulations to defend yourself, can be totally inhibiting on establishing yourself in an unknown country. Aké Achi believes, and proves every day, that the employment rights of many migrants and refugees are misunderstood by employers and by the Home Office itself on a regular basis through its 'Right to Work checks', leading to many instances of unfair dismissal. However, with the help of Aké's organisation to prove these errors and to demonstrate their legal right to work, they can be reinstated. In some instances, among Aké's caseload, people have even obtained a pay rise, due to the recognition of their outstanding capacities!

Aké is a former child labourer from the Ivory Coast. He was one of the first victims of the Right to Work checks in 2009. At the time, the situation he experienced in his host country had no name, today it is called a hostile environment. Aké struggled to find support in getting to demonstrate his right to work in the UK.

This led Aké to set up [Right2WorkUK Ltd](#) to protect the labour rights and empower others who are going through a similar situation. This structure



Aké Achi

has evolved to become [Migrants at Work Ltd](#), whose objective is to empower migrant workers in the in the community where they live, so that they are able to identify the early signs of labour exploitation where they work in order to challenge bad employment practices.

Aké arrived in the UK in 2006 with little knowledge of the English language. He now holds a B.Sc. in International Relations and a Master's degree in International Human Rights Law. He is currently studying towards his Cilex Employment lawyer qualification, and he hopes to find a University and secure funding to carry out his PhD research in migration law and labour Law.

Those first experiences left a strong mark on him and motivated him to work in the area of rights:

"Migrants and black workers, including British and EU citizens, get no support from trade unions – says Aké – when I came here and experienced the right to work check issue in 2009. My former employer asked for evidence of my right to work, they had my French national ID card, but they didn't understand what it was. The fact that I was EU citizen did not matter. What mattered to my employer was that I was a black migrant worker, who allegedly did not have the right document to work. New immigration rules – increased employers' responsibility for our immigration status – they didn't understand – had to contact the French embassy, the Home Office. My employer decided they'd suspend me until I had evidence of my work permit".

Aké has reacted to this situation in a very determined way. He joined the [GMB](#) union and tried to get support. This was not enough. He says:

"Trade Unions did not understand what the problem was because as far as they were concerned, the right to work was an immigration issue, not an employment issue"

He created Migrants at Work Ltd, as a transformation of Right2WorkUK Ltd and has now created a separate trade union called **NOOVO, the union**, which is specifically working in defence of regular and irregular migrants and refugees rights at work. It is in its infancy stage.

Aké quotes many concrete examples of persons he has managed to help with Migrants At Work, including:

- someone from the Windrush generation, whose ILR (indefinite leave to remain) was questioned by the employer as the passport had become expired etc. This person was reinstated and received a pay rise,
- a Gambian worker was fired for “gross misconduct”. Aké’s intervention and defence resulted in a reinstatement and pay rise,
- 8 Romanian farm workers were extracted from a farm, where they were victims of modern slavery. This operation was successful due to the partnership of many actors including community organisations and **GLAA** (Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority)

It’s important to underline, that WINK (What I Need to Know) has profited enormously from the **MiFriendly Cities** branding. Aké says that earlier it



Logo Migrants at Work



Logo Noovo

was always an uphill battle to be recognised and taken on as a serious partner. Since being in the **MiFriendly Cities** network it has been much easier, and partnerships have been created, with many structures, such as RMC, GLAA and the European Union (European Rights Group). Work with this structure is permitting Migrants at Work to become a consultative body on workers’ rights, especially in the area of immigration status-related discrimination. The added value of Aké’s efforts are his encouragements to others to become active:

- *Go step by step! Try and find proper support before you get into this. I rushed too fast and was asked for evidence, which I didn’t have, but what was needed were ready-made research papers with all the evidence e.g. data, case studies – it takes time to put the evidence together to send it to people on time, and when you are a small organisation led by volunteers with no funds, it is challenging to have research papers ready to go.*
- *Surround yourself with a team before going on this journey as a lone-worker*
- *I found myself in a situation where a lot of people want to help, but I can’t divide myself into four*
- *People shouldn’t be afraid to raise their issues*

- *I've sent so many emails, had so many rejections – before I found the GLAA who did open the door to me. Don't be discouraged by 100 rejections: carry on and the door will eventually open! You have to be resilient and persevere! Never give up! Especially if it is a topic which is really important to you.*
- *Often people don't want to support because they don't understand what the issue is.*
- *Communication is really important.*
- *I have learnt that instead of framing it as a political / human rights issue, I have sometimes had to frame it differently in order to be heard and listened to.*
- *Listen and be ready to be criticised, constructive criticism is healthy. Others will tend to undermine you and your effort, just don't mind them.*

Mama Jay Juliet – Promote your music

Mama Jay comes from Kenya and has been living in the UK for over 30 years. She is very active in promoting togetherness through culture, mainly music.

