



NEWLY ARRIVED IN A COMMON HOME

**BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF DIASPORA
STAKEHOLDERS AS COMMUNITY AGENTS
FOR THE INCLUSION OF NEWLY-ARRIVED
MIGRANTS**

Portuguese report (Lisbon)

AIDGLOBAL

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Forewords

NEAR (NEwly ARrived in a common home) is a European project that aims at fostering social orientation of newly arrived migrants during their settlement in the receiving countries. Funded under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), NEAR activates a process of mutual trust, knowledge and cross-cultural transfer between migrants and local communities, building a sense of belonging of “a new common home”.

The project is highly context-specific and offers a unique approach towards integration at local level in four target areas (Lisbon, Nicosia, Perugia, Milan) that cater to different groups of migrant beneficiaries and combines multiple strands of activities: building the capacity of and empowering diaspora stakeholders, facilitating access to services and labour market entry for asylum seekers and international protection holders, strengthening inclusion levels of newly arrived children, and enhancing orientation and opportunities for newly arrived university students.

NEAR is coordinated by Fondazione ISMU (Italy) and is implemented in partnership with Tamat NGO (Italy), CARDET NGO (Cyprus), AIDGLOBAL (Portugal) and the Catholic University of Milan (Italy).

Capacity building and empowerment of diaspora stakeholders (named “Community Agents, CAs”) plays a central role in the NEAR approach. Since the early start of the project, partners mapped diaspora and other migrant stakeholders in the four cities to identify the most suitable neighbourhood. After setting up an outreach campaign, they organised consultation meetings with interested diaspora stakeholders to identify the knowledge gaps and needs and co-design training programmes on relevant public, private and non-profit integration services by also partnering up with key service providers at local level.

This report takes stock of a year-long outreach, training and engagement of diaspora stakeholders. In doing so, it aims to facilitate the transfer of experiences, tools, knowledge and practices for organizations, practitioners and other interested groups to build the capacity of and empower diaspora communities as actors in the integration of newly-arrived migrants at local level.

1. Taking into account diaspora communities in selecting target areas

The process of identifying the area of action started from the research of the places with the largest number of immigrant population and with potential interest in being Community Agents. In addition, the previous knowledge of one of the project members about the territory of Santa Clara Parish, brought more interest and confidence that it could be prone to welcome and orient newcomers.

In addition, it was verified that the territory had a character of vulnerability and visible needs, in which the NEAR project could act through auscultation and training of Community Agents, who would be multipliers of knowledge and welcoming.

The territory of the parish of Santa Clara has a community with a very high immigration rate, with many undocumented people and newly arrived immigrants. The territory brought together and presented an urgent need for integration, the majority PALOP, from São Tomé and Guinea-Bissau. According to Instituto Nacional de Estatística (2021), the Resident Foreign Population in the parish of Santa Clara is 3947 inhabitants (17%)¹.

The first step on identifying the most important locations on the map for Santa Clara Parish was by areas of interest, so we established the main points: Reception Centers, Non-Profit Organizations, Social Services, Health and Wellness, Public and Private Services, Schools, Local Commerce, Culture and Parks, Supermarket and Restaurants. The selection was made to fulfill the main needs upon arrival of an immigrant person.

As to understand the necessities of the territory and its residents we started by presenting AIDGLOBAL and the NEAR Project in the Santa Clara Parish Council, where they stated that the activities were welcomed because due to covid-19, the population was a lot more vulnerable, the social disparities arose and because of the health situation, the community cohesion and inclusion has decreased. Therefore, AIDGLOBAL showed interest in participating in the Migration Group which would take place once a month and where updates on the territory, new projects and how to collaborate with everyone would be taken into account.

