

EMPOWERING MIGRANTS THROUGH CRAFT-BASED SKILLS: SOCIAL ECONOMY INITIATIVES FOR INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION

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Purpose: This paper explores how social economy projects can facilitate migrant inclusion through the cultivation of crafts-based skills, creating economic opportunities while fostering social cohesion. Crafts and traditional skills serve as powerful tools for empowerment, enabling migrants to gain employment, develop entrepreneurial initiatives, and participate actively in local communities. By examining successful case studies, engaging in traditional embroidery and handicraft cooperatives, this study highlights the role of social enterprises, cooperatives, and community-driven initiatives in supporting migrants through skills training, mentorship programs, and market access. Craft-based social economy initiatives provide economic opportunities while fostering cultural exchange and social cohesion. This study investigates how these initiatives empower migrants and contribute to their integration within local communities.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper employs a qualitative case study approach, examining three key projects—MADE51, Knit for Peace, Refugee Company, and INTERCRAFT—that utilize crafts-based skills to support migrant integration. These case studies are analyzed through the lens of social economy theory, focusing on their vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and community-building aspects. Data is gathered from project reports, interviews, and relevant literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these initiatives.

Findings: The study demonstrates that crafts-based social economy projects significantly contribute to migrant integration by providing sustainable income opportunities, fostering cross-cultural connections, and enhancing social cohesion. The findings highlight the importance of vocational training, entrepreneurship, and intergenerational collaboration in these initiatives, showing how they empower migrants and offer a sense of purpose and inclusion.

Originality/value: This paper contributes to the understanding of the role of social economy projects in migrant integration, with a specific focus on crafts-based initiatives. It provides valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and social enterprises working with migrants, offering evidence of the positive impact of these initiatives on both economic and social inclusion. The article shows the importance of craftsmanship not only from the point of view of the products created and services offered, but also as a tool for integration and social inclusion.

Keywords: social economy, migrant inclusion, integration programs, cultural and ethnic diversity, craft, crafts-based skills, community engagement, cultural economy.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Migration has become an increasingly significant global phenomenon, with millions of people relocating due to economic, political, and environmental factors. Integrating migrants into host societies presents both challenges and opportunities, particularly in terms of employment, social inclusion, and cultural adaptation. Traditional economic models often fail to provide sufficient support, leaving many migrants in precarious employment or social isolation. In response, social economy projects—initiatives driven by social and environmental objectives rather than profit maximization—offer alternative pathways for migrant integration.

Migration, defined as the movement of people from one primary place of residence to another, can occur within a country (internal migration) or across international borders (international migration). It reshapes the lives of migrants and has profound effects on both the economies and societies of both origin and destination regions (De Haas, 2020). Migration is intrinsically linked to broader societal, technological, demographic, and environmental changes, including historical patterns of colonialism and their long-lasting impact on global mobility (Barnett, Adger, 2018). Contemporary migration trends are influenced by demographic transitions, particularly in regions with low fertility rates, where migration plays a pivotal role in reshaping population structures, including age distribution and dependency ratios (Coleman, 2006).

Migration can be temporary, such as seasonal or circular migration, or permanent. It may also involve involuntary, often short-term displacement due to unforeseen events like natural disasters or conflict. Migration is increasingly recognized as a key factor in shaping regional economies and social structures, often leading to the creation of new communities and altering social and economic dynamics in both origin and destination areas.

The integration of migrants into host societies presents both challenges and opportunities. Traditional economic models often struggle to adequately support migrants, leaving many in precarious social and employment situations. Social economy projects—initiatives that prioritize social, cultural, and environmental goals over profit-making—offer a promising approach to migrant inclusion, particularly those centered around crafts-based skills. These initiatives not only provide employment opportunities but also foster social cohesion by promoting cultural exchange between migrant and host communities.

While the issues of migration and the assimilation of migrants have been extensively studied within individual countries, considerably less attention has been given to the role of craft-related activities and programs in engaging migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Crafts-based initiatives within the social economy play a particularly valuable role in fostering inclusion. Handicrafts, textiles, ceramics, woodworking, and other artisanal skills provide economic opportunities while also serving as cultural bridges between migrant and host communities. These initiatives empower migrants by providing vocational training, facilitating entrepreneurship, and enabling access to fair-trade markets. At the same time, they help preserve traditional craftsmanship and promote cross-cultural exchange.

This paper examines the role of social economy projects that leverage crafts-based skills to integrate migrants, offering a more inclusive and sustainable pathway for their economic and social inclusion. This also constitutes the uniqueness of the presented content, which has so far been an unpopular topic of scientific research. The originality of this paper lies in its focus on the underexplored intersection between migration, social economy, and crafts-based initiatives. While the broader topics of migrant integration and social inclusion have been widely addressed, the specific role of artisanal skills—such as handicrafts, textiles, ceramics, and woodworking—in facilitating these processes has received limited scholarly attention. By highlighting how craft-related projects empower migrants economically and socially, preserve cultural heritage, and foster cross-cultural dialogue, this study offers a novel perspective on sustainable integration practices. The analysis of case studies further contributes original insights into how social economy models can serve as effective, culturally grounded tools for inclusion.

Through examining various case studies, the paper will assess how these initiatives contribute to migrant livelihoods, skills development, and community engagement, while emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural interaction and empowerment. These initiatives showcase the potential of crafts to enhance integration, foster resilience, and support both migrant communities and host societies.

2. Material and Methods

This study draws on two sources of material for content analysis: peer-reviewed scientific articles available online and websites of third sector projects. The selection of relevant literature was planned using the commercial scientific material databases Web of Sciences (WoS) and Scopus. It was planned to use three groups of keywords connected by AND/OR operators: I) *migrant/refugee/asylum seeker*, II) *assimilation program/integration program/inclusion program*, III) *craft skill/craft-based skill*. Both in the WoS and Scopus databases the search within All Fields/Abstract title, Abstract, and Keywords ended with zero results. The selection

was continued using Google Search Engine, by the snowball sampling method, initiated by reviewing entries listed and subsequently exploring their references. As the article progressed, supplementary sources were identified and integrated, enabling a detailed account of four programs targeting migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, where inclusion was promoted through engagement in craft-based skill development. This, in combination with a literature review on craft skills and strategies for migrant inclusion, facilitated the identification of pathways through which the target groups can access income opportunities, intercultural support—both across national backgrounds and generations—and enhanced integration with the host society, contributing to greater social cohesion. The above is visually presented in Figure 1.

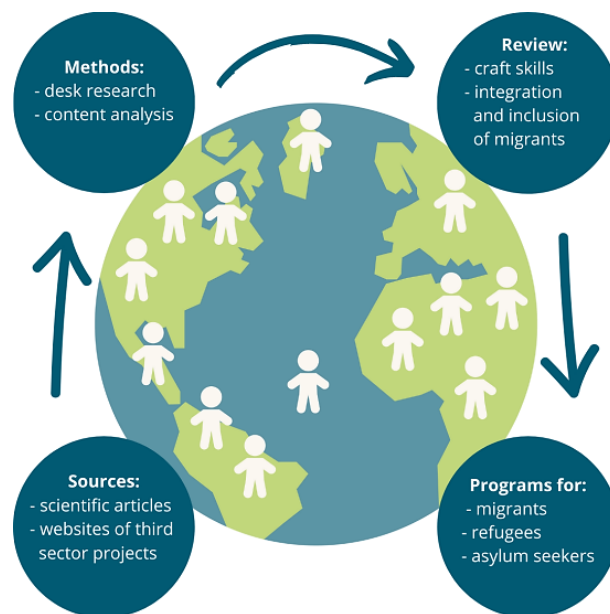


Figure 1. Highlights of the research process.

Source: Own elaboration.

This article, following the approach adopted in the report written by Fasani (2024), employs a broad definition of the term ‘migrant’, encompassing any individual who relocates to another country with the intention of residing there for a specified period of time, thereby excluding tourists and short-term business visitors. The scope encompasses individuals with diverse legal standings, including both permanent and temporary residents with valid permits, asylum applicants, recognized refugees, and those without legal documentation.

