

# The Library Bridges (LiBri) project

## Promoting the integration and inclusion of third-country nationals in Europe through libraries and local partnerships

### 1. Introduction

Europe is currently facing a considerable challenge in welcoming and integrating third-country nationals (TCNs).<sup>1</sup> According to the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), the number of asylum applications in the EU reached nearly one million in 2022 – an increase of over 50% compared to the previous year.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, more than eight million refugees from Ukraine have sought refuge across Europe.<sup>3</sup>

TCNs are disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion, with a risk rate of 48.6% compared to 19.8% among native populations.<sup>4</sup> Effective integration requires addressing multiple challenges faced by TCNs, including language barriers, access to education, understanding of the host country, dealing with legal and administrative procedures, and establishing social connections within host communities. Research identifies the latter as the backbone of successful integration.<sup>5</sup> This calls not only for preparing welcoming communities, but also for creating shared initiatives and inclusive public spaces. As community needs evolve, institutions must reconsider how services are delivered and experiment with new, adaptable approaches. Strategies will not work without the engagement of the people who create change, so their development and implementation should be carried out through continuous iteration with partnerships involving other institutions and local organizations, including local government and TCN associations.

Libraries are uniquely positioned to support the integration of TCNs across Europe. More than 65,000 public libraries in the EU<sup>6</sup> provide free public service and act as natural meeting points for newcomers and host communities. Libraries are regarded as safe and trusted places offering access to information, lifelong learning, and cultural activities.

- 1 In this report, the term “third country nationals,” or “TCNs”, is used to encompass all refugee, exile, displaced and migrant populations in Europe in an inclusive manner.
- 2 Almost 1 million asylum applications in the EU+ in 2022, European Union Agency for Asylum, 22.02.2023, <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/almost-1-million-asylum-applications-eu-2022>, last accessed: 16.07.2025.
- 3 Ukraine situation Flash Update #45, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 20.04.2023, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100224>, last accessed: 16.07.2025.
- 4 The potential for financial instruments supporting migrant integration. Part 1: Market Assessment Report, fi-compass, 27.06.2024, <https://www.fi-compass.eu/library/market-analysis/potential-financial-instruments-supporting-migrant-integration-part-1>, last accessed: 16.07.2025.
- 5 Ager, Alastair; Strang, Alison: Understanding integration. A conceptual framework, in: *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, 2008, p. 166-191.
- 6 EBLIDA annual report. 1 May 2024 - 1 April 2025, European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations, n.d., [https://eblida.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EBLIDA\\_Annual-Report-2024-2025.pdf](https://eblida.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EBLIDA_Annual-Report-2024-2025.pdf), last accessed: 16.07.2025.

In this context, the project Library Bridges (LiBri) aims to strengthen the role of libraries in developing and implementing local integration strategies, thereby increasing the effectiveness of TCN inclusion at regional and local levels. In the long term, LiBri aims to empower libraries to contribute to the sustainable integration of TCNs through access to culture, education and training opportunities, and social connections with host communities. These local strategies aim to both empower TCNs by addressing structural barriers to integration and by fostering meaningful social connections between TCNs and host communities. This report outlines the project's methodology, the tools and resources developed, the challenges encountered, opportunities found, recommendations, and the key results achieved.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Project background

The project "Library Bridges: Promoting the Integration and Inclusion of Third-Country Nationals in Europe Through Libraries and Local Partnerships", commonly known as LiBri, is a two-year project co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union.<sup>8</sup>

The project is coordinated by BSF – Bibliothèques Sans Frontières (Libraries Without Borders, France) and implemented by a consortium of partners in five European countries: ACV – Asociația Comunităților Viitorului (Communities of the Future, Romania), ANVITA – Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants (National Association of Welcoming Cities and Territories, France), BSF Italy – Biblioteche Senza Frontiere Italia (Libraries Without Borders Italy), FRIS – Fundacja Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego (Information Society Development Foundation, Poland), and KISC – Kultūras Informācijas Sistēmu Centrs (Culture Information Systems Center, Latvia).