A search engine that was the most effective was word-to-mouth, on our presence in the Community Group of Ameixoeira and Galinheiras, which is a group that meets biweekly with most of the associations and interested residents of the Parish of Santa Clara. In this way, we were able to understand which are the main associations actively working on the territory, what they are developing, what new projects are coming and who could collaborate and create synergy in the NEAR Project. This was the most important vehicle for AIDGLOBAL to be included in the territory, in the ongoing activities that we volunteer for, as to know more local people and their necessities.

We soon realized that most of the CAs would be from African countries that have a relevant expression in the territory in terms of community participation.

¹ https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_indicadores&indOcorrCod=0011166&xlang=pt

Strengths:

- Easy identification of the area of operation, due to its history of migrant population and community aid.
- Welcoming of AIDGLOBAL by the Community Group of Ameixoeira and Galinheiras. Many associations have shown willingness to support the project and help with the activities development and dissemination.
- Synergies between local institutions in the territory contacted in identifying potential CAs.

Criticalities:

- The identification of the CAs ended up centring on people from the PALOP countries, because they are the ones with the greatest expression in the territory. Therefore, the group was not very heterogeneous in terms of nationalities. On the one hand this showed a reality of the community.

Definition of “diaspora”

For Cohen (1997, p. 196)², contemporary diasporas "bridge the gap between the individual and society, between the local and the global". In other words, due to the interdependence between countries, on an economic and cultural level, that of the formation of national identity and subjectivity becomes complex. The author calls "traveling cultures" the position in which those who emotionally adopt two lands and cultures find themselves, which makes the diaspora call into question the concept of the nation state, which is, at this juncture, a subjective and plural location. In this sense, to identify the CAs, this concept of diaspora was considered since it is the one that fits with the reality identified in the territory. A large part of the citizens of the region of the Santa Clara Parish are of African origin and maintain in their daily lives cultural habits typical of their countries. Examples of this are food, music and forms of communication.

Working with CAs of African descent was of relevant importance, as it allowed them to express their feelings and perceptions regarding their identity. Starting from the assumption that these people are part of a local-global place meant that the approach in the project was attentive to the wounds, affections, and cultural journeys while respecting their roots. Building an ideal of a peaceful common home, is a process that is done through education and listening in the community.

During the sessions, discussing colonialism, racism, prejudice, and xenophobia was a challenge because it is a delicate subject that deserves attention. It was noticeable the need of some participants to talk about the topic, which had relevance in the context where they are inserted since the Galinheiras territory is very marginalized and these people have great difficulty integrating into society despite the Galinheiras community having a welcoming profile. As a solution, we realized that we should, during the sessions, create an environment in which the participants could feel safe about the themes and could expose them.

² Cohen, R. (1997) Global Diasporas, Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press

2. Identification of needs and final selection

The reasoning used to select the profiles of the focus CAs was both through individuals and organizations. A strong collaboration was established with a local association that provides specific assistance to migrants in terms of regularization, support in housing, health, education and work issues. Many inhabitants already knew this association previously and have been supported by it. In other words, the association created a bond of trust between the project and the CAs.

To gather the needs of the participants, we firstly had to organize a roundtable with immigrant residents in Santa Clara Parish in collaboration with the mentioned association. In this way, we could listen to their stories, understand their struggles, their necessities, which processes worked and which ones didn't, and the local associations and services that supported them throughout their integration into their new community.

To ensure CAs's participation and feedback, we created an interactive and dynamic session plan based on Non Formal Education method, that aimed to make them comfortable talking about their experiences as immigrants in Portugal. We observed that some participants already had numerous characteristics of a CA, and so we asked them to share their experiences in helping newcomers. This representativeness in the group inspired the others, and at that moment, it was possible to stimulate communication and cooperation among them.

We asked the following questions throughout the session: "What are the main difficulties immigrants face when they arrive in the host country"; "What were the main entities that most supported you in integrating in Portugal?"; "What type of support would you have liked to have and did not have?". The participants answered and gave their opinions about the issues in a very spontaneous way, pointing out their main concerns, mainly related to housing, employment, health, regularization process, communication and racism. All their needs were already expected, given the reality of the territory and the primary difficulties in the integration process, especially for immigrants from the Global South.

