



Embrace



# PARTICIPATORY PROCESS WITH NEWCOMERS IN EST ENSEMBLE, FRANCE

2022-2023

**PLACE**

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# WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOKLET

This Booklet combines the participatory experience of 15 newcomers (beneficiaries of international protection, students, economic migrants, etc.) and 7 local actors (civil servants) from five of the municipalities of the territory of Est Ensemble - Montreuil, Pantin, Noisy-le-Sec, Bobigny and Les Lilas, under the project "Embrace", which took place from October 2022 until March 2023 delivered by PLACE network.

This document is divided into four main chapters. The first one, "About the Project", gives an overview of the Embrace project and the three phases of this participatory process with newcomers: Listening Sessions, Face-to-Face Meeting, and Co-Projecting Workshops.

The second chapter "Newcomers' Experiences and Recommendations" presents what was shared by the newcomers in the Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting regarding their integration into the Île-de-France region. It is organised into five themes: Access to information and rights, Feeling Integrated, Prejudices, Participating Meaningfully, Feeling Legitimate and starts with an introductory text that combines testimonials from the newcomers and tries to be as faithful as possible to their contributions. It is followed by the main recommendations for better practice, presented in bullet points.

Lastly, illustrative newcomers' quotes are shown in boxes.

From all the information collected and presented to local actors by the newcomers, the third chapter, "Creation of a Collaborative Solution", showcases the last phase of the process, the Co-Projecting Workshops. After a collaborative decision on the topic to focus on, this part of the Booklet exposes the ideating process that resulted in three co-created solutions for the Inclusion of newcomers in local instances such as municipalities to optimise their participation and feeling of integration.

The Booklet ends with a last chapter that presents a sample of "Testimonials from Participants", collected during and after the activities.

The information presented in this material intends to inspire local actors and practitioners who regularly work for or with newcomers to see the added value and unique perspective that comes from involving them in the decision-making processes.

It also aims to share main experiences and recommendations regarding the main topics of integration, with a focus on Participation and Inclusion of newcomers within municipalities which can be useful for the definition and/or improvement of policies and programs that are created to promote newcomers' integration.



# ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Participatory Process with Newcomers is part of the European project "Embrace - Empowering Migrants to Be Representative Actors in Community Engagement", funded by AMIF. It has been implemented simultaneously in 11 cities in 6 European countries, in 2022-2023.

Using ComParte's methodology, it aimed at involving newcomers in the decision-making process of the topics that directly affect them and their integration into the country.

This booklet compiles the knowledge collected during the participatory process, in the three main phases presented on the following pages: Listening Sessions, Face-to-Face Meeting and Co-Projecting Workshops.

It intends to be a working tool for local actors and practitioners, using the lived experiences of the newcomers to make better-informed and efficient decisions when defining integration policies, aligned with the beneficiaries' real needs.

## NEWCOMERS INVOLVED:

15 newcomers, 60% female, from Afghanistan, Syria, India, Tchad, Sudan, Madagascar.

## LOCAL ACTORS/PRACTICIONERS INVOLVED:

7 local actors/practicioners from:

- Est Ensemble: User relations and civic participation centre
- Pantin: Local Democracy Office & Community Center Management
- Montreuil: Social inclusion and monitoring of migrant workers' homes & Trade Development
- Noisy-le-Sec: Direction of Prevention and Public Safety
- Bobigny: Local Democracy Office
- Les Lilas: User Relations & Innovation Democracy



## STEP 1. LISTENING SESSIONS

Listening Sessions are informal moments where, through creative and participatory methodologies, newcomers share their experiences and recommendations for better integration in the municipality as well as how participation could be improved in public institutions, inspired by what went well and what could have been better in their situation. In November 2022, 3 Listening Sessions were implemented in a hybrid format with 15 newcomers in total, which started with emojis spread on a table, and newcomers were challenged to choose from them to explain their experience of integration when they arrived and now. This was the starting point of the conversation that explored in detail their insights on what could be changed and maintained for better integration as well as for the participation of future newcomers in the region of Île-de-France.