In the analysis, these four case studies were chosen due to their comprehensive representation of how craftsmanship can serve as an effective tool for migrant integration. The Table 1 provides an overview of the key criteria for selection, which demonstrates the varied and impactful roles these programs play in both migrant empowerment and community cohesion.

Table 1.*The key criteria of selection*

Criteria	Explanation
Diversity of approaches	The programs represent different models for integrating migrants through crafts—vocational training, entrepreneurship, and cultural exchange. This variety provides a comprehensive perspective on crafts-based integration strategies.
Geographic representation	The programs are based in different European countries, offering insights into how crafts can support migrant integration across diverse socio-political contexts.
Cultural heritage and social integration	These initiatives emphasize the preservation of cultural heritage through crafts while promoting social integration, allowing migrants to engage with and contribute to the host society.
Impact on community cohesion	The selected programs create opportunities for meaningful interaction and collaboration between migrants and host communities, fostering mutual understanding and reducing social tensions.
Proven success and recognition	Each program has demonstrated measurable success in integrating migrants economically and socially, making them exemplary models for scaling and adapting in other contexts.
Variety of craft disciplines	The programs encompass different crafts (embroidery, weaving, knitting, and woodworking), which are culturally significant and adaptable to modern markets, offering diverse pathways for migrant empowerment.

Source: Own elaboration.

3. Results – theoretical background

3.1. Craft skills

Craft is the art of producing objects using tools and manual labor, requiring a high level of skill. It involves the use of specialized techniques and carefully selected materials, and its essence is precision, and attention to detail (Zabulis et al., 2023). Craft involves the development and/or mastery of many skills. This includes both skills that can be described as complex or requiring a lot of time and effort, as well as simpler skills associated with lower qualifications. Maintaining, practicing and sharing craft skills also takes place in low-skilled jobs (Rostain, Clarke, 2025).

Materials devoted to craft skills can be divided into three groups showing: I) skills that influence the development of creative talents, II) skills necessary to perform craft work, and III) skills that are acquired through the practice of craft.

- I) The Crafts Council, in its Craft Skills Progression Framework, lists a group of skills related to early human development, allowing children to discover creative talents and become creators in the future. Skills focused on crafts include: creative idea communication – develop and share ideas; selection and use of materials and media; selection and use of tools and equipment, dexterity skills, risk taking, failure and resilience, using colour, texture and surface design and empathy (Crafts Council, n.d.). Critical thinking skills for analysis and conceptualization are also useful for crafts (Vermillion, Anderson, Rowe, 2014). As noted by M.-L. Rönkkö and J. Lepistö (2016), people with a developed ability for bisociative thinking, thanks to which they combine elements of different ideas and construct a completely new and original idea,

demonstrate a flexible way of thinking and can easily move from one step to another when making decisions during the craft process.

- II) According to V. Yliveronen and P. Seitamaa-Hakkarainen (2016), craft skills consist of motor, technical and cognitive skills (including perception and problem-solving). They are not a series of operations, but a combination of know-how, knowledge and thinking (Yliveronen, Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2016). In this article, the term craft-based skills refers to this group of skills. Table 2 presents a set of skills necessary within the creative industry. In the table below, it can be seen that researchers use different names to describe craft skills. Considering this group of skills, they can be divided into technical, entrepreneurial, and interpersonal craft skills. Thus, the group of technical skills includes planning skills, creating skills, and those resulting from the use of a given production method or the use of a given material, proportion, or movement. In the group of entrepreneurial skills, an important place is occupied by, among others, business communication skills, financial language skills, career self-management, financial management, marketing, negotiations, time management, and the ability to sell work. Some of them can also be classified as soft (interpersonal) skills, such as: communications, negotiations, presentations, and networking.

Table 2.

A set of skills necessary within the creative industry

Skills	Source
- Planning skills - Creating or making skills - The ability to make things by hand/manual skills (understood as the ability to use hands efficiently to perform a specific task or operation)	Müürsepp, Kikkull (2014)
- Interpersonal skills - Research skills - Business communication skills - Financial language skills - Flexibility - Career self-management - Financial management - Marketing - Negotiations - Presentations	Wilson, Stokes (2005)
- Technological skills	Bartosova (2011)
- Awareness of the appropriate legal framework	Haukka (2011)
- Small business skills - Developing professional networks	Bennett, Robertson (2015)
- Practical skills - Entrepreneurial skills - Personal skills (networking)	Luckman (2015), Luckman, Andrew (2020)
- Motivation - Interpersonal skills - Self-confidence - Communication and presentation - Time management - Resilience	England (2022)
- Ability to sell work	England (2022)

Source: Own elaboration based on England (2022); Müürsepp, Kikkull (2014).

III) As J. Vermillion, J. Anderson and D. Rowe (2014) note, the creator, beyond the artifact, develops a set of skills in the process of creation that are used in decision-making and the creation of other products. Crafting can also increase the creator's control over materials, construction and awareness of broader design issues such as the development process, production methods and environmental impact, as well as influence the consideration of alternative perspectives, managing complexity, visualizing ideas and early identification of potential problems (Pinski, Kane, Evans, 2018). Creating a new product, learning a new technique or creating variations of a design that require a complex learning process with experimentation and testing, also influences the development of physical and cognitive skills (Pollanen, 2015).

3.2. Factors related to the integration and inclusion of migrants

Migration is a challenge for both migrants and the host community. Concern about the limited resources of the host area causes obstacles related to the acceptance of new members of a community characterized by a different culture by the existing ones. Migrants also associate a change of place of life with a group of concerns related to functioning in a new environment, both for themselves and their closest relatives. These may concern residence rights, difficulties in finding a job, language barriers, culture shock, social isolation, unequal opportunities and possibilities for development, etc. Working out a solution that reduces or eliminates the concerns of both parties can promote the integration considered in four dimensions - structural, cultural, social and political. Structural integration is understood as the attainment of parity with the majority population in terms of economic resources and occupational status, primarily assessed through an individual's position in the labor market and household income levels. Cultural integration refers to the alignment of attitudes, values, and the adoption of a common language. Social integration denotes equal and reciprocal interaction between members of minority and majority groups. Political integration pertains to the extent of inclusion and participation in the public and civic life of the host society (Heath, Schneider, 2021).

Skills and qualifications of migrants are one of the indicators of their integration into the labor market. They enable migrants to find employment. According to data published in the report *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2023* (OECD/European Commission, 2023), more than one third of immigrants in the EU are poorly educated, but the number of people with higher education is increasing within this group. Formal adult education plays a critical role in reducing educational disparities between immigrants and native-born populations in host countries. Participation in language courses is also positively associated with a higher likelihood of attaining advanced language proficiency, particularly among migrants who arrived with, at most, intermediate language skills (OECD/European Commission, 2023). Language proficiency in the host country is a key determinant of migrants' successful integration into the labor market, with strong associations observed between language skills, employment prospects, and income levels. Participation in language training not only enhances

employability and wage potential but also has a positive spillover effect on the educational performance of migrants' children. Educational credentials obtained within the host country are generally more effective in facilitating labor market entry and progression than those acquired abroad. This is primarily due to their alignment with local language and institutional standards, and the reduced friction in terms of recognition and employer acceptance. Supporting human capital development after migration—through formal education, training, and recognition of prior learning—can significantly improve the average educational attainment among migrants, thereby boosting both their labor market integration and long-term upward mobility. The recognition of foreign qualifications is particularly crucial, as it directly influences access to employment that matches migrants' skills and prevents the inefficient use of talent (Fasani, 2024). Within the European Union, migrants constitute approximately one-third of the workforce engaged in elementary occupations characterized by routine, low-skilled tasks and, frequently, physical labor. It is noteworthy that there is a gradual up skilling trend observable among migrant workers in these roles. However, many immigrants face systemic challenges in the recognition of their foreign qualifications and in securing employment that aligns with their skill levels. As a result, over qualification is prevalent, which not only diminishes the marginal returns to education but can also contribute to reduced motivation and job dissatisfaction among this group (OECD/European Commission, 2023).