At the end of the round table we asked who would like to participate in the training and most said yes. Later, we contacted these people and some of them were able to participate and others, due to work and schedule incompatibility could not. Thus, in order to have more people and a more heterogeneous group, we promoted the training in other ways.

The first resource used to have contact with potential CAs was face-to-face dissemination, through the participation of the project team in Community Group meetings and during the visits on the territory, through informal dialogue. The second involved the dissemination and posting of flyers with the training invitation and the information about the contents. It was decided to distribute flyers to the inhabitants in the Galinheiras center, where many people pass throughout the day. Posters were placed in allowed places, such as restaurants, markets, schools, and the local associations that receive newcomers. The third means of communication was through social networks and posting informative posters. We published it on AIDGLOBAL's social networks and shared it on Facebook groups of immigrant communities and other potential interest groups.

We tried to present the project in an objective way to transmit the information clearly. Regarding the publicity material, we created a poster with an image that graphically illustrated two hands together, communicating the idea of unity and courage. The poster's title had the objective of creating a connection between the expression "Be a Community Agent" and the word "participate". We also used the phrase: "If you have a migratory background, and want to collaborate in the inclusion of newly arrived migrants, contact us". We tried to use words and expressions that would be easy for people to understand, considering that some have difficulties with Portuguese.

Besides that, we contacted other groups such as the Community Group of Ameixoeira and Galinheiras and the Ameixoeira Community Center, which were essential for us to get to know their members and beneficiaries and also to get to know the territory and its dynamics in terms of welcoming newcomers. From the Community Group, we met a Guinean citizen who is a well-known Community Agent in the community, and was significant for disseminating the training because he is a person who welcomes newcomers, has a lot of knowledge about the regularization processes and is a focal point of trust and empathy in the community, many times referred as a community leader. During the outreach process, some people contacted us to sign up, this is why we strongly believe that word of mouth dissemination made a big difference in the dissemination of the training in the territory.

The criteria used to identify the final group of Community Agents were the personal history, especially considering the challenging migratory process; the nationalities, assessing the representativeness of the predominant nationalities in the territory, age range, considering that one of the greatest needs identified was related to employment and gender parity.

Strengths:

- We noticed that sometimes an individual could make a lot of difference in a community and that we have to give space to this person because it can be a spokesperson for several needs of the newcomers. It means that despite the importance of associations in communicating and disseminating information, having an eye for individuals has its value and should be used as a good practice.
- The face-to-face approach had a significant impact on outreach, as it was possible to create a closer and more genuine connection with people and explain the purpose of the training. It was an opportunity to insert ourselves more in the community and make ourselves known to them, which helped to create more trust connection.
- Heterogeneous in its particularities, had important elements in common, which helped build a sense of unity and identity and promoted a comfortable, dynamic, and familiar environment for the participants. In this way, it was possible to build a diversified group, in which some had more knowledge than others, which in itself was an essential element for promoting the sharing of experiences and mutual learning. We believe that this strategy met expectations and contributed to the unity and friendship among people.

Criticalities:

- The matching of schedules between the sessions and the people's availability, due to shift work schedules.
- Lack of people involved in associativism. As a possible solution, during the sessions we introduced them to the existing associations in the territory and how they could become part of them, working on the importance of associativism in their integration processes in the community.
- One of the challenges encountered concerning the dissemination channel was to reach those possibly interested in the training through social networks. The target audience of the training, being very specific, was challenging to reach through digital media. There is not, for example, a Facebook group of the territory's residents or a profile of the community itself where information can be shared. For this type of initiative in the Santa Clara territory, we think this means of dissemination did not have as much impact as the others, mainly due to the lack of internet access and the connection to profiles and virtual communities specific to the region. As a solution, we invested in face-to-face dissemination, which worked and created more direct contact with people.