“Bringing people together and appreciating other peoples’ cultures” could be the motto of her social innovation, where she is getting musicians together, getting them to know each other and play. Rehearsal rooms are always a challenge for musicians of all sorts. For Mama Jay, if musicians are given a possibility to play, to start, they will develop as well as they can. Her dream would be to have several important moments during the year, when musicians could concert.

In Coventry and the West Midlands there are many very talented musicians who need some opportunities. What is even more important, is that music does not require language to be understood. It is in itself a universal language.

Mama Jay has organized nights of music. Many of the musicians, but not all, are from Syria. She has linked some of her activities to Share my Language and has also taken part in radio programmes. She



Mamajay Juliet

has worked closely with One Nation Studios – a local recording studio – to train up Jethro, who is helping her to reach out to the community and to bring people together to share and learn. However, confidence building in a public space, and vocal training, which Mama Jay does, is impossible during the lockdown, so it must be said that the COVID 19 pandemic seriously has limited this initiative.

However, there is hope that this project will benefit very much from, and contribute to, the legacy of **MiFriendly Cities** project. The **MiFriendly Cities** project is also building a new space called ‘Hope House’. Mama Jay and Jethro are lined up to deliver music sessions and performances for the community in this local space in Coventry.

4. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

The legacy of **MiFriendly Cities** will continue strongly through the social enterprises and the social innovators, some of which have been described in this Journal. The work done on this journal shows the immense force, energy, know-how and experience which newcomers to the Midlands are bringing with them, notwithstanding the challenges they have had to face:

- in their countries of origin,
- during their journeys, which for some, took years,
- during their initial months/years in the UK, with the uncertainty of getting the right to remain,
- during their first jobs, well below their real capacities,
- their studies,
- and getting their first real employment.

What's more, many of these persons have families, children, and had to live what others would define as a normal life "in addition". So, the local communities and cities, where these newcomers live and work, can really say that they benefit from the added value created by these migrants and refugees, who are progressively becoming fully fledged UK inhabitants.

However, the experiences of these leaders show that the journey towards integration in the UK is filled with very difficult and energy and time-consuming challenges. These include:

- inconsistencies between immigrant and employment rules, decisions and courts,
- gaps in Home Office rules and regulations,

- lack of knowledge of employers about migrants' and refugees' rights, concerning employment,
- hidden or open discrimination regarding persons coming from other countries,
- insufficient understanding of what it means to change countries and to use a different language and code of behaviour, by the UK systems and other residents.

Our heroes have, in their way shown the way out of these paradoxes, be that through 'Britology', education about migration and employment rights, or increased confidence from social activities. Above all, to have these interventions delivered by someone with lived experience creates an opportunity to feel heard and understood.

Notwithstanding, **MiFriendly Cities** must take on board, at this moment of the final year of the project, that some of these services are vital to the migrant and refugee community. Without them, the next newcomers will have a much more difficult time.

Secondly, the rules and regulations concerning these minorities have to be improved at the national level, which does not seem to understand and appreciate the difficulties created by a globally inconsistent and contradictory set of laws, which are used in a non-holistic fashion, by persons only concerned by their own "silos".

5. UIA CHALLENGES

MAPPING MiFRIENDLYCITIES AGAINST THE ESTABLISHED UIA CHALLENGES

Challenge	Level	Observations
1. Leadership for implementation	Low	<p>The leadership of the MiFriendly Cities project has improved, due to the sharing of responsibilities, which has allowed the criticisms concerning the perception of a Coventry centred approach to almost disappear. This implies that the three participating cities, Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton are collaborating more closely in a day to day fashion. Paradoxically, the needed meetings, done with the help of virtual screens etc., because of the COVID 19 pandemic, have helped this coordination: less travelling time, more efficiency, etc. The exchanges are further stimulated by easier and more frequent telephone exchanges, COVID 19 rules obliging.</p> <p>The steering group meetings – run in turn by each city, have improved matters, as has the employment of a common legacy officer Ros Johnson, who is working to see which actions can survive the end of the project financing, which has been prolonged till May, but without supplementary monies. Overall, partnership working is more streamlined. WP 4 – employment – Birmingham and Coventry are sharing with Wolverhampton. The final event of the project is being planned towards the end of March and will be a digital event. It is hoped that it will be a collaborative celebration of the last 3 years.</p>
2. Public procurement	Low	<p>Idem.</p> <p>No new developments. Please refer to the previous journals.</p>
3. Integrated cross-departmental working	Low	<p>The integration of other departments is getting better as we go along. The partner cities are now working with Public Health, where the Health Champions have really played their role. Paradoxically, the pandemic has helped to make the Health Champions irreplaceable!</p> <p>MiFriendly Cities did not engage with rough sleepers before the pandemic, but have started to provide employment support via digital means and more recently, in a local hotel adhering to guidelines</p> <p>COVID – video – citizenship and rights – schools and parents. Distribution of different materials has gone right across the whole region. So, the transfer of information in these areas is much better than going face to face. MiFriendly Cities has embraced digital transformation...what to rule out and what to continue...</p>