## STEP 2.

# FACE-TO-FACE MEETING

In the Face-to-Face Meeting, that took place in January 2023, 8 newcomers shared their experiences and recommendations directly with 6 local actors and practitioners. It's was opportunity for this information to be shared first-hand, in a direct and personal way, giving space for a dialogue between all the participants to clarify ideas and perceptions. The newcomers shared their insights during most of the meeting, while the local actors actively listened to them, giving feedback on how newcomers' experiences and recommendations resonate with and impact their work. Taking place in an informal setting, this meeting is an opportunity to create proximity and trust between newcomers and local actors.



## STEP 3.

# CO-PROJECTING WORKSHOPS

Co-Projecting Workshops use a Participatory Policy Design methodology, tested in several countries in northern Europe, which allows the use of design to create concrete solutions that make sense for the beneficiaries, based on the challenges faced by the public sector and associated partners that were mapped in the Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting.

In March 2023, the Workshop took place in an intensive full-day of deep collaboration between all stakeholders (8 newcomers, 5 practitioners, and local actors) with a practical, fun, and creative approach.

In the end, the participants arrived collaboratively at three prototypes of solutions to improve the Participation and Inclusion of newcomers within municipalities.

# NEWCOMERS' EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting, newcomers shared their experiences and recommendations about many different aspects of their integration and participation in Île-de-France. The following pages present their contributions, systematized and organized by theme. It starts with an introductory text that combines testimonials from the newcomers, followed by the main recommendations in bullet points, and relevant quotes from newcomers.

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND RIGHTS

"The two things that are very frustrating for any newcomer is that when we enter the system, we have no idea what it is. And then there are so many things and you're not able to digest all the information coming to us from different directions. For us, it becomes very difficult to navigate through the procedures because if you're fortunate, if you have a circle that protects you, it will be fluid but if you don't have that circle, it will become very difficult to navigate. I became angry because I went to prefecture and it felt like no one cared about us. For me it was unacceptable to find an officer in a country such as France, to refuse to give a service because I don't speak his language. The public bodies, make everything online, for them it's easy but for us, it's not."

- Create bodies dedicated to informing the newcomers in public institutions & multilingual information pamphlets
- Buddy systems between newcomers
- Review/make administrative processes and access to housing (including CADAs) easier and faster
- Diversify the workforce processing asylum claims (example: younger generation)
- Make sure that services, especially in-person, are available in other languages than in French
- Move away from having all the procedures online and dispatching some of the responsibilities from the public institutions to town halls/NGOs closer to newcomers
- Making sure workers understand their target audience and have the necessary knowledge around newcomers' rights
- Hold a repository or a database of all the newcomers in France to send them information and mobilize them efficiently

"It would be good to have a tiny pamphlet that communicated everything that I could possibly use. Like in university, you get a pamphlet where you can find the library, associations, so you feel more equipped to digest information."  
- Newcomer

"It would be really nice if the prefectures had certain bodies dedicated to informing the newcomers on what are the policies in place and what are their rights."  
- Newcomer

# FEELING INTEGRATED AND PART OF SOCIETY

"At first, I was confused because I didn't know what to do and where to start and I didn't know where I had to go. Integration was more my own effort, the system didn't help me at all to be in this place. If it was a better system, I might be in a better place now. French is important without which you cannot move very far. You have to put in hours, which can become frustrating because you are not able to express yourself. Leaving my country I declined a minister job because I had a more important job. Now even with my status as a refugee, I find nothing to do in France that matches my skills. For now, I am so happy because I know what I have to do. It's because I feel integrated, I found a job, I found a house, education, and gained all the things I wanted."

- Welcome at airport to support newcomers
- Promote mental health and social links
- Clarify opportunities that exist, beyond job opportunities, that newcomers could benefit from (municipal councils, fellowships...)
- Recognise newcomers' qualification
- Help newcomers find a (stable and meaningful) job, learn French, find housing, access education, have a circle of friends, explore and get to know the city they live in, know the system and feel good about the host society - starting even before they have their official papers

"I have been in France for a while but I don't know what I can possibly be doing here except finding a job, running my life, what kind of other opportunities [e.g. involvement in community life, scholarships, city councils, etc.]. are there. This is like a gray zone."  
- Newcomer

"Learning French, going to a Master's program, and working, it gives you a rhythm, and you can meet other people who are going through similar situations, and move forward."  
- Newcomer

"Focus on the social integration and the mental health of most of the people that come here. They will find solutions by themselves and won't only be waiting for the government to help them."  
- Newcomer





## PREJUDICES

"We left our country with all of our achievements in one night and then when we arrived here we faced a different culture with different people we didn't know about with different behavior, especially the discrimination which was really visible in some organizations for our processes and paper works."