L.A. Oucho and D.A. Williams (n.d.) include the following determinants that reduce negative perceptions of migrants and the challenges that accompany them: determination to maintain peace (manifested through various means of communication), mutual learning to understand cultural norms and values, and developing safe migration practices at the national, regional, and global levels. Zhang et al. (2023) emphasize that community participation is a way to promote the social integration of migrants. It helps migrants cope with, among others, inequalities and marginalization, acts as a mediator in solving community problems and easing tensions between migrants and residents in developed countries, and also helps to cope with intercultural/ethnic challenges. Several community-based activities have been identified as having a particularly positive impact on the integration process. Group meetings, for instance, facilitate the exchange of information, provide migrants with a platform for self-expression within an egalitarian setting, foster interpersonal connections, and offer emotional support—all of which contribute to a strengthened sense of belonging. Storytelling serves as another effective tool, enabling individuals to articulate personal experiences, process feelings of passivity or disempowerment, and contribute to the creation of shared memories, collective narratives, and community identity. Additionally, recreational activities—such as dance, sports, and travel—promote intercultural understanding and mutual appreciation. Researchers have further emphasized that the value of collective action within communities lies in its potential to transform initial social acquaintance into enduring partnerships rooted in mutual support (Zhang et al., 2023).

F. Fasani (2024) also notes that social partners and other private organizations play an important role in the assimilation process, enabling understanding of the complexity of migration and developing effective policies, as well as improving working rights and conditions, providing services, training and employment assistance. The researcher includes among the mentioned partners, trade unions and employers' organizations, institutions of the European Union and civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations (Fasani, 2024).

Coley et al. (2019) identified three groups of determinants that affect migrant integration (Table 3). Among the actions that work well in integration, effective integration projects that are tailored to the needs of migrants and involve long-term investment are listed. According to the researchers, participation in integration projects has a positive impact on migrants' self-esteem. These programs are most effective when they are tailored to the target group, especially taking into account factors such as: the presence or absence of family networks or existing contacts, mental and physical health, the ability to speak a foreign language, previous qualifications and professional experience. Effective integration necessitates sustained, long-term investment. While certain elements can be addressed as immediate priorities, others inherently require a medium- to long-term perspective. Integration projects must be given adequate time to take root, foster trust, and build meaningful connections between migrants and local institutions. Additionally, migrants require sufficient time and support to develop English language proficiency, pursue education, and engage in training opportunities—crucial steps to prevent long-term social and economic marginalization. The category of projects also appears within the second group of determinants, encompassing projects that are adaptable, developed from best practice, co-designed, co-delivered and effectively evaluated. They should be, among others:

- adapted to the destinations of migrants (including rural areas and suburbs),
- engaging migrants in the implementation of the project,
- enabling access to online educational materials (also after the project is completed),
- enabling the possibility of measuring integration results (Coley et al., 2019).

Table 3.

Factors influencing integration of migrants

Factors that work	Factors that may work	Factors that don't work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural orientation. - Language skills. - High-quality social connections. - Partnerships between migrant community organizations and other institutions. - Effective integration projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognizing the needs of different migrant groups. - Developing leaders in migrant communities. - Focusing on the community. - Strategies at the national and local level. - Projects that are adaptable, developed from best practice, co-designed, co-delivered and effectively evaluated. - The presence of family members. - Supporting migrants' physical and psychological health and minimising time spent in detention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A lack of support - Not recognizing integration as a holistic and long-term process

Source: Own elaboration based on: Coley et al. (2019).

4. Results – examples of social economy programs supporting migrants in Europe based on craft-based skills

Across Europe, various social economy projects have been developed to support the economic and social integration of migrants. These initiatives focus on vocational training, entrepreneurship, employment support, and cultural exchange, often using crafts and artisanal skills as a means of empowerment.

4.1. “Refugee Company” (Netherlands) – Entrepreneurship and Craftsmanship for Refugees

Refugee Company is a Dutch non-profit organization that supports the social and economic integration of refugees in the Netherlands. Recognized as a Public Benefit Organisation (ANBI) by the Dutch Tax Administration, it benefits from tax exemptions on donations and contributions, while also allowing donors to receive tax deductions under specific conditions.

The organization believes that employment is the key to successful integration, and it actively works to create work opportunities for refugees through its social enterprises and learn-work programs. By engaging in meaningful employment, refugees can build confidence, gain work experience, develop social connections, and achieve greater independence.

Refugee Company aims to contribute to an inclusive society by:

- Providing employment opportunities—both paid and voluntary—to help refugees take a step toward financial stability.
- Encouraging Dutch society to be more open and welcoming toward people with refugee backgrounds.
- Supporting personal development through language lessons, civic integration, and well-being programs.

The organization offers structured learn-work programs that last between six months and three years. These programs are operated through its social enterprises, such as:

- A Beautiful Mess – A creative space where refugees work in catering, fashion, and textile production.
- Mondmaskerfabriek– A face mask production facility providing employment to refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants start their journey in "safe spaces", where they can gain work experience while also receiving language training, personal development coaching, and civic integration support. Refugee Company has already made a significant impact on refugee integration in the Netherlands, as reflected in its key achievements:

- 291 jobs created for refugees.
- 493 participants engaged in skill-building programs.
- A community of over 5000 people supporting refugee integration.
- 80,734 visitors engaging with the organization’s initiatives and projects.

By combining work, education, and community engagement, Refugee Company helps refugees become independent, active members of Dutch society while also fostering broader social acceptance and inclusion (Home - Refugee Company, n.d.).

4.2. MADE51: a global brand promoting artisan products made by refugees

MADE51 is an initiative launched by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to help forcibly displaced people re-establish their livelihoods by preserving their cultural heritage and integrating into both local and global economies. The program recognizes that while refugees may lose their jobs and homes upon fleeing their countries, they often bring with them valuable artisan skills and traditions that have been passed down through generations. These skills provide an opportunity for refugees to contribute to their host societies and rebuild their livelihoods through the creation and sale of handmade products.

MADE51 functions as a global brand of artisanal home décor and accessories crafted by refugees, with a focus on creating high-quality products while fostering social enterprises that support refugee artisans. The program identifies refugee artisans, helps them form strong artisan groups, and connects them to experienced local social enterprises. These enterprises collaborate with the refugee artisans to create unique product lines that are sold alongside the business's regular offerings. This connection between refugee artisans and local social enterprises facilitates the integration of these products into the global market, ensuring fair trade practices and the financial sustainability of both the artisans and the communities that host them.

MADE51 currently operates in 23 countries and collaborates with a network of 35 social enterprise partners, each of which undergoes a thorough assessment and onboarding process in collaboration with the World Fair Trade Organization. This collaboration ensures that social businesses adhere to fair trade practices, with regular monitoring to maintain the integrity of the program and ensure that refugees are supported in a safe and sustainable manner.

The initiative also provides business development assistance, artisan training, and product development to its partners. These efforts ensure that the artisans have the necessary tools to refine their craft, access markets, and build sustainable businesses. Furthermore, MADE51 markets the products of refugee artisans under its brand, helping to generate demand and connect the products to global retailers and consumers.

The impact of MADE51 is profound not only for the artisans but also for the communities they are a part of. For example, Sidi, a 55-year-old Tuareg blacksmith from Mali, produces various products such as tents, bags, and jewelry. Through MADE51, he learned to combine materials like leather, silver, and horn to create unique jewelry. This opportunity has allowed him to earn money, feed his children, pay for their education, and invest in raw materials to improve his craft. Sidi's story highlights the importance of collaboration and knowledge exchange, which motivates him to continue his work and build a future for his family.

Similarly, Ousseina, a Malian weaver, uses her skills passed down from her grandmother to weave intricate carpets. With the income from her craft, she is able to support her family, buying food, clothes, and even a goat. She values working with other women in the refugee community, exchanging techniques and sharing experiences, which gives her hope for a better future and a potential return to Mali.

With support from the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), MADE51 has expanded its operations, strengthening its presence in Burkina Faso and launching in Niger. This expansion has allowed the program to reach more refugee artisans, offering them learning opportunities, technical support, and access to new markets. The initiative also introduced a new holiday collection in 2023, showcasing products from Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Malaysia, as well as Syrian refugees in Turkey, Armenia, and Lebanon.

MADE51 exemplifies how social enterprises and fair trade models can play a crucial role in refugee economic empowerment. By combining traditional artisan techniques with modern market access, the initiative helps refugees preserve their cultural heritage, regain their livelihoods, and contribute to their host communities. Through its global network, MADE51 not only provides financial support for refugees but also offers them a sense of purpose and dignity by allowing them to showcase their craftsmanship on the world stage (MADE51, n.d.).