BSF is an international non-profit organization based in France aiming to promote access to education, culture, and information to vulnerable communities. BSF Italy is its Italian branch implementing the organization's mission in Italy. ACV is a Romanian non-governmental organization that helps communities adapt to future changes through education and information. ANVITA is a French network of welcoming local and regional governments advocating for unconditional access to rights for all. KISC provides access to information resources and cultural heritage stored in archives, museums and libraries under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture of Latvia. EBLIDA – the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations – is a European non-governmental association whose mission is to pursue the interests of the library and information science profession. FRIS is a Polish non-governmental organization which has been implementing the Library Development Program in cooperation with public libraries in Poland. Each partner implements the project in its national context. At the European level, EBLIDA is responsible for communication and dissemination of the project and its outcomes.

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7 This paper refers to the authors' presentation *LiBri – Library Bridges: Library Bridges: How can libraries and their local partners promote the inclusion of people with a migration background?* on 26 June 2025 at the 9th Library Conference (113th BiblioCon) in Bremen, Germany

8 The LiBri project is co-funded by the European Union and implemented by a consortium of partners across five countries. The authors thank participating librarians, TCN associations, local authorities and all partners for their invaluable collaboration.

LiBri aims to help libraries, their local authorities and NGOs to come together to develop and implement inclusion strategies to increase the effectiveness of the integration of TCNs at regional and local levels. Its main objectives are:

- To research and approach existing initiatives at the local level, to inform about project activities and resources, to promote the project to different stakeholders (librarians, local authorities, TCN associations) and to encourage them to participate in it through the establishment of partnerships,
- to develop specific resources (guides/toolkits) to help librarians design and implement relevant intercultural activities,
- to help libraries develop and implement local partnerships and strategies,
- to disseminate the findings and results of the project digitally and in-presence, via innovative digital platforms and participation in European library conferences.

### 3. Project methodology

The project work is structured into three areas. The first area corresponds to the initial desk research conducted by the partners in order to obtain a greater understanding of the national context and existing TCN integration initiatives in each of the project countries – France, Italy, Latvia, Poland, and Romania.

The second area corresponds to LiBri's aim of establishing local partnerships and developing tailored integration strategies. This began with a series of events and outreach activities designed to raise awareness of the project, the local partnership-building process and the expected benefits for local stakeholders. Following these initiatives, an open call was issued to cities interested in participating. To qualify, each application had to include a local authority (e.g., the city council), a library and ideally at least one local NGO focused on the topic.

To ensure the quality of the partnerships and integration strategies, the LiBri consortium hired experts on inclusion and integration to act as trainers and to support the establishment of the partnerships and strategies. Throughout the entire project, the trainers provide workshops and tailored tutoring on inclusion and integration matters to representatives of the local partnerships. Once selected, the local stakeholders, together with the LiBri partners and trainers hired to assist with the process, conducted a local needs assessment to identify existing resources, challenges, and areas for improvement. To achieve this, a series of methods were used, tailored to the local context, including desk research, interviews and focus groups with local TCNs, and questionnaires. Throughout the process, all local partnerships received support in the form of workshops and consultations with trainers. It was essential to collect direct community input, including the perspectives of TCNs. Based on the findings of the needs assessment, the partnership formulated objectives and operational goals and created a strategic plan. The LiBri project currently supports 50 libraries through this process.

The third area corresponds to the efforts to disseminate the project findings and results. Through the creation of new resources, such as guides and toolkits, and the adaptation of existing resources, such a checklist based on the *IFLA guidelines for libraries supporting displaced persons: refugees, migrants,*

*immigrants, asylum seekers*<sup>9</sup>, the project aims to disseminate the inclusion initiatives identified in the first research phase and to encourage their implementation throughout Europe. Similarly, the project aims to facilitate the replicability of the LiBri methodology for establishing local partnerships that aim to include migrants and displaced persons by creating a new guide on local partnerships. The LiBri resources – the toolkits, the guide on establishing local partnerships, and the self-assessment checklist – are the result of research done by the project consortium and are greatly strengthened by the shared experiences of the participating cities.