3. Organization of content for the training programme and communication

We organized the content of the training by first identifying the daily needs of the immigration process for people in vulnerable situations. We knew that issues such as housing, health, employment, and regularization were key. However, after the round table discussion, several participatory dynamics took place to give voice to citizens regarding their needs, challenges, expectations, and fears. We listened carefully, recorded, and in meetings planned the modules that were then reviewed by a community citizen who gave us feedback. We also had several meetings with the trainer, who has a law degree and is one of the technicians at CNAIM - National Center for Support to Migrant Integration, located in Ameixoeira. This Center is part of the ACM - High Commissariat for Migrations, a Public Institute. This professional was invited because we believed that she could be an asset due to her knowledge of issues involving the reception and orientation of migrants and her proximity to the community.

The training was divided into three modules: legislation, services, and communication. For each module two sessions were held. In the "Legislation" module, the first session focused on reflection on what it is to be a community agent and where to start. In the second session, the focus was on the Migration Law and there was plenty of room for the CAs to ask questions and clarify doubts. In the "Services" module we covered access to the public services available in the territory as well as knowledge about the documents needed to access each one. The second session was a field visit by bus, in which we went through all the services identified and made dynamics so that the participants could absorb the information and feel more secure to transmit it. The Communication module was focused on the construction of the unconventional map in which sensations, perceptions, and feelings regarding the territory were addressed through communication mechanisms.

Informal language was used during the training sessions and tried to simplify the technical terms especially in the module on regularization processes and legislation. We know that a lot of information can be complex and unfamiliar, so we always had the support of the PowerPoint presentation projected on the wall so that everyone could have clarity about the terms and their definitions and always gave to each participant a resume sheet with the most important information for them to take home and study. As a complement, we always used images alluding to the themes so that they could create a greater connection with the information and bring realism and references.

We sought to use these resources because we believe that one of the main elements of this training was communication and how the information should be transmitted. Therefore, we always sought to clarify the concepts practically, with real examples, with the support of technological and physical resources. On the first day, we distributed to each participant a notebook and pens and made the contents available on paper to make notes directly on it.

Another mechanism chosen that had great relevance during the training was the creation and distribution of T-shirts for the CAs. The T-shirts had "Are you new here? I can help!" written in Portuguese, English, Creole, French, and Arabic. This resource was used so that the CAs could connect with the identity of the project, feel that they were indeed CAs who could support and guide the newcomers, becoming references in the territory and be recognized in the territory by newcomers.

Our outreach was focused on the concept of Community Agent, through empowerment and self-confidence to believe that they could correctly inform newcomers and support them in their process of arrival in Portugal. We also focused on the concept of "inclusion" and the challenges and opportunities linked to it, stimulating the participants to reflect and take action for themselves and those arriving in the territory.

It was essential to create a sense of identity in the group to feel welcome, the union, and the security to act in the community actively and responsibly. For this reason, the idea of "common home" was also worked on to understand the commonalities among the participants and what they could do together to have a more welcoming and empowering experience in this new common home.

Strengths:

- We asked for feedback from an immigrant community citizen regarding the materials used in training to check the language issue and the form of communication. We made some adaptations to make the content clearer and more direct. It is important to have a look from someone in the community to check if the content is understandable and accessible.
- The trainer already knew some of the Community Agents, and by learning a little about their stories and needs, she could more easily support them in their doubts and questions. Moreover, during the training, she brought practical examples of absolute situations experienced by newcomers, contributing to the participants feeling more welcomed and involved in the learning processes.

Criticalities:

- Despite all the effort to use an accessible language, there was always someone with more comprehension difficulties, either in the Portuguese language or in understanding the meaning of the more technical terms. There was one participant from Benin who had greater language difficulties, but fortunately there were people on the team who could translate into French when needed. The regularization and integration process requires the comprehension of legislation and documentation, and so we always try to give participants space to talk about their doubts and try to adapt the explanation according to their limitations.