4.3. Knit for Peace (UK): community knitting for those in need

Knit for Peace is a community-driven initiative based in the United Kingdom that seeks to provide warmth and support to vulnerable groups, including refugees, by engaging volunteers to knit essential items. The program's core aim is to create a sense of community and compassion while helping those in need. Through its collaborative efforts, Knit for Peace facilitates a range of activities that benefit both the recipients and the volunteers who participate (Table 4).

Table 4.
Key Features of Knit for Peace

Key feature	Description	Impact
Encouraging handmade contributions	Knit for Peace invites people of all ages and skill levels to contribute knitted items, such as blankets, hats, scarves, socks, and sweaters. Volunteers can knit at home or in organized groups.	Fosters a sense of connection with displaced individuals, offering a way for volunteers to help refugees.
Distribution to vulnerable communities	Once knitted items are collected, they are distributed to hospitals, refugee shelters, women's refuges, and other organizations. This supports those in need, especially refugees.	Provides warmth and comfort to vulnerable groups while symbolizing solidarity and support for people facing hardship.
Providing yarn and supplies to low-income individuals	Knit for Peace offers free yarn and supplies to low-income individuals, allowing them to contribute without the burden of purchasing materials.	Empowers low-income individuals, fosters inclusion, and helps participants improve their knitting skills.

Cont. table 4.

Fostering mental well-being and community engagement	Knitting has therapeutic benefits, helping to reduce stress and anxiety. It combats loneliness, especially among older individuals, through social knitting groups.	Promotes mental well-being and builds social connections, creating a positive environment for participants.
Promoting intergenerational connections	The initiative encourages participation across all age groups, where older participants mentor younger volunteers, and vice versa.	Bridges generational divides, promotes mutual understanding, and creates a balanced, harmonious community.

Source: Own study.

As illustrated in the Table 3, Knit for Peace integrates various approaches to support refugees and other vulnerable groups. The initiative not only provides physical support but also nurtures mental well-being, community engagement, and intergenerational connections. By encouraging participation from diverse backgrounds, Knit for Peace creates an inclusive, supportive environment where both volunteers and recipients benefit. This holistic approach plays a key role in fostering social cohesion and strengthening community bonds.

Knit for Peace is a powerful example of how community-driven initiatives can make a tangible impact on both vulnerable communities and the volunteers who support them. By engaging individuals in knitting for those in need, the program not only provides essential items to refugees and other displaced people but also promotes a sense of purpose, mental well-being, and social cohesion. The initiative's holistic approach—focusing on community engagement, intergenerational connections, and inclusion—demonstrates the profound impact that simple acts of kindness can have in improving lives and creating stronger, more connected communities (Knit for Peace, n.d.).

4.4. INTERCRAFT

INTERCRAFT is an initiative implemented under the Erasmus+ KA2 programme – Cooperation Partnerships, the main objective of which is to support the social integration of people with migration experience in the local communities where they currently live. The project promotes building intercultural and professional bridges through the active involvement of young migrants, social workers and local craftsmen. It implements activities that respond to the needs of migrants and third-country nationals who want to develop and use professional skills acquired in their countries of origin. The program was developed in response to three key areas of need identified by migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as the craft sector and social enterprises. It encompasses: I) fostering social inclusion within host communities, enhancing migrants' skill sets to increase their competitiveness, and facilitating their integration into the labor market; II) revitalizing the craft sector by promoting intergenerational knowledge transfer, supporting market sustainability, and introducing innovative approaches to skill transmission; III) equipping participants with interdisciplinary competencies, innovative methodologies, and tools to strengthen relationships between migrants and local communities in host regions.

The program categorizes its beneficiaries into three distinct groups: direct, indirect, and remote. Direct beneficiaries include young migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, as well as local artisans in host communities, small and medium-sized craftsmanship enterprises (SMEs), social workers, and staff from social enterprises engaged in migration-related initiatives. Indirect beneficiaries comprise start-ups working with waste materials, youth civic associations promoting migrant social inclusion, professionals from the manufacturing sector clusters, start-ups specializing in ICT and Key Enabling Technologies (KETs), social enterprises focused on sustainability and the circular economy, young students from Design Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and other social enterprises operating in the migration sector. Remote beneficiaries encompass policymakers from public administration institutions, decision-makers in social inclusion policies, youth associations that foster social integration through sports, and various third-sector organizations involved in social initiatives.

This structured approach ensures that the program's impact extends across multiple levels, fostering collaboration among key stakeholders in migration, sustainability, and social inclusion. The project aims to (Inter Craft, n.d).:

- Develop an innovative training methodology to enhance the creative potential of skills within the craft sector.
- Promote cross-cultural exchange and inclusion by integrating traditional craft knowledge with local professionals.
- Strengthen the competencies of social enterprise practitioners working at the local level in host countries.
- Create an intercultural craft atlas that maps diverse artisanal traditions.
- Analyze social enterprises that incorporate intercultural craft practices, emphasizing sustainable and circular economy principles.
- Implement an innovative joint curriculum that facilitates the development of soft, digital, and green skills.
- Establish a social platform serving as a digital hub for sharing educational resources, disseminating project outcomes, and fostering communication among participants.

Table 5 presents the activities carried out within the project.

Table 5.

Actions and effects planned in the Inter Craft project

Action /Effect	Specification
Field analysis in the partners countries: Italy, Greece, and Slovenia	Italy (Terra di Tutti): social enterprises all over Italy working in the fields of sustainable reuse, craftsmanship, immigration, solidarity economy, ethical fashion, social atelier, carpentry. Greece (Odyssea): social enterprises related to sustainable agriculture and transportation solutions, craftsmanship and handcrafted jewelry Slovenia (Terra Vera): social realities of the food sector, sustainable reuse and textile sector. European level (University of Florence).

Cont. table 5.

INTERCRAFT Syllabus	Essential training materials for implementing pilot actions aimed at testing the Joint Curriculum developed within the project. This document serves as a fundamental resource for educators and facilitators, providing comprehensive guidance on the required content, methodologies, and formats to ensure the effective delivery and assessment of the curriculum.
INTERCRAFT Pilot Action/s	It represents a critical phase in testing the previously designed Joint Curriculum by gathering both qualitative and quantitative data on the experiences of participating target groups, including migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, local artisans, and social workers. Its primary objective is to establish a blended learning environment where the envisioned innovative training methodology can be effectively tested. This initiative plays a key role in validating the Joint Curriculum through structured data collection, ensuring its relevance and adaptability. The overarching goal is to activate an integrated curriculum that facilitates the acquisition of soft, digital, and green skills among key target groups. Additionally, the Pilot Action aims to foster a collaborative learning environment that promotes intercultural dialogue, facilitating meaningful exchanges between individuals and skill sets. To ensure comprehensive monitoring, data will be systematically collected and documented through internal reports, ultimately contributing to the development of a structured training kit. The Pilot Actions encompass a diverse and interactive learning experience, bringing together migrants, social workers, designers, and artisans in a dynamic educational setting. Experts from various disciplines—including pottery, woodworking, textiles, and 3D printing—share their expertise to enhance collaboration and innovation. Beyond hands-on workshops, participants engage in cultural excursions, visiting museums, artisan studios, galleries, and heritage sites both within the region and beyond. Additionally, they explore local businesses, craft workshops, and reuse centers, enriching their understanding of sustainable and traditional practices.
INTERCRAFT Joint Curriculum	It facilitates the development of soft, digital, and green skills across three distinct target groups: young migrants, local artisans, and social workers. It is composed by 8 different module: 1. Crafting Connections for Inclusive Collaboration and Empathy, 2. Cultural Exchange and Intercultural Competence, 3. Interpersonal and Soft Skills, 4. Creativity and Design Thinking, 5. Craftsmanship and Traditional Knowledge, 6. Sustainable design and eco-social responsibility, 7. Digital Literacy, 8. Business and Entrepreneurship.
INTERCRAFT Atlas Map	Mapping of intercultural craft experiences.
INTERCRAFT Digital Tool	A project outcome designed as a digital social platform for sharing provided and generated materials, while also serving as a tool for disseminating information, communicating project activities, and showcasing achieved results.