In order to disseminate the LiBri resources and knowledge, a thematic webpage on the topic of TCN integration has been created. It centralizes all resources produced or compiled by the consortium. More recently, the LiBri consortium has been present in a series of conferences throughout Europe, and will continue to do so until the project ends in April 2026. The project was presented through a lightning talk during the EBLIDA 33rd Annual Council and Conference, in Riga, Latvia, and with stands and presentations at the 70th Congress of the Association of Librarians of France, in Montreuil, France, and at the 9th Library Congress of BID (Bibliothek & Information Deutschland), in Bremen, Germany. In August 2025, the project went beyond European borders as it was presented during IFLA's 89th World Library and Information Congress, in Astana, Kazakhstan.

## 4. Project outputs

In order to ensure a centralized location for all project information and outputs, a new thematic webpage was developed on EBLIDA's website – host of its innovative E-PANEMA platform. E-PANEMA is a centralized space for library projects and for the creation of new partnerships, providing a unique, free place for libraries to connect and pursue funding together, and to be inspired by ongoing or completed projects. Similarly, creating a new thematic webpage on the integration of TCNs allows for a centralized space for all information on the topic. On the website, users can find new and pre-existing tools and publications, as well as a map of libraries and other organizations who work on the topic, and information about specific projects and initiatives. Despite being created for LiBri, the webpage will be maintained after the project ends and will be continuously updated with new entries on E-PANEMA and resources as they are published. This new webpage also hosts a growing number of resources – including manuals for librarians, research on the topic, and resources for TCNs themselves – collected and continuously updated by the project partners. The webpage, where all project outputs can be found, can be accessed through the following URL: <https://eblida.org/displaced-exiled-migrant-persons/>

At the beginning of the project, the partners conducted desk research to better understand the national context of TCN integration, gathering contextual information and integration initiatives in each country. This research was compiled in the *LiBri desk research report: context elements and existing initiatives for TCN-welcoming libraries*<sup>10</sup>, which is available on the project's webpage.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Gerasimidou, Despina: IFLA guidelines for libraries supporting displaced persons. Refugees, migrants, immigrants, asylum seekers, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 16.12.2024, <https://repository.ifla.org/items/7ce3fe3e-ce77-4dcb-9912-2e7d2dfcaab5>, last accessed: 16.07.2025.

The Italian partners of the LiBri project, Biblioteche Senza Frontiere, published an article in *Biblioteche Oggi*, the most widely published monthly professional information magazine in Italy aimed at librarians and the library world. The article proposes a theoretical classification of public libraries' intervention models for the inclusion and integration of migrants, based on the analysis of two dimensions: the partnership and the strategies that libraries implement to promote the inclusion and integration of third-country nationals, especially migrants. The partnership dimension corresponds to the library's capacity and level of dialogue with local authorities, the capacity and level of dialogue with other bodies such as universities and associations, and co-planning with different actors and the TCN community. The strategies dimension corresponds to the type and aim of the interventions, the details of the specific activities and their implementation criteria, and the library's features in terms of human resources involved, library stock and user specificity. The article is available in Italian<sup>12</sup> and in English.<sup>13</sup>

As part of LiBri, the consortium is developing four toolkits for librarians. The four topics covered were established based on the previous research:

- Social cohesion through culture
- Libraries as supporting and welcoming information hubs
- Life skills for integration in local communities
- Outreach strategies (including for specific audiences, such as unaccompanied minors, families, and TCNs who are passing through the country)

All toolkits are structured in the same manner. They include an introduction to the topic, a subdivision in smaller key actions, a short explanation of why this action is relevant for libraries and recommendations on what libraries can do – including best practices gathered from the research. Approximately ten activities are listed at the end of each toolkit. The activities are aimed at TCNs, the host communities and the library teams, and they allow members of these groups to meet and exchange in a neutral and safe space, thus contributing to the inclusion of migrants and displaced persons in the local community. Activities include informal language classes, “living library” events, staff workshops, library tours, and multicultural events, to name just a few. The four toolkits are expected to be available in 2026 through the thematic webpage.