- Punish any discrimination, between religions, ethnicities, colors, language, etc.
- Avoid differentiation between newcomers
- Promote exchanges between neighbours
- Hold organisations accountable for their treatment of newcomers ("make sure they make more good than bad")

"We should avoid differentiation between the newcomers, especially between the refugees, or every person that leaves their country. There shouldn't be any favoritism, Ukrainians, Afghans, Somalians, Syrians, we have to look at them with the same eyes, we have to welcome them with a warm heart." - Newcomer

"If there is any discrimination between religions, between colors and between languages, etc., it could be a real crime and they are to be punished if anyone does that."  
- Newcomer

"Every time I talk about my specialty, people close down, people say you are too ambitious. There are no jobs for migrants except cleaning."  
- Newcomer



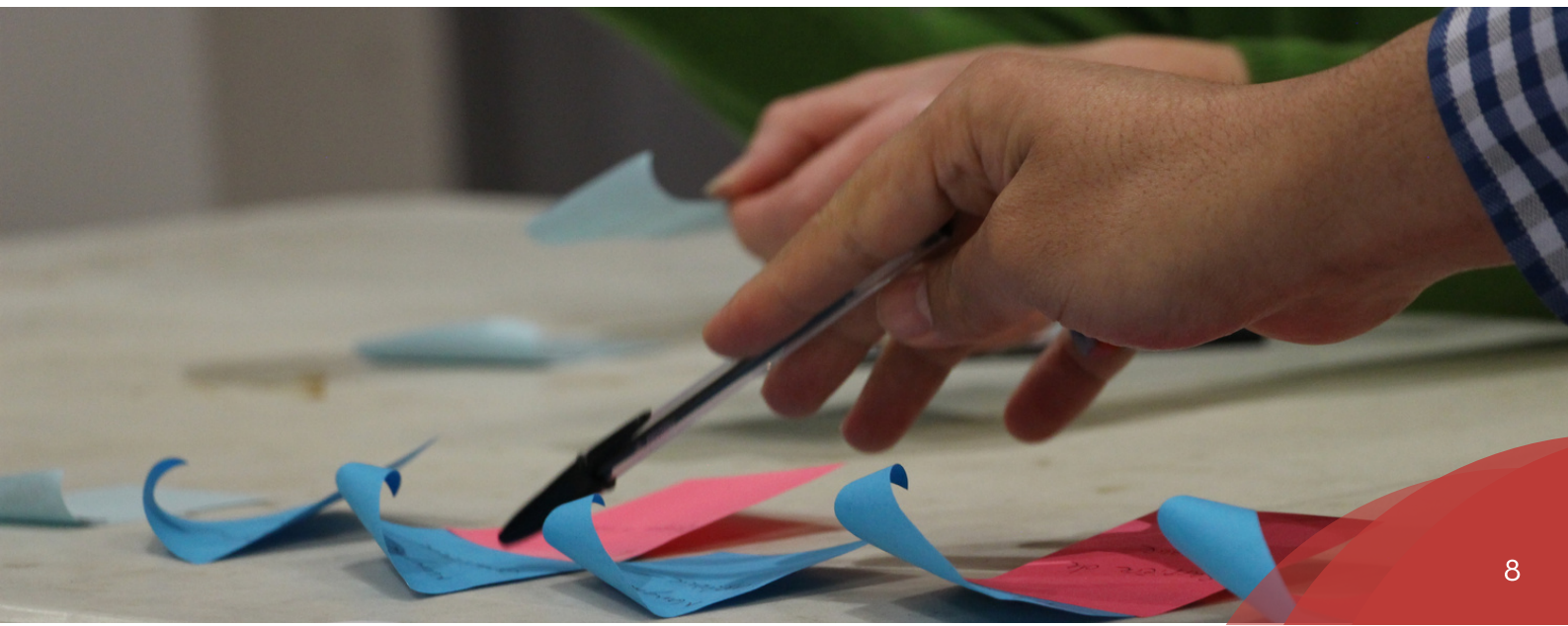
# PARTICIPATING MEANINGFULLY

"Only a small part of society participates, others are not engaged in politics, it's just symbolic. Everything stays in theory, we hear migrants and then it is compiled in a document but it is not applied. Ultimately, I was lucky to participate, unfortunately, I was not the one to make decisions, I was just a listener, there to give information and receive it but I was not able to participate to say no we need to add this. I would be interested to participate personally but only, if I know that my voice counts somehow, or if I add something there will be a benefit. The big problem for all of the representatives is that they are hearing from people speaking in our name, but they never hear our word directly, that is the big mistake."