Source: Own elaboration based on Newsletters nos. 1-13. (Inter Craft, n.d).

The Table 6 highlights how different social economy programs support refugees and migrants by leveraging their skills and providing economic opportunities. Refugee Company focuses on vocational training and entrepreneurship, helping refugees integrate into the Dutch labor market. MADE51, a global initiative by UNHCR, connects refugee artisans with international markets, ensuring fair trade and sustainable incomes. Knit for Peace, based in the UK, mobilizes volunteer knitters to create warm clothing for those in need while fostering social inclusion. Participation in the presented programmes can bring migrants a number of benefits, such as the development of competences, integration into the labour market, the opportunity to start a business, access to international markets, cultivating traditions, a stable source of income, material support for refugees, social integration and a positive therapeutic impact. Each initiative not only provides financial support but also promotes cultural preservation, skill development, and community engagement, helping displaced individuals regain independence and dignity.

Table 6.*Social economy programs and their benefits for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers*

Program	Location	Main activities	Support areas	Benefits for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers
Refugee Company (Netherlands)	Netherlands	Vocational training, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship support	Craftsmanship, gastronomy, fashion, graphic design	Skill development, job market integration, opportunity to start a business
MADE51 (UNHCR)	23 countries	Supporting artisans, international trade, collaboration with local enterprises	Handicrafts (jewelry, weaving, handmade décor)	Access to global markets, preservation of traditions, stable income
Knit for Peace (UK)	United Kingdom	Organizing volunteers to knit for those in need	Knitting, crocheting	Material support for refugees, social inclusion, therapeutic benefits for participants
INTERCRAFTS (transnational program)	3 countries + European level	Developing an innovative training methodology to enhance creativity in the craft sector while promoting cross-cultural exchange by integrating traditional artisanal knowledge with local professionals. Strengthening the competencies of social enterprise practitioners supporting migrants and maps diverse craft traditions through an intercultural craft atlas. Analyzing social enterprises that incorporate sustainable and intercultural practices, implements a joint curriculum emphasizing soft, digital, and green skills, and establishes a digital platform for resource sharing, networking, and project dissemination.	Supporting the social inclusion by fostering their integration into host communities. Providing interdisciplinary training and mentoring to enhance skills and improve employability in the labor market. Revitalizing the craft sector by promoting knowledge transfer and sustainability while encouraging eco-friendly and resource-efficient practices. Strengthening networks between migrants, local professionals, and policymakers further enhances community engagement and policy influence.	Enhancing skills by providing training in soft, digital, and green competencies, increasing employment opportunities through professional development. Supporting entrepreneurship by enabling migrants to apply and expand their artisanal skills in a sustainable business context. Fostering cultural exchange and inclusion, facilitates access to resources and networking via a digital platform, and promotes personal and professional growth by boosting confidence, adaptability, and social integration.

Source: Own study.

Each of these programs combines social action with economic support, helping refugees rebuild their lives and create new income opportunities. Furthermore, the Table 5 highlights the diverse strategies employed across various programs to integrate migrants into local communities through crafts-based social economy projects. These initiatives not only provide vocational training and employment opportunities but also foster social cohesion by encouraging cultural exchange and collaboration.

For instance, Refugee Company provides skill development programs in areas such as tailoring, woodworking, and graphic design while enhancing refugees' employability through business training and mentorship. MADE51 focuses on training refugee artisans in traditional crafts such as jewelry-making, weaving, and handcrafts, helping them market their products through social enterprise partnerships and global fair trade networks. Meanwhile, Knit for Peace engages volunteers and refugees in knitting and crocheting initiatives, fostering a sense of community and social integration through collective crafting.

Entrepreneurship is also a key focus in these programs. Refugee Company supports refugees in starting their own businesses or joining cooperatives, while MADE51 helps refugee artisans access global markets by collaborating with local social enterprises. Knit for Peace encourages both refugees and volunteers to contribute knitted goods to those in need, creating opportunities for economic participation through donations and sales.

Community engagement projects in Refugee Company, MADE51, and Knit for Peace provide spaces for cultural exchange, collaboration, and social cohesion. These initiatives bring refugees and local communities together through shared craft activities and intercultural workshops, promoting social integration.

Finally, policy measures and institutional support play a significant role in these initiatives. Refugee Company partners with local institutions to provide resources and guidance for refugees to integrate into the workforce. MADE51 works with governments and businesses to ensure refugees have access to fair trade markets and necessary funding. Knit for Peace supports refugee integration through policy advocacy, ensuring refugees receive the aid and opportunities they need.

By comparing these diverse approaches, the study underscores the effectiveness of crafts-based projects in facilitating migrant inclusion and highlights the importance of a multi-faceted approach that combines vocational training, entrepreneurship, community engagement, and institutional backing.

The Table 7 focuses on how Refugee Company, MADE51, Knit for Peace, and INTERCRAFT utilize different approaches to support migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from training and skill-building to promoting social integration and securing institutional support. Four key areas of activity are being implemented as part of the initiatives: development of professional competences and potential of participants, support for entrepreneurship and professional activation, building social involvement and social integration, as well as support at the political and institutional level.

Table 7.*Social economy projects supporting migrant integration through crafts*

Method	Description	Example project & locations
Vocational training & skill development	Training programs in textiles, knitting, craftsmanship, and business development. Providing refugees with the skills to enhance their employability and create products for market.	Refugee Company – Vocational training in areas like tailoring, woodworking, and graphic design for refugees in the Netherlands. MADE51 – Artisanal skill development for refugees in areas like jewelry-making, weaving, and handcrafts. Knit for Peace – Volunteer knitting initiatives for refugees to improve skills in knitting and crochet. INTERCRAFT – Development of an innovative training methodology to enhance creative skills in the craft sector. Implementation of a joint curriculum focusing on soft, digital, and green skills. Equipping participants with interdisciplinary competencies, methodologies, and tools. Promoting intergenerational knowledge transfer within the craft sector.
Entrepreneurship & employment support	Supporting refugee entrepreneurs through cooperatives, microfinance, and market access. Helping refugees turn their crafts into income-generating businesses.	Refugee Company – Encouraging refugees to start their own businesses or join cooperatives, such as catering and fashion. MADE51 – Connecting refugee artisans with global markets through social enterprise partners, ensuring fair trade and sustainability. Knit for Peace – Creating opportunities for refugees to sell their knitted goods or donate to those in need, fostering community involvement. INTERCRAFT – Supporting market sustainability by revitalizing the craft sector. Enhancing migrants' skill sets to improve their competitiveness in the labor market. Facilitating the integration of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers into employment opportunities. Analyzing social enterprises that integrate intercultural craft practices and sustainability principles.
Community engagement & social integration	Promoting social cohesion through collaborative work, shared experiences, and cultural exchange. Engaging local communities and refugees through shared craft projects.	Refugee Company – Providing a platform for refugee artisans to collaborate with local Dutch professionals and entrepreneurs. MADE51 – Encouraging collaboration among refugee artisans from different backgrounds, fostering a sense of community and intercultural exchange. Knit for Peace – Connecting volunteers with refugees to create garments for those in need, promoting social integration through knitting. INTERCRAFT – Promoting cross-cultural exchange and inclusion through collaboration between migrants, artisans, and social workers. Strengthening relationships between migrants and local communities in host regions. Establishing a digital social platform to foster networking, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange. Supporting youth civic associations and social enterprises working on migrant social inclusion.
Policy & institutional support	Advocacy for refugee rights, legal recognition, and support from governments and NGOs to promote refugee-led businesses and enterprises.	Refugee Company – Supporting refugee entrepreneurs with resources and guidance for integration into the local economy in the Netherlands. MADE51 – Collaborating with governments and local businesses to provide artisans with access to fair trade markets and funding. Knit for Peace – Supporting refugee integration through donations and policy advocacy to ensure that refugees receive aid and opportunity. INTERCRAFT – Engaging policymakers, public administration institutions, and decision-makers in social inclusion policies. Encouraging youth associations and third-sector organizations to foster social integration through sports and other initiatives. Structuring the program to influence migration, sustainability, and social inclusion policies at various levels.