10 LiBri desk research report. Context elements and existing initiatives for TCN-welcoming libraries, European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations, 09.2024, <https://eblida.org/resource/libri-desk-research-report/>, last accessed: 16.07.2025.

11 Displaced, exiled and migrant persons. Promoting the integration and inclusion of third country nationals in Europe through libraries and local partnerships, European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations, n. d., <https://eblida.org/displaced-exiled-migrant-persons/>, last accessed: 16.07.2025.

12 D'Antonio, Anna Lisa; Felici, Sara: Promuovere l'inclusione dei cittadini di Paesi terzi in Europa attraverso le biblioteche pubbliche. Mappatura e tassonomia dei modelli di intervento: il caso dell'Italia, in: *Biblioteche oggi* 44 (2), 03.2025, <https://www.bibliotecheoggi.it/it/articolo/16533/promuovere-l-inclusione-dei-cittadini>, DOI: 10.3302/0392-8586-202502-010-1

13 D'Antonio, Anna Lisa; Felici, Sara: Promoting inclusion of third-country citizens in Europe through public libraries. Mapping and taxonomy models of intervention: the case of Italy, n. d., <https://eblida.org/resource/promoting-inclusion-of-third-country-citizens-in-europe-through-public-libraries-mapping-and-taxonomy-models-of-intervention-the-case-of-italy-english/>, last accessed: 16.07.2025.

The LiBri consortium has also been working on a practical checklist for libraries to assess their welcoming and integration strategies. The checklist is based on the *IFLA guidelines for libraries supporting displaced persons: refugees, migrants, immigrants, asylum seekers*<sup>14</sup>, and is the result of an ongoing collaboration between the LiBri partners and IFLA's Equitable and Accessible Library Services Section (EALS). The checklist is expected to be publicly available in 2026 through the thematic webpage.

The LiBri project was developed based on an adaptable partnership-building model that can be replicated in other projects and by different parties. To ensure its scalability and replicability, the consortium is also working on a guide on how to develop the process presented in the previous section. This publication will provide libraries with information and tools on how to find partners, on the different models for long-term cooperation, what the strategy should include, how to implement it and how to monitor and evaluate. It also includes worksheets and a strategy template to facilitate the process. The manual is expected to be publicly available at the end of 2025 through the thematic webpage.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Challenges of local strategies

As the consortium supported the local partnerships, a series of barriers became clear. The most significant obstacle to the integration of migrants into the community are language barriers. As a result, there is a high demand for language learning, including, for example, regular classes, conversations, practical workshops, and language cafés. The difficulties posed by language barriers are only worsened by the lack of clear information on employment, housing, healthcare and education as well as too much bureaucracy.

Socially, integration efforts are hindered by misinformation, manipulation, discrimination, and hate speech, as well as the limited contact between migrants and host country residents, as these groups tend to live in separate social "bubbles." A proposed solution to address hate speech, for example, is to develop educational campaigns aimed at the general public. In order to bring migrants and local communities together the library can host mediation activities such as migration-themed book clubs, film exhibitions, language exchange sessions, staff workshops, bibliotherapy, and homework help sessions where participants can meet in a neutral, safe space and exchange, thus breaking down barriers and stereotypes.

At the institutional level, social integration is primarily perceived as the responsibility of public institutions and NGOs rather than libraries and other cultural centers, as culture is often not regarded as a tool for social change by policymakers. Libraries are not even recognized as partners in integration efforts; a perspective which is also shared by the migrants themselves. Additionally, some libraries adopt an "elite" model, offering quality content but failing to reach marginalized users.

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14 Gerasimidou, Despina: IFLA guidelines for libraries supporting displaced persons. Refugees, migrants, immigrants, asylum seekers, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 16.12.2024, <https://repository.ifla.org/items/7ce3fe3e-ce77-4dcb-9912-2e7d2dfcaab5>, last accessed: 16.07.2025.