4. Training methods and tools

Non-Formal Education was used as a method during the training because we believed that for the information to be fixed in a more natural and simplified way, it should be a method quickly adapted to the group. Techniques, such as brainstorming, role-playing, crafts, music, dance, peer activities, outdoor learning were used to make the training dynamic and interesting,

Every session started with an icebreaker, in which the intention was to promote a safe environment in which the participants felt comfortable and awake to learn and share. In a second moment, we usually had the systematization of information, which could often be more complex at the level of understanding due to technical terms. However, even during these moments, we ensured that the participants were free to ask questions and share experiences with the topic at hand.

This methodology was chosen because it can provide learning outside the box that is more easily adaptable to the target audience. The learning process occurs through the development of skills more naturally, such as cultural awareness, social responsibility, and respect for diversity. In this way, Non-Formal Education's use helped the participants feel more open to express their needs and interests regarding the inclusion process in the host country. In one of the sessions, we asked for suggestions of songs typical of their countries, and everyone danced and had fun. It was an important ice-breaking moment, creating closer connections and cultural exchange.

Face-to-face methods were used in the training, as we believed that personal contact would have more impact and create a sense of team, cooperation, and unity between the participants and the training team. Moreover, holding the training on the territory itself helped bring the opportunity to the beneficiaries, in a welcoming idea, strengthening the connection of people with the community. The interaction in and with the environment is an essential element in learning what is intended, especially knowing the local services to support newcomers.

We chose to hold face-to-face meetings at the local association, as it was already a familiar environment for most participants. The idea was to provide a "family" experience where the beneficiaries could feel "at home". It was an important choice, as it made it more accessible and optimized the participants' commute from their homes or jobs to there. In addition, the association provided an adaptable space in which we could distribute tables and chairs in our way, which facilitated the moments of participatory dynamics and the locomotion of the wheelchair of one participant. There was space for the coffee break table, accessible internet, good acoustics, and a bathroom.

Throughout the project, we used digital resources as support, especially in the moments of systematization of concepts. In two days of training, a participant in Guinea-Bissau participated through a digital platform. The training team adapted the format of the sessions to ensure the interaction and understanding of this participant, who in the following sessions was in person. We kept the face-to-face format throughout the training, which was beneficial for the group regarding sense of belonging, team, and shared identity.

The trainers approached a broad policy a more practical structure to present local services. In one of the sessions, we rented a bus. Through a pre-defined and strategically thought route, we travelled around the territory visualizing all the available services that support and facilitate the arrival and permanence of immigrants. During the tour, the training team stimulated the participants' knowledge about the services already presented and each one had a chance to hold the microphone of the bus, and present each stop with the information previously learned.

This moment was significant in connecting theory with practice and creating a feeling of familiarity and security regarding the territory, as well as enhancing the communication and confidence in the

learning process. The initiative helped the trainees to feel more self-assured about the information regarding each site and its geographical location. It was indeed a dynamic exercise and essential for the participants to be able to absorb information and strengthen their feeling as Community Agents.

In terms of topics of interest to CA, they were most interested in the regularization process in the country in relation to documents and family reunions. Many people still had doubts about the documentary process and the specifications of each case, such as medical board, student visa, family unit, having a child already born in Portugal, marriage, etc. There is a way to proceed with documentation in each case, which was a common topic among the participants.

Another theme very much addressed by the CAs was what each local service could provide to meet needs. In this sense, they were interested in exploring how they should seek to access these services. For this, we used the role-playing method, in which the participants put themselves in everyday situations and exercised communication about available services and two needs. We also noticed their constant need to expose feelings, frustrations, and complicated problems in their trajectory as immigrants. In this sense, we provided moments for these shares and welcome among the group.

About the training, the CAs mentioned words such as: "learning", "self-confidence", and "sharing". Creating moments of group knowledge in their territory to meet newcomers' needs was a memorable experience for the participants, undoubtedly marking a happy memory in the ALCC location.