Challenge	Level	Observations
4. Adopting a participative approach	Low	<p>Participation between project partners has improved a lot. But the challenge to deliver a certain number of actions, which depend on a face to face relationship has become much more difficult, if not impossible. This has undoubtedly resulted in a drop of engagement, which all partners of the project are trying to counteract, when this is possible.</p> <p>For example, Share my Language sessions have been done virtually, but people are disengaging, so the Coventry coordinator has decided to give them a rest for a certain time. On the contrary there has been an increase in engagement of Health Champions – as they work in their communities, transmitting messages, helping to understand government decisions. They have become such a great resource.</p> <p>Media Lab and Migrant Voice organise “Power Talks”, where regular public speakers coming from refugee and migrant backgrounds help others to understand the situation. A small group of participants has become an editorial group, which is also working in the logic of Black Lives Matter.</p> <p>In the area of social innovation, a development officer has been employed on a consultancy basis to help build up the network of social innovations.</p>
5. Monitoring and evaluation	Low	<p>This area will be more investigated a little more in Journal no 6. At present the team is getting ready for the final evaluations.</p>
6. Financial Sustainability	Medium	<p>The expenditure of the project is being analysed, as the project will last 3 extra months, till May 2021, without any additional financing.</p> <p>All three cities are analysing how to sustain activities which seem the most important to them.</p> <p>A legacy specialist has been brought in to help identify the actions which could become a permanent legacy of the project. The social innovations, should, according to some participants become a permanent annual event, as the migrant and refugee community really need this.</p> <p>The legal and rights help that certain social enterprises and social innovations are proposing has to be able to maintain its force and to develop to make sure that all persons needing it (local resident included) can benefit.</p> <p>All three councils are under a lot of pressure to reduce spending, therefore the result of the financial sustainability of certain actions, could be difficult.</p>

Challenge	Level	Observations
<p>7. Communicating with target beneficiaries</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Due to the COVID 19 pandemic the integration of migrants and refugees has been overtaken by the pandemic and the need is to focus at the present: in staying safe with your own family, helping neighbours, getting food, being safe.</p> <p>However, the COVID 19 rules and regulation are isolating a lot of us, especially new arrivals. The project wants to maximise integration, not just for the newly arrived. A new project, based on experience of MiFriendly Cities is being prepared.</p> <p>There is a big problem lurking in the background for the whole of society, which is a direct result of the COVID 19 confinement policy. Figures of family violence in general are increasing world-wide (by 40% according to some sources), as all the members of each household are obliged to pass many hours together at home, in a situation where someone may be ill, someone may have lost their job and where in addition the relations between family members may be very strained due to the confinement.</p>
<p>8. Upscaling</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The work of the legacy officer may facilitate the upscaling of some actions. The management of the project is thinking more about how to safeguard what exists, as at the present moment, there do not seem to be too many opportunities, and the cuts in public spending appear to continue.</p> <p>Looking at the social enterprises and the social innovations, it is very possible that some of them may survive the end of the project, as they are producing financial entries themselves. The support in balancing their financial situation is one of the key elements in the next few months. Notwithstanding the management level maintains, that there are not many opportunities and that the project must find a capacity to keep going, even though the bigger employment projects will not be able to continue without new funds.</p>

6. CONCLUSIONS – LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Lorraine, one of the social innovators, is very active in the UK championing migrants' rights. We must not forget to remember realities such as hers:

GOD, I LOVE MY SON

God I love my son. WaChiuta mwana same nkhumutemwa. WaChiuta I love my son.

I had my son when I was still a teenager back then kukaya ku Malawi.

I remember the day I first entered Chatinkha labour ward that year.

I remember that month, that day, I remember that night.

It was 3:50 AM that my son showed up.

He was cute and he still is now.

WaChiuta I love my son.

I remember the first time he suckled my breasts.

I smiled.

And that will forever stay with me.

Children are a blessing so they say.

I agree I am blessed. With my son, we grew together and were closely knitted together.

WaChiuta I love my son. God, I love my son.

My son always knew what I was thinking of just looking in my eye.

All those are just memories now.

I feel incomplete.

He sends me photos we took together but that is not enough for me.

I feel empty.

That connection no longer exists.