Source: Own study.

5. Discussion

Although the topic of crafts supporting migrant integration is rarely discussed in scientific research, the literature suggests that practicing crafts can positively affect individual well-being. Factors such as materials, artifacts, a sense of achievement, opportunities for personal development, improvement of physical and cognitive skills, control over the body and emotions, as well as social and cultural aspects of crafts contribute to improving the quality of life. Crafts are seen as a recreational activity that enhances a sense of self-control and influences life satisfaction, even in situations where career prospects, life options or social networks are limited. Finely crafted crafts reflect the aesthetic intentions of the creator and the ability to evaluate and appreciate one's own achievements (Pollanen, 2015). The above may have a positive impact on the psycho-physical condition of migrants and thus also contribute to integration considered in all four dimensions - structural, cultural, social and political.

Crafts, like art, are also a dynamically developing sector of the economy, which creates numerous employment opportunities and thus facilitates the assimilation of migrants. Craftsmanship is currently undergoing a dynamic revival, increasingly recognized as an emerging industrial sector that offers significant benefits within educational, cultural, and economic policy frameworks (Jakob, Thomas, 2017). The process of revival of this field began in the second half of the 20th century, as a response to the growing popularity of industrial design and the mass production of consumer goods (Ebsco, 2022). Craft enterprises are mostly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The analysis of the EU Crafts and SMEs Barometer highlights the economic development of SMEs in all sectors and business categories (SMEunited, 2024), which can be an incentive for migrants to take up employment in professions based on crafts-skills and contribute to their structural integration. Craftsmanship is currently going beyond its traditional dimension, combining heritage with modernity and innovation. Thus, meeting the needs of modern consumers interested in authenticity, sustainability and personalized experiences in the luxury market (Fiftiers, n.d.). The increasing demand for craft products and services is described as the main driving force of the market. Its development is also supported by the emergence of digital marketing platforms and e-commerce, as well as the valuation of handicrafts as a carrier of tradition and cultural meaning that evokes emotional bonds (Blue Weave Consulting, 2024). The Business Research Company (2025) publishes the results of analyses emphasizing that in 2025 the arts and crafts market will record an 8.1% increase (from \$44.71 billion in 2024 to \$48.33 billion in 2025). On the other hand, forecasts indicate that in 2029 this market will reach an estimated size of \$65.18 billion (The Business Research Company, 2025).

The methods of integration and inclusion of migrants mentioned in sections 3.2 and 3.3 of this article are certainly not the only ones. Another possibility of supporting the community by using craft-based skills, that were not addressed in the research part, are organizations

established by representatives of the host community or migrants themselves and aimed at various groups in need of support – including people affected by natural disasters, women, representatives of national minorities, people from rural areas, people with disabilities and their relatives (Table 8). For example, in China, more than 1/10 of such enterprises are established by people of non-Chinese origin – broadly understood group of migrants. Engaging in socially necessary initiatives influences the positive perception of the host country by its population, builds bonds, promotes meetings and mutual acceptance.

Table 8.

Examples of craft-related organizations outside Europe within the social economy sector

Organization	Characteristic	Source
Tibetan-Qiang Embroidery Center	The center, founded in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, in the aftermath of the Great Wenchuan Earthquake, supports women from the Qiang ethnic minority by providing employment opportunities through training programs, workshops, and the production of items that incorporate traditional Qiang embroidery	Johnson, Shiling (2016)
Jian'ai Crafts Limited Liability Company	A social enterprise committed to supporting individuals with haemophilia, their families, and people with disabilities. Through the creation of paper carvings and sculptures, the design of knitting patterns, and the production of decorative items for celebrations and weddings, the enterprise offers meaningful employment opportunities while fostering self-confidence and empowerment.	Shanghai University of Finance & Economics Social Enterprise Research Center, Peking University Center for Civil Society Studies(2013)
Shanghai Social Innovation Park	A park offering professional training in fields such as graphic design, fine arts, and handicrafts, while also creating employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.	Shanghai University of Finance & Economics Social Enterprise Research Center, Peking University Center for Civil Society Studies (2013)
Atlas design	A company that empowers women weavers from the Dong ethnic minority to share their traditional knowledge, unlock their economic potential, and highlight the cultural and economic value of women's craftsmanship	Sowley (2017)
Dancing Yak	This company delivers vocational training in sewing and manual production techniques, aiming to support and economically empower disadvantaged communities such as single mothers, persons with disabilities, and students.	Social Enterprise in Sichuan (2017)

Source: Own elaboration based on: Mazur-Włodarczyk (2021).

In addition to pursuing value creation and profit generation, these enterprises focus on skill development, promoting traditional crafts, and supporting individuals in disadvantaged life situations by offering employment opportunities and facilitating market access. Some of these businesses are founded by the craftsmen themselves (examples are shown in Table 9).

Table 9.*Examples of pro-social activities carried out within craft enterprises outside Europe*

Craftsman	Characteristic	Source
Li Dehua	This company provides employment to 130 people with disabilities, focusing on the traditional art of pyrography — the intricate decoration of wood, leather, and similar materials using a heated stylus to create burn patterns.	<i>Disabled craftsman helps locals live a better life with gourd pyrography</i> (n.d.)
Niu Chengguo	This cooperative brings together 300 members and provides employment to 200 people with disabilities, with the aim of improving their quality of life and preserving artisanal traditions.	<i>Beijing Gourd Artist Helps World Understand Beauty of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage</i> (2021)
Osung Dorje	A traditional bow maker who preserves cultural heritage by training and employing craftsmen with disabilities, while supporting individuals facing challenging life circumstances.	Zhang (2014)
Wang Jintang	A craftsman who inspired local communities to acquire artisanal skills and establish workshops focused on producing violins and other stringed instruments. This initiative has significantly boosted the income of more than a hundred families, generated employment opportunities, and offered training programs for people with disabilities.	Shan & Lu (2020)
Pan Xiaohong	A craft workshop specializing in car decorations inspired by traditional Uyghur embroidery, providing employment for 58 individuals, including 22 people with disabilities.	Zhao (2020)
Dawa Dakpa	A boiler maker managing a crafts business and offers training workshops for people with disabilities and unemployed individuals from the surrounding area.	Yao (2016)

Source: Own elaboration based on: Mazur-Włodarczyk (2021).

To effectively support crafts-based social economy projects for migrant integration, governments and institutions can implement several key actions. First, they can provide financial support in the form of grants, loans, or tax incentives for social enterprises employing migrants. Second, encouraging public-private partnerships can help scale these projects and maximize their impact. Integrating traditional crafts into vocational training programs could improve employment opportunities for migrants. Additionally, governments can fund cultural programs such as festivals, exhibitions, or craft fairs that promote cross-cultural dialogue and showcase migrant craftsmanship. It is also important to create legal policies supporting the growth of social enterprises that employ migrants, as well as provide social support programs, such as healthcare and housing, to enable migrants to fully participate in the labor market. Public awareness campaigns that highlight the contributions of migrants in craftsmanship can improve their social perception, and international collaboration can facilitate knowledge exchange and expand the reach of these initiatives. These actions could help integrate migrants, promote cultural heritage, and support economic growth through social crafts-based projects (OECD, 2023).

The Table 10 provides a comprehensive snapshot of key refugee integration programs across Europe, showcasing the wide variety of approaches and areas of focus that aim to support the social, economic, and cultural integration of refugees. These programs highlight the multifaceted nature of refugee inclusion efforts, which span from providing practical housing solutions to creating coordination hubs and establishing intercultural councils. Each of these

programs targets different aspects of the integration process, recognizing that successful inclusion is not a one-size-fits-all approach, but rather a combination of strategies that address the diverse needs of refugees (*Promoting Refugee Integration and Inclusion: Empowering Municipalities Across Europe Integration Policy Brief August 2024*, 2024).

One critical area of focus is the provision of housing, which remains a key challenge in many host countries. Programs aimed at improving access to secure, affordable housing play a crucial role in helping refugees settle into their new communities and begin rebuilding their lives. Municipalities and local governments often collaborate with international organizations like UNHCR and NGOs to provide housing solutions, whether through direct assistance or facilitating access to the housing market. By ensuring that refugees have access to stable accommodation, these programs contribute to a sense of security and belonging, which is essential for their overall well-being (*Promoting Refugee Integration and Inclusion: Empowering Municipalities Across Europe Integration Policy Brief August 2024*, 2024).