- Let newcomers be active contributors rather than listeners in decision-making processes and go beyond symbolic initiatives by focusing on concrete actionable actions
- Open decisions, even small ones, to newcomers
- Promote mental health and psychological health as well as fulfil minimum needs to make participation easier
- Organize a national conference for refugees to express their ideas
- Encourage and promote co-listening processes & create platforms/space of exchange very regularly between newcomers and local actors at local and EU level as well as target newcomers who have an interest in participating
- Municipalities should promote civic participation by doing conferences, workshops even online (e.g.: Facebook live)"
- Promote technology to increase participation

"Give us the chance to organize a national conference to hear directly from refugees or migrants, what they need and what they face to address it instead of listening to other people speak in our place." - Newcomer

"My municipality does live Facebook sessions and respond to people, it's like a direct connection between local actors and others, whether French or not." - Newcomer



# FEELING LEGITIMATE TO PARTICIPATE

"Most of the time I don't know what a democratic life means. I never thought about it and I still don't have enough knowledge. I feel like I don't have the right to share my ideas about politicians that make decisions for our rights and we are not allowed to give our ideas to them. If I say my ideas, they will not be appreciated and they don't make sense because I am a refugee. I always feel excluded. It is our destiny as a refugee."

- Going beyond 'tokenistic' approaches of participation and taking newcomers' ideas and interests seriously.

"People need to see our stories to change the negative mindset that they have about us; This will push decision makers to improve the systems because now, they will know it's profitable. We should bring all success stories of newcomers together, have one portfolio, to show everything we did good in one place." - Newcomer

- Share success stories of newcomers (portfolio, online platform..) in order to change the narrative around newcomers.
- Make information and knowledge about what democratic life and participation means and how it works more accessible and clear to all.
- Participants ('Emerging Leaders') that went through this path/program from PLACE network should help empower newcomers be part of the system and feel legitimate.

"They want to include us to take what we have in our brain but if we want to use our brain for our interest it doesn't work." - Newcomer



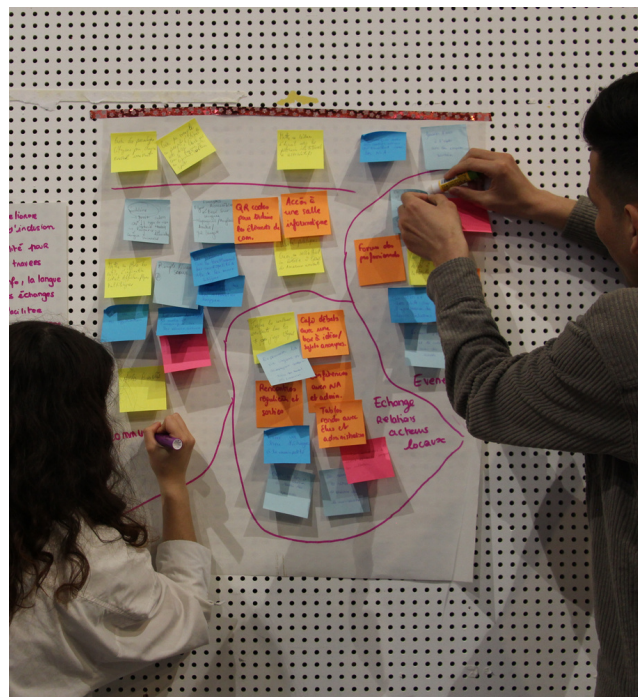
# CREATION OF A COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

Post-its, discussions, story-boards, brainstorming, laughs, creativity, and fun! These were the main ingredients of the Co-Projecting Workshop in Est Ensemble.