## 5.2 Advantages and opportunities

The consortium also identified advantages of the project methodology. For example, the local diagnoses have already helped to identify community needs, available services, stakeholders, local actors and to foster dialogue and cooperation among partners. Additionally, many libraries are regarded by their local communities as crucial community resources, providing welcoming, trusted, accessible and safe spaces that provide essential information services, technical assistance, language learning opportunities and cultural programs. And finally, there is a high integration potential among children and young people, who overcome language barriers relatively quickly.

## 5.3 Lessons learnt

As the consortium and local partnerships find obstacles and overcome them, they become lessons to learn from and strengthen the implementation of the project. For example, although public libraries were invited to join, many have also taken the initiative to establish partnerships in their communities, working together on local integration strategies with great success. In these partnerships, libraries solidified their meaningful role as partners of local governments and NGOs. Additionally, the co-created strategies that developed from these local partnerships benefited from the fact that libraries are close to people they work with. As a result, the strategies have the potential to inspire real strategic solutions that will be beneficial for the whole community.

Throughout the process, it became clear that individual and group interviews reveal information that cannot be found in existing data from various reports and statistics, such as the need for more psychological support, especially for children and refugees, or the desire for recognition and contribution, not just receiving support. It was also evident that communication is important, both between migrants and supporting institutions and within the community, where narratives are often shaped by stereotypes, misinformation and fears.

The main success in conducting the local diagnosis was achieving mutual understanding. All interested parties got to know each other better, listened to existing problems and came to a conclusion on how to improve the situation together. Ultimately, the project has fostered a culture of collaboration and recognition across the social, educational and cultural sectors.

## 5.4 Recommendations

Based on the needs assessments and the obstacles and opportunities found, the consortium has developed a list of recommendations for libraries and other organizations interested in implementing a similar methodology:

- Improve outreach and communication strategies.
- Support library staff in developing intercultural competencies and universal design<sup>15</sup> skills to address diverse and special needs.

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<sup>15</sup> Universal design is the development of an environment that can be accessed and used by all people regardless of age, size, disabilities, and others.

- Offer simplified, visual and multilingual materials, e.g. “start-up” guides on legal, employment, education, health and housing issues.
- Expand existing research to include more ethnic groups, youth and elderly migrants.
- Continue educational campaigns aimed towards the general public to combat misinformation and stereotypes.
- Expand flexible, practical language learning offers, accessible to various user groups.
- Strengthen collaboration between libraries, NGOs, and public institutions to create holistic integration services.
- Foster intercultural dialogue and inclusive spaces to reduce social tensions.

## 6. Conclusion

LiBri has developed an innovative methodology for facilitating the integration of TCNs through local partnerships centered around libraries. This method is based on the principles of co-creation with the target group, recognizing the untapped potential of libraries as effective platforms for bridging communities, and taking advantage of local partnerships to enact change. Throughout its implementation, it has become clear that this method is successful, flexible, scalable and can be applied in other geographical and social contexts.

Throughout the implementation of LiBri, the consortium has confirmed that libraries can be effective platforms for the integration of TCNs at the local level and yet are underutilized in this role. As free, accessible, trusted, and safe spaces where newcomers and the host community can meet, libraries are uniquely positioned to bridge social divides and promote the integration of TCNs. However, in order to achieve this, it is important to note that libraries require institutional support and funding, recognition as legitimate integration actors, continuous professional development for staff and knowledge of the needs of the local community – including TCNs.

The findings of the project also confirm the importance of co-creating strategies and action plans with TCNs, adapting them to the local context, and ensuring the active involvement of key stakeholders with the capacity to drive meaningful change, such as local authorities, libraries and NGOs.

As the project progresses, the consortium will learn more on how to use this methodology even more efficiently and adapt it accordingly. Meanwhile, the LiBri partners have been working on new resources and tools for libraries and library staff to implement successful integration activities and services. As the partners continue to disseminate the project, its resources and methodology, they hope it will be replicated successfully in other countries and contexts.

In summary, at a time of increasing polarization and unrest, libraries have become one solution for integration due to their reputation and work as safe, trusted spaces that provide access to information and exchange. LiBri acknowledges and confirms this role and provides the necessary tools and knowledge to strengthen it across Europe.



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