Coordination hubs, such as those seen in various European cities, are another essential element of successful integration programs. These hubs bring together multiple stakeholders, including municipal authorities, international organizations, civil society, and refugee communities, to ensure that services are delivered in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. By offering centralized locations where refugees can access information and services, such as legal assistance, healthcare, and education, these hubs reduce barriers to access and improve the efficiency of support systems. They also foster a more seamless integration experience by providing clear referral pathways and promoting cooperation across different sectors.

Intercultural councils are another important feature of refugee integration efforts, as they help facilitate dialogue between refugee and host communities. These councils provide a platform for both groups to share experiences, address challenges, and collaborate on building mutual understanding and respect. Through intercultural dialogue, these councils promote social cohesion, helping to break down cultural barriers and dispel misconceptions. By actively engaging with both refugees and local residents, these councils create an inclusive environment that fosters a sense of community and shared identity.

The success of these integration programs underscores the importance of multi-level governance, where municipalities, international organizations, and civil society work together to address the complex needs of refugees. Effective refugee inclusion requires not only the commitment of local governments but also the support and expertise of national and international actors. Collaboration between these stakeholders ensures that resources are used efficiently, and that integration efforts are sustainable and impactful. Moreover, the involvement of civil society organizations adds a layer of expertise and a community-based perspective, ensuring that programs are responsive to the actual needs of refugees.

Ultimately, the diverse approaches highlighted in the Table 10 demonstrate that refugee integration is a dynamic and ongoing process. By addressing various dimensions of integration—ranging from housing and legal support to cultural exchange and community

engagement—these programs contribute to the creation of inclusive societies where refugees can thrive. The continued success of these initiatives depends on the ongoing collaboration of all stakeholders involved, as well as the adaptability of these programs to respond to emerging challenges in the ever-evolving landscape of migration.

Table 10.

The refugee integration programs across Europe

Country	Municipalities	Area	Objective
Greece	Athens	Holistic integration support/ Enhancing municipal-level integration capacity/ Effective inclusion of refugees/ Effective multistakeholder coordination	The Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant & Refugee Issues program supports efficient collaboration between local authorities and various stakeholders to ensure the successful integration of refugees and migrants while fostering social cohesion. Founded in 2017, ACCMR became Greece's first municipal-led coordination hub, facilitating collaboration between the City of Athens, the central government, civil society, and international organizations. Together with the Migrants' Integration Centre, it forms the foundation of Athens' efforts to integrate migrants and refugees. By May 2024, ACCMR had brought together over 190 members on its digital platform, which maps more than 300 services and activities promoting inclusion throughout Athens. The center's four working committees hold monthly meetings focused on Education, Livelihoods, Gender, and Intercultural activities. ACCMR provides essential tools and resources to its staff, ensuring coordinated operations across the city with clear referral systems and effective multilevel cooperation to improve integration support. It has also played a crucial role in coordinating emergency responses, including during the COVID-19 pandemic and the influx of refugees from Ukraine
Poland	Multiple, in the Mazowieckie, Świętokrzyskie, Podkarpackie, Małopolskie, Silesia, Lubelskie voivodeships (provinces)	Affordable Housing Solutions	In collaboration with Habitat for Humanity, UNHCR assists national and local governments in enhancing their ability to provide secure, affordable, and dignified housing solutions for vulnerable groups in Poland. This partnership aims to enable Poland to tackle housing challenges effectively and support the integration of refugees through sustainable housing options.
Bulgaria	Nationwide	Housing	Aiming to improve housing availability, the national project maps municipal housing stock and works to enhance housing conditions for refugees through collaborations with local municipalities. By the end of 2022, the Shelter for Humanity Foundation/Habitat Bulgaria, in partnership with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDP), carried out a study on the management of municipal housing in Bulgaria. The research gathered data from all 265 municipalities across the country, including the district administrations of Sofia. The findings showed that nearly 40% of Bulgaria's housing stock remains vacant, with municipalities owning just 0.8% of the total housing units.

Cont. table 10.

Italy	Bari, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Rome, Turin, Bologna, Genoa, Ravenna	Holistic Integration Support	<p>The Integration Charter is an agreement signed by cities dedicated to the social, cultural, and economic integration of asylum seekers and refugees. Initially signed by six major Italian cities—Bari, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Rome, and Turin—it was later joined by the municipalities of Bologna, Genoa, and Ravenna. Spazio Comune or "integration hubs," were established with the purpose of uniting key local institutions and service providers to assist refugees in accessing information and services, supporting their integration into Italian society.</p> <p>Spazio Comune centers are managed by municipalities with support from UNHCR. Cities that have signed the Integration Charter (IC) have been encouraged to participate in the program, and centers are now operational in Bari, Naples, Rome, Turin, and Milan. These centers provide a range of services, including legal assistance, municipal registration, employment support, healthcare, and housing information. They also host UNHCR initiatives such as Community Matching, Partecipazione Azione, Welcome (<i>Welcome. Working for refugee integration</i> <i>The Global Compact on Refugees</i> UNHCR, n.d.), and Community Outreach Volunteers, and help connect individuals to additional services and projects. Under this model, municipalities establish a governance system to streamline intake processes, case management, and referrals, ensuring comprehensive support tailored to the needs of each individual or family.</p>
Cyprus	Limassol	Coordination, Access to funding, Developing holistic integration support	<p>Cyprus is creating intercultural councils, regional networks, and sustainable funding mechanisms to promote long-term refugee integration and social inclusion.</p> <p>The Developing Intercultural Integration Policies project aimed to create an inclusive society by actively involving local stakeholders. Notable successes included the establishment of intercultural councils and the introduction of initiatives such as language courses and vocational training for immigrants. The project benefited from the involvement of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM) and the Union of Cyprus Communities (UCC), whose expertise helped address operational and legal challenges. Additionally, Regional Intercultural Networks in each district mapped the civil society landscape and developed actionable two-year plans to improve community outreach. Although the project has concluded, a new initiative, the 2023 Enhancing Structures and Policies for Intercultural Integration in Cyprus (<i>Intercultural integration in Cyprus - Intercultural Cities Programme</i>, n.d.), is currently in progress. This initiative builds on previous efforts, continuing with strategies such as regular reviews, sustainable funding mechanisms, and ongoing evaluation to ensure the long-term effectiveness of intercultural integration efforts.</p>

Cont. table 10.

Moldova	Multiple municipalities	Holistic integration support/ Enhancing municipal-level integration capacity/ Effective inclusion of refugees/host communities in planning and service delivery	The Cities of Solidarity initiative aims to foster refugee integration in Moldova by supporting local municipalities in creating integration action plans and setting up community service centers.
Lithuania	Akmene	Holistic integration support, Effective monitoring of integration outcomes.	Akmene District is focused on community outreach, refugee integration support, and monitoring, involving local authorities and Nordic-Baltic integration actors to improve refugee outcomes. Beginning with ad hoc activities in 2014 to support Ukrainians arriving from Crimea, the municipality has established a more structured approach by appointing a dedicated team and an integration coordinator. This effort was further strengthened through the leadership of mayors and vice-mayors involved in Nordic-Baltic cooperation, who took study trips to Finland and Sweden to enhance their skills and gain insights into the integration tools and methods used in the Nordic countries. The dedicated team spans various sectors, including social services, healthcare, education, welfare, IT, communication, employment agencies, business associations, and local NGOs. Additionally, a targeted outreach strategy was developed, involving six community leaders (<i>seniūnijos</i>) throughout the municipality. This initiative has been instrumental in engaging Ukrainian families and setting up individual monitoring to track integration progress and tailor responses. The success of these efforts has been highlighted in local media, showcasing Ukrainians making Akmene their home. (<i>Akmene</i> , n.d.)
Finland	Jakobstad, Larsmo, Kronoby, Nykarleby, Pedersöre	Long-term intermunicipal collaboration on integration	In the Jakobstad region, the goal is to enhance regional cooperation among five municipalities to provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to refugee reception and long-term integration. The collaboration among the five municipalities started in 2010, aiming to create a more integrated and holistic approach to refugee reception and integration through a regional perspective. The refugee reception and integration services are guided by (i) a shared cooperation agreement that outlines the regional framework for integration efforts, and (ii) the Integration program for 2022-2025, which has been endorsed by each municipal council. These integration efforts are further supported by projects addressing various issues, including the inclusion of refugees in the labor market (<i>Integration Works - Jakobstad</i> , n.d.)