Throughout a very intensive and dynamic day, 8 newcomers and 5 local actors and practitioners worked together to create three collaborative solutions for one of the main challenges of integration in the municipality, identified and decided unanimously upon the Listening Sessions and Face-to-Face Meeting:

## Participation and Integration within the Municipality

At the end of the day, these were the three co-created solutions that was prototyped by the groups:



### SOLUTION 1

We are going to create a service dedicated to the inclusion/integration of newcomers in the local life and decision-making processes. This new service will put into place tools for communication, networking, community animation through a newcomer council, an intercultural space, a forum, outings and activities, immersion days and participation in local city councils. Thanks to this, newcomers will become local actors in the life of the municipality which will enhance the feeling of cohesion / living together through tolerance and acceptance, and promote citizenship and humanity.

### SOLUTION 2

The direction of participatory citizenship and neighborhood life will offer free training for newcomers : FINA (Formation d'Inclusion Nouveaux Arrivants). It permits them to be helped to feel integrated in society. It includes: Learning French, Workshops on self-confidence, Cultural and sports outings, Professional internships, Workshops on sharing experiences and knowledge, Sensibilization to living together, Exchanges of good practices for the valorisation of competencies, Psychologist/Health professional, Access to the library/médiatèque.

### SOLUTION 3

We are a community of professional volunteers who are empowered through previous processus of inclusion. We want to help newcomers with integration and empowerment, assisting and giving them the most relevant information. Our goal is to make the process more simplified, reachable and less stressful for the people who have gone through lots of challenges like you!

## How did the groups arrive at these solutions?

Identifying the root cause of the problem

Ideating key features and possible solutions for the problem

Prototyping the selected solution

## Identifying the root cause of the problem

Throughout the first phase of the Co-Projecting Workshop, the participants identified different causes that contributed to the lack of participation and integration within municipalities. By organizing and clustering them, they can be summed up in these three thematic areas:

- Accessing rights and services:  
Including difficulties for newcomers to access resources and information, non-adapted information material, a complicated juridical framework, language & communication issues, lack of financial and human resources/means from the public administration...
- New cultures and habits:  
New cultures, new ways of thinking that the public institutions are not always familiar with. New environment and codes for the newcomers to adapt to...
- Connecting to and including newcomers:  
Difficulty for local actors to know how to approach newcomers and where to find them, lack of inclusive activities that are designed to facilitate newcomer's inclusion, lack of trained agents on how to welcome newcomers...

Taking into consideration all the information shared, the participants were invited to create a "How might we" statement, that would guide the process of creating a collaborative solution. The participants elaborated the following statements

- Group 1: How might we improve the system of inclusion of the municipality for the newcomers through access to information, language, networking and exchanges in order to facilitate their participation in decision-making processes and local life.
- Group 2: How can we better the support of newcomers in order for them to learn the language and better communicate to start feeling included.
- Group 3: How might we have access to proper information for newcomers and professionals so that they can be empowered enough to have a stronger impact on decision-making processes.

## Ideating key features and possible solutions for the problem

The groups identified the following key features as important for the creation of a solution to the identified problem:

- Exchanges between newcomers and local actors / immersions ("a day in the life") in diverse sectors
- Cooperation/Collaboration between NGOs, business sector, universities municipalities and newcomers
- Meaningful inclusion of diverse newcomers within public institutions including through staff
- Access to opportunities such as employment opportunities, trainings language classes, education, housing ...
- Sensibilisation to reduce stereotypes
- Promoting culture & sports
- Open and Accessible information for all
- Communication & Technology
- Events
- Newcomers as referents/mentors for other newcomers



## Ideating key features and possible solutions for the problem

Considering the identified key features, different possible solutions emerged, such as:

Creating a new service within the municipality that would integrate and empower newcomers to participate in decision-making processes.

Create a free training for newcomers to feel included and able to participate in their host society.

Create a community of volunteers to help and empower newcomers to integrate and participate within their context.

After this moment, the groups started to understand what could be done. Many solutions were similar to each other, so converging was easier. The three groups decided to focus on the three ideas mentioned above and prototype them.

## Prototyping the selected solution

To prototype the selected solutions, the groups used a storyboard:

1

- A newcomer wonders how to participate.
- He has a first contact with a NGO, a personal contact, social media, the municipality or through internet and learns about the integration service.
- At the municipality he is redirected to the relevant service.
- Once he is part of it, he benefits from several key services: an intercultural space (with access to info, IT tools, spaces of exchanges, multilingual guides), discussions in municipal councils, trainings (debating skills, speeches, languages, administration, law, NGOs...), cultural outings/forums, and immersion days.
- All of this has the goal for the newcomer to feel empowered and able to participate in the life of the municipality.