Strengths:

- Most of the time, the CAs shared real-life situations they experienced or by people they knew, which brought them more interest and connection to the themes. In some of the sessions during the week, the trainer asked the participants how to proceed. This interaction helped create a more trusting relationship between the team and the participants.
- The in-person method more easily provides answers to different individuals or groups' different demands and needs.
- Since many of these people have feelings of anxiety and loneliness, the opportunity of the face-to-face training was an added value both personally and as CAs.
- Including non-training moments in the program could strengthen the bonds between the participants and create a sense of common identity.
- In every session we've dedicated 15-20 minutes to allow CAs to ask questions. The questions made by the CAs opened a really interesting debate and exchange of ideas between the group and with trainers.

5. On-going engagement of CAs

Even though the CAs were already integrated in the community and in the territory, the legislation and services modules turned out to be very useful for their lives. Since it is natural to have more doubts regarding the bureaucratic processes, which vary according to each situation, the learning acquired has become an added value both personally and as agents in their community.

The CAs showed great satisfaction in improving their knowledge on the approached topics in order to have greater confidence in transmitting knowledge and orienting newcomers. There was very positive feedback from the participants regarding the modules, as they met their expectations.

The possibility to help themselves while learning how to help others was a key aspect to keep CAs engaged during and after the training ended. In order to support all CAs to practice what they have learned during the training, an unforeseen activity was organized with that purpose.

We include non-training moments in the program at the end of the training. We gather all the CAs to give them the certificate and, as requested by them, we did a training day on the field, where we approached people on the streets, wearing the T-shirts, and met several immigrants who had questions asked. They provide information on legislation and services available, and share the local association flyer and contacts, so the migrants could know where to go and who to contact if they need support with their documentation and integration process in Santa Clara Parish.

Beyond the training all CAs and trainers were connected on a WhatsApp group, allowing them to be always up to date with the information on session dates and time, inform when not available to participate in a session and communicate with the group to ask questions between the training sessions, share experiences and news they consider to be beneficial to the whole group.

“Even if a message is well-crafted, it is unlikely to have an impact if it is not channeled via a credible figure or voice. Thus, the messenger is as important as the message. (Resoma, 2019)”²

The CAs group is diverse in age, gender and descent. São Tomé e Príncipe, Guinea Bissau, Benin and Brazil are the countries of origin with representation in the group, a very positive aspect taking into account that a great part of the migrant community of Santa Clara Parish has African descent. The simplicity of their being is what we consider will spark feelings of familiarity and warmth with the wider migrant community, contributing towards an effective and relatable communication about migrants and to migrants.

The final module of the training "Communication", focused on capturing experiences related to emotions and the territory. This moment was important for them to rescue memories and sensations regarding their integration processes in the new country. The activities aroused interest and satisfaction, as they were able to share unique moments of their lives, both negative and positive. The sharing also served to exercise welcoming and listening skills, helping to develop the skills of a community agent. The feelings associated with the places were an essential element for understanding the importance between emotions, belonging, and identity.

Strengths:

- The ACs showed great interest in keeping in touch with each other, which shows that the training was able to build strong and true relationships.
- The WhatsApp group remains active. The CAs know they can count on each other and have this tool as an ally for the welcoming process.

² <https://www.migpolgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/POB-Public-Opinion-Hind-Sharif.pdf>

- Communication through emotions has helped to bring the CAs closer and to create easier forms of interaction, through the representativeness, identification, and history of each one.

Criticalities:

- Some CAs still felt a lack of self-confidence to express themselves and orient newcomers. It was noted that many of the feelings demonstrated by the immigrants are related to insecurity, low self-esteem, and loneliness. Feelings like these in fact can be obstacles to a more fluid communication. However, all the work developed enhanced self-confidence and empowerment mechanisms so that the CAs could feel important to other people and consequently increase their self-confidence and resilience. Meanwhile, the exercises in communication through emotions supported this process, as it allowed for a safe environment to express themselves without fear of judgment.