Cont. table 10.

Slovakia	Bratislava, Zilina	Holistic Integration Support	<p>Slovakia is working to establish integration service hubs in cities like Bratislava and Zilina to provide refugee services and ensure coordinated local responses.</p> <p>In Slovakia, municipalities have played a crucial role in responding to refugees arriving from Ukraine, as well as those in mixed or onward movements. Bratislava, in particular, has taken a proactive approach by coordinating the Assistance Centre Bottova - Blue Dot Hub - (<i>Blue Dots - UNHCR Slovakia</i>, n.d.), which brings together various stakeholders, including government authorities such as the Border and Alien Police (responsible for issuing TP documentation) and the Migration Office (Ministry of Interior), as well as international organizations like UNHCR offering registration and protection counseling. National NGOs also contribute by providing essential support in areas like accommodation, healthcare, child care, psychosocial assistance, legal counseling, community activities, and educational services. To address the growing need for coordination and support, Bratislava established a new integration department within its municipal government. Other municipalities in Slovakia have also appointed dedicated staff, including Ukrainians, to manage refugee response at the local level. UNHCR's involvement with Slovak municipalities has been vital in ensuring refugees' access to social services and other support. Additionally, the city of Zilina in northern Slovakia operates an integration and community center ("Lighthouse") that serves as a hub for community-based protection and inclusion activities.</p>
Romania	Brasov	Holistic Integration Support	<p>The goal is to support the economic inclusion, community engagement, and social cohesion of refugees through a community-led center in Brasov, offering services like counseling and educational activities.</p> <p>AMDDDB CATTIA/KATYA (Metropolitan Agency for Durable Development Brasov) is a non-governmental organization set up as an intercommunity development agency, established by cities, towns, and villages within the Brasov metropolitan area. During the emergency response phase (April 2022 - August 2023), it operated as a Blue Dot, providing a wide range of services, including basic needs support, information, counseling (such as assistance with obtaining temporary permits and accessing healthcare), and child-friendly spaces. Currently, it functions as a community center focused on offering counseling, livelihood and economic inclusion services, educational and child protection activities, as well as promoting social cohesion.</p>

Cont. table 10.

Baltic and Nordic Countries	Multiple municipalities	Multilevel coordination to enhance the integration potential of municipalities	<p>The For-In project is based on extensive regional and national partnerships, designed to leverage existing initiatives in the Baltic countries and the vast experience of the Nordic countries. Its goal is to enhance the capacity of local authorities, civil society, refugee and immigrant communities, and other stakeholders involved in integration efforts.</p> <p>Over the past decade, the Baltic States have consistently refined their integration policies by creating targeted national programs, action plans, and strengthening the capacities of local authorities. Alongside the For-In project, a Pan-Baltic initiative for integration stakeholders has supported collaboration between local practitioners and national integration actors across the Baltic countries.</p> <p>Further information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Two-year integration project kicks off across the Nordic and Baltic region – UNHCR Northern Europe,- Nordic-Baltic project 2021-2023 FOR-IN,- Pan-Baltic Experience Exchange Seminar in Vilnius,- Best practices in hosting Ukrainian refugees in the Baltic States.
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Source: Own elaboration based on: *Promoting Refugee Integration and Inclusion: Empowering Municipalities Across Europe Integration Policy Brief August 2024* (2024).

Overall, this paper brings a novel contribution to the academic discussion by emphasizing the multifaceted role of crafts in migrant integration—beyond individual well-being and economic self-sufficiency—to include cultural preservation, community building, and structural participation. It fills a gap in the existing literature by framing crafts-based initiatives within the broader context of the social economy and demonstrating their impact through both theoretical analysis and practical case studies.

While the study provides valuable insights into crafts-based social economy projects for migrant integration, the limitations related to sampling bias, geographic scope, and lack of long-term data suggest the need for further research to strengthen the generalizability and depth of the findings. Another limitation of the study is its focus on successes, without addressing potential obstacles such as funding instability, scalability issues, or cultural resistance. This is a topic that could be the basis for the next stage of research.

The use of snowball sampling, while useful for identifying relevant case studies, may introduce bias as it relies on recommendations from a small group of initial participants. This could lead to an overrepresentation of specific types of programs, potentially overlooking others that may also be effective in migrant integration. Although the study examines case studies from four programs, this geographic limitation may not fully capture the diverse ways in which crafts-based social economy projects can address migrant integration in other regions. The challenges and successes identified may not be universally applicable. The study primarily focuses on qualitative analysis, which is invaluable for understanding the dynamics and impacts of these programs. However, without long-term quantitative data, it is difficult to assess the sustained impact of these programs on both migrants and host communities over time. Each program included in the study has unique characteristics and implementation models.

While this diversity provides a broad view, it also means that comparisons across programs can be difficult, especially in terms of scalability and transferability to other contexts or regions.

Future research directions should include comparative studies across different cultural and regional contexts to better understand the universal and culturally specific aspects of crafts-based integration. Longitudinal studies could explore the long-term impact of involvement in such initiatives on the social mobility and identity formation of migrants. Finally, interdisciplinary studies combining migration studies, cultural policy, and social entrepreneurship would deepen the understanding of how crafts intersect with various dimensions of inclusion.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, refugee integration programs across Europe are diverse and multifaceted, addressing a variety of needs ranging from housing and legal support to employment and community engagement. These initiatives aim to ensure that refugees are able to successfully integrate into their new communities, enhancing their social inclusion and well-being. Among these, crafts-based social economy projects, such as MADE51, Knit for Peace, The Refugee Company, and INTERCRAFT, have emerged as innovative and effective pathways for migrant integration. These initiatives provide economic empowerment, promote cultural exchange, and facilitate community-building, enabling migrants to contribute meaningfully to their host societies. MADE51 connects refugee artisans with global markets, providing both a platform for economic independence and a means to preserve cultural heritage. Knit for Peace encourages volunteers to knit handmade garments, fostering social inclusion and intergenerational connections while supporting displaced communities. The Refugee Company focuses on entrepreneurship and craftsmanship, offering refugees opportunities to build sustainable businesses and integrate into the local economy.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate the power of crafts to bridge the gap between migrant and host communities, creating inclusive environments where migrants can develop skills, gain employment, and form social connections. For these models to thrive, ongoing policy support, sufficient funding, and strong partnerships between governments, NGOs, and businesses are essential. With such support, crafts-based projects can continue to foster economic inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and sustainable integration for migrants.

While these crafts-based initiatives have shown considerable promise in facilitating migrant inclusion, there are several limitations to their impact. One major challenge is the scalability of such programs, as they are often dependent on local partnerships and resources, limiting their reach to broader migrant populations. Additionally, the reliance on volunteer participation in initiatives like Knit for Peace may limit the sustainability of these programs without consistent

funding and institutional support. Furthermore, while these projects contribute to economic self-sufficiency, they may not fully address other critical needs of migrants, such as legal aid, housing, or healthcare. Finally, the success of these programs can be influenced by political climates and the willingness of host countries to provide inclusive and supportive environments for migrant communities.

Future research could explore the long-term impact of crafts-based social economy projects on migrant integration, specifically examining how these initiatives affect migrants' social mobility and overall well-being. Studies could also investigate the scalability of these models across different geographic regions and migrant populations to identify the key factors that make them successful in various contexts. Furthermore, research could delve deeper into the intersection of policy support and the sustainability of these initiatives, analyzing the role of government, business, and civil society in sustaining these programs. Finally, comparative studies between crafts-based initiatives and other forms of social economy projects could provide valuable insights into the most effective approaches for integrating migrants into host societies. Another issue worth investigating is craft-based skills, their specificity, transferability across borders - to new places, adaptation of techniques to new materials, and how works created with their help connect different cultures.

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