My son ali ku Malawi while I live here in the UK. WaChiuta I love my son.

God, I love my son.

The tagline and status that I often use.

It is my way of testifying to God that no matter the feelings my son may have,
No matter anyone else may judge me for what has happened in my life I will forever
love my son. Like a rock I will stand with my son.

Nothing has or will change that part of me for him.

God, I love my son.

WaChiuta I love my son.

It is an affirmation.

It is a promise.

It is a declaration.

I miss my son and I know he misses me too.

We miss each other.

WaChiuta I love my son.

Sometimes we cry together on the phone.

We console each other.

Believing that one day our story will change.

God, I love my son.

WaChiuta I love my son is a protest to show that whatever barriers that have been mounted between us, my heart, is always with him.

God, I love my son is a status that comes from the deepest part of my heart.

I know I have failed him but it stands:

God, I love my son. WaChiuta mwana wane nkhumutemwa.

You can watch a film made of this poem, created through a collaboration between two of the social innovators – Loraine Masiya Mponela (Right2a Home project) and Laura Nyahuye (Maokwo Create and Talk project) here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EDSJG-o-1c&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=LauraNyahuye

Some readers may want to understand even better what it feels like to be without documents. This was the reality for Maha Mamo ([here](#)), a Syrian born stateless person who finally, after 30 years of life, obtained nationality in Brazil. Not having documents is certainly traumatic, especially, when it is linked to separation from the country you are born in and you love “through your genes”. This living in “suspended animation” is very difficult to understand, if it has not touched you directly. The sense of

isolation, of lack of security, of closed doors is indeed traumatic.

This feeling is transferred to the next generation, and maybe generations to come, as in my case: my parents could not go back to Poland after the II World War, as they were in danger of being put into prison, or being sent to Siberia in the Soviet Union... so they became stateless persons in the UK. Much later they were able to become British citizens, but their hearts and souls still belonged to Poland, where my mother was finally buried.

The question could therefore be formulated: “why do almost all countries make this process of finding a second country to love so difficult?”

This space between what could be the situation and what it is in reality also comes out in the conclusions that can be made about the integration of newcomers and their eventual organisations. **Dipali Chandra**, who is secretary of the [West Midlands Funders Network](#), who was kind enough to answer some questions on this subject, states the following:

- there is a real cultural difference between how people organise themselves coming from different cultural backgrounds. The way we organise in the UK is not the same,
- the charity framework in the UK is not understood by others. Understanding the terms of charity and ‘not for profit’ requires quite some effort,

- there is a language and a jargon in this area – you learn and understand. If not, it’s very difficult to understand,
- the type of organisation is not always appropriate – social Innovation is useful, as it can be of different types.

For Dipali being one of the “Fluffy Dragons” who evaluated the pitches of the social innovators, was particularly useful in understanding the issues facing migrants and refugees, which must be tackled in their own areas or communities. The work with the migrant and refugee social innovators allowed her a lot of insight into their situations.

The **West Midlands Funders Network**, represents 40 trusts and funders and has been in action for 40 years. It has evolved over time. At the beginning it was a support network for paid staff working in trusts and foundations. The number of members steadily increased and they endowed the network with capital amounts of money to invest or give out as grants. The scope of the network was extended to social investors, public bodies and 3rd sector organisations. The network looks at practices and gaps in funding and the pros and cons of different areas of funding. Collecting data on the region, allows the network to inform funders on what areas they might prioritise.

Funders are of course concerned by risk analysis, and their attitude to new groups, with little experience, heightens this aspect. They do however identify common goals and try to build up the trust that may reduce the element of risk.

“As is well known, funders are meant to be equitable – says Dipali – but there is still a strong level of racial inequality, which is probably an unconscious bias at the governance and staffing level”.

In this Journal No 5 we have covered such subjects as “Britology”, or the rights of migrants and refugees, which are not respected due to open gaps in the way the British system functions. On the other hand, we have the Champions (Health, Journalists, Social Scientists) and the Heroes (social enterprises and social innovations), who are reformulating the way in which the whole of the UK, or EU society can and maybe should act.

The burning question is whether as a whole society we are learning from these examples,

putting them into practice in our own surroundings and imitating these extraordinary ordinary persons and structures, for a better collective future? Is it not in this area, that the alliance of the public sector, the private sector, the knowledge sector and society at large should unite to make the world a better place, not just from the newcomer point of view, but for the post COVID-19 epoch and the efforts we all have to make in the transition towards a healthy planet. As says Maathai: **“I will be a hummingbird, I will do the best I can.”** – so should we all.



Look at Some Interesting Efforts to Save Planet Earth – RocketNews, rocketnews.com

POST SCRIPTUM

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Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.



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