2

- A newcomers tries to visit relatives to understand the administrative process.
- They need to call the Prefecture to start their procedures and then have to wait a long time and face many difficulties to do their processes at the prefecture and OFII.
- The user also faces difficult conditions in its accommodation and accessing health services (he needs an interpreter).
- Finally he hears about the training and asks to be registered to participate to his social assistant.
- He then starts the training at the municipality surrounded by newcomers like him.

3

- A newcomer with low confidence due to the lack of information has many questions on how he can make a change.
- He feels powerless, isolated, discriminated against, lonely and discouraged.
- He asks information to different groups: other newcomers, Prefectures, existing NGOs/communities and finally the newly created network of professional volunteers.
- The volunteers offer walk-in appointments, phone calls, messages, a website and info on their social channels. Their services include providing information, offering direction and guidance as well as informing newcomers of their rights.
- Newcomers feel empowered, included and ready to help others which means that the community becomes empowered and is changed.
- This results in better cooperation with the municipality and permits the participation of the community in decision processes which results in a virtuous circle.

In the end, the groups decided - as mentioned before - that...

- Solution 1: We are going to create a service dedicated to the inclusion/integration of newcomers in the local life and decision-making processes. This new service will put into place tools for communication, networking, community animation through a newcomer council, an intercultural space, a forum, outings and activities, immersion days and participation in local city councils. Thanks to this, newcomers will become local actors in the life of the municipality which will enhance the feeling of cohesion / living together through tolerance and acceptance, and promote citizenship and humanity.
- Solution 2: The direction of participatory citizenship and neighborhood life will offer free training for newcomers : FINA (Formation d'Inclusion Nouveaux Arrivants). It permits them to be helped to feel integrated in society. It includes: Learning French, Workshops on self-confidence, Cultural and sports outings, Professional internships, Workshops on sharing experiences and knowledge , Sensibilization to living together, Exchanges of good practices for the valorisation of competencies, Psychologist/Health professional, Access to the library/médiatèque.
- Solution 3: We are a community of professional volunteers who are empowered through previous processus of inclusion. We want to help newcomers with integration and empowerment, assisting and giving them the most relevant information. Our goal is to make the process more simplified, reachable and less stressful for the people who have gone through lots of challenges like you!

# TESTIMONIALS FROM PARTICIPANTS

"For me, sharing this experience with one another and listening to each other is the most powerful moment. With the program it's like a democratic practice that we have learned today. This is the way we can listen to one another." (Newcomer)

"The meeting was different because we were confronted with 'real' stories and not with assumptions we were making on their behalf." (Local Actor)

"I appreciated the intervention of the local actors, which enriched us and permitted us to know how municipalities work." (Newcomer)

"I really appreciate what we have done and our exchanges even if we had diverging points, we converged. The fact that we can exchange with very different points of view, mixed with newcomers and people from the administration, this was very rich." (Local Actor)

"I am leaving with many ideas. I think that the project developed by my group deserves to be deployed more widely and I am thinking about how I could mobilize my future community." (Local Actor)

"For the first time we listened to each other. It made me emotional and I understood there's many things to discuss." (Newcomer)

"The recommendations of the newcomers are useful for the community in which I work, where many nationalities live, but whose words are often absent. Some of these recommendations could be incorporated into participatory democracy mechanisms." (Local Actor)

"I really appreciated how different ideas and mindsets can bring new ideas. It was really amazing for me, we were discussing, we had different thoughts, ideas, but at least we collected all of them together for a solution" (Newcomer)

All newcomers said they strongly agreed or agreed that they had the space and opportunity to contribute actively to the workshop with local actors and that they experienced a better and closer relationship with them. As a result of participating in these workshops, 100% of newcomers also felt more confident in their ability to propose new ideas to local actors and participate to more workshops like this.

All local actors were satisfied with the level of collaboration and ideas of the group, as well as felt that the workshop permitted them to establish a better relationship with newcomers. 100% felt like they would like to participate in a process like this again and felt more inclined and confident to include newcomers in the participatory processes of their work.



**Embrace**



Any thoughts you want  
to share?  
Did you implement some  
solutions?  
Did this booklet inform  
your work/a project?  
Give your feedback  
[here!](#)



**AMIF PROGRAMME  
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