

Plan Einstein Academy

TRANSFERABILITY STUDY

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URBACT Innovation Transfer Networks 2024-2026

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Lead Expert:

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Transfer partners:

Coimbra (Portugal)
Suceava (Romania)
Thessaloniki (Greece)
Warsaw (Poland)
Zagreb (Croatia)

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Introduction

What is URBACT?

URBACT is the European Territorial Cooperation programme for towns and cities in the EU and accession countries. The current programme 'URBACT IV' runs from 2021 to 2027 and is financed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as well as the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument (NDICI3).

URBACT's mission is to enable cities to develop integrated solutions to common urban challenges, by networking, learning from one another's experiences, drawing lessons and identifying good practices to improve urban policies.

URBACT promotes participatory, place-based and integrated approaches to designing and implementing sustainable urban development policies, practices and innovations supported by transnational exchange and learning, capacity building, and knowledge & innovation transfer.

What are the URBACT Innovation Transfer Networks?

URBACT Innovation Transfer Networks (ITN) provide a two-year framework for cities to prepare for the transfer of successful innovative practices demonstrated under the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) initiative from 2016 to 2023.

Cities that have implemented an UIA project act as Lead Partners, working with a small group of partner cities interested to learn how to apply the innovation in their context.

The projects have three phases:

- **Phase 1 – Understand** (6 months): visits and exchanges to ensure a deep and shared understand of the original innovative practice and its transfer potential to the partner cities.
- **Phase 2 – Adapt** (12 months): exchange and learning activities focused on how the innovative practice can be adapted for implementation in the different partner city contexts.
- **Phase 3 – Preparing for Re-use** (6 months): exploring funding options and addressing opportunities and challenges for enabling and encouraging future implementation.

What is the Transferability Study?

This Transferability Study is the key output of the Understand Phase (Sep 2024-Feb 2025) of the Plan Einstein Academy Innovation Transfer Network. It provides the foundation for the ongoing activities of the network (Mar 2025-Aug 2026).

It sets out a detailed understanding of 'Plan Einstein', the innovative practice of the City of Utrecht that lies at the heart of this network. It goes on to examine its overall transferability and then the specific transferability to the five partner cities of Coimbra (PT), Suceava (RO), Thessaloniki (EL), Warsaw (PL) and Zagreb (HR).

Finally, it sets out the expected network journey and methodology to support the partner cities in developing their city-level plans for how to adapt and implement Plan Einstein in their context.

State of play after six months

The first six months of the Plan Einstein Academy network have now been completed and there is a good feeling of positivity within the network. Participants have already expressed that the network has started to feel 'like a family' – with everyone looking to support each other on a shared journey and where everyone can express openly their questions, doubts, hopes and expectations.

A tremendous amount of progress has been made in developing a detailed and in-depth shared understanding of the original Plan Einstein approach in Utrecht, which can seem relatively complex and nuanced. One of the challenges has been that the approach defies simple definition in terms of a specific set of obligatory activities and actions. It is more about putting into practice a set of principles, however that is done in practice.

However, this flexibility also offers real encouragement to transfer, since at its core Plan Einstein already takes account of the need to apply principles in ways which adapt and respond to specific local contexts.

Furthermore, one of the most exciting and promising aspects of this Innovation Transfer Network is that, in a very real sense, the first transfer city has been Utrecht itself, which has already shown how to transfer the innovation to other local contexts.

Plan Einstein is now part of local policy in Utrecht – agreed to unanimously across the political spectrum in 2019. Three new Plan Einstein locations have been opened in different neighbourhoods across the city, with a fourth on the way in early 2025. Each location is different, demonstrating the flexibility of Plan Einstein in adapting to different local needs and realities.

The five transfer partners are extremely diverse – by size, geography, local economic context and demographic trends, but also by migrant profiles and the opportunities and challenge these present. Nevertheless, all of them can take practical inspiration from Plan Einstein and all of them have a strong motivation to enhance aspects of local migration policy as it currently exists. The expectation at this early stage of the network is that all five transfer partners will be able to plan the implementation of significant aspects of Plan Einstein in their local context – and each of them in interestingly different ways!

The network journey so far

➤ Kick Off Meeting (TEX1 - Online) 9 September 2024

An opportunity for all partners and the Lead Expert to introduce themselves and discuss initial project objectives and first steps.

➤ URBACT ITN's Kick-Off Meeting (Paris) 1-2 October 2024

The first opportunity for representatives of all partners to meet in person and discuss aspects of the URBACT method, network understanding and up-coming journey.

➤ Deep Dive into Plan Einstein (TEX2 - Utrecht) 27-29 November 2024

All partners visited the Lead Partner, Utrecht for a 2.5-day deep dive into the Plan Einstein approach: an invaluable opportunity to visit, see and experience the Plan Einstein approach first-hand, take part in workshops and meet local partners.

➤ Building understanding (TEX3 - Online) 7, 10 & 13 January 2025

Three online sessions enabled the partnership to follow up on remaining questions and doubts about Utrecht's innovation and journey following the experiences of the deep dive.

➤ In-person Partner Visits 21 January – 14 February 2025

The Lead Partner and Lead Expert visited all five partner cities in a series of 2-day visits over a four-week period to get to know their local context, services, partners, challenges and hopes.

Section 1: The Innovative Practice

1.1. Introduction to Plan Einstein

"Living together, learning together and working together."

This is the core concept of Plan Einstein, the innovative practice from the City of Utrecht in the Netherlands in which refugees rebuild their lives at the very heart of the local community. The approach is based on responding to the needs of locals and new arrivals alike in ways that foster understanding, respect individual human rights and support personal development of all involved.

The Urban Innovative Action

Plan Einstein emerged from the 'Utrecht Refugee Launchpad' an Urban Innovative Actions project (2016-2019) which was the original name for the innovation conceived by the City of Utrecht during the 2015-2016 refugee 'crisis'.

Plan Einstein's theory of change stated that the project would create good relations in the neighbourhood, as well as deliver increased skills and connections and higher levels of mental wellbeing for asylum seekers and neighbourhood members.

Cities play a crucial role in the integration process of asylum seekers. The way we receive newcomers into our society has an impact on its future shape and prosperity. The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad (U-RLP) offers an inclusive approach to facilitate integration from day one, involving residents and social networks within the neighbourhood. The experience of living, learning and working together creates a shared social capital between newcomers and residents to launch social change and provide new work opportunities. People draw strength, inspiration and courage from the many meaningful encounters.

Maarten van Ooijen, Deputy Mayor of Utrecht

The innovation was tested with UIA funding. The city government built a partnership with NGOs, social enterprises and educational institutions. The project housed asylum seekers and refugees in the same complex as local young people in the district of Overvecht.

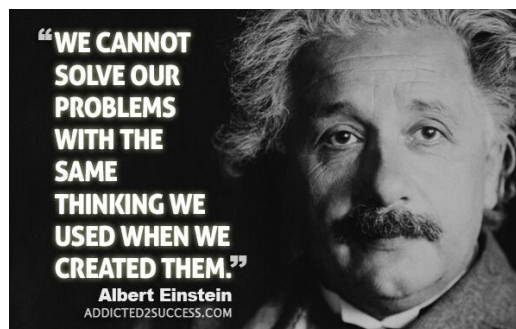
It used co-learning, inviting residents from the neighbourhood to take courses together and engage in social activities in a shared social space. Courses in English and entrepreneurship were offered as subjects of 'futureproof' value, useful to participants' professional future regardless of the country they would ultimately reside in.

The co-housing and co-learning reception facility, known locally as 'Plan Einstein', aimed to develop asylum seekers' social networks with neighbours, while providing opportunities for participants to develop their skills, to enhance wellbeing and improve community cohesion in the neighbourhood. As such, the project aimed to engage with concerns from receiving communities, activate asylum seekers 'from day one', as well as reverse the negative spiral of boredom, anxiety, and worsening mental health that existing approaches to reception generate.

Evaluation of the UIA project

The UIA project included a detailed evaluation conducted by a team of researchers from University College London, University of Oxford and the University of Roehampton who worked alongside the local partnership as the project unfolded.

Key conclusions of the evaluation of the initial Urban Innovative Action included:



1. **Good relations** – “Initially negative sentiments dominated public debate around the asylum seeker centre. However, this hostile narrative did not reflect the views of the majority once the centre opened.”
2. **Increased skills and connections** – “Plan Einstein helped participants make a ‘transition to transition’ into the labour market. It equipped participants with English language and entrepreneurship skills. It also gave them confidence and insight into Dutch society...”
3. **Increased wellbeing** – “Most asylum seeker and refugee participants reported improved feelings of wellbeing achieved through the Plan Einstein project. They felt able to use their time more productively in contrast to the feelings of boredom and depression they experienced in other asylum seeker centres.”
4. **Governance** – “Plan Einstein... brought together a network of organizations from different sectors, managed through the principles of equality and non-hierarchical organization... [Participants] were able to benefit from a holistic approach, and a diverse and complementary range of skills and networks offered by a range of people...”

“Plan Einstein provides an emerging solution through local level cooperation to some key challenges in asylum seeker reception. Its promise lies in its attention to relationships of asylum seekers: with each other, with people in the neighbourhood that surround reception centres and within local and national business environments. **It recognises the power of connection**, and understands social and professional networking as a key facilitator of integration. There is much evidence to support the investment in skills as a way of improving outcomes, which Plan Einstein did. Plan Einstein however also placed equal weight on developing asylum seekers’ (and some neighbourhood participants’) confidence, know-how and feelings of hope. **The innovation recognised those psychosocial aspects as necessities, not luxuries in helping participants make the ‘transition towards the transition’ to the labour market.** They proved important in facilitating the first steps towards activation and social integration...”

*Oliver, C. et al., 2019. The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad Final Evaluation Report.
University College London and COMPAS: University of Oxford.*

1.2. Policy Context

Understanding migrant profiles

The word 'migrant' is an extremely broad term covering a whole range and types of profile and experience. Before understanding policy and practice aimed at migrants, it is essential to have a more precise understanding of the different categories of migration and thus of migrant.

Voluntary v Forced Migration

Voluntary Migration	Forced Migration
People who choose to leave their home, often for better opportunities, e.g. economic migrants, educational migrants or lifestyle migrants.	People who are obliged to leave their home due to dangers or threats e.g. war, natural disaster, climate change & human trafficking.

Regular v Irregular Migration

Regular (Legal) Migration	Irregular (Undocumented) Migration
Movement with legal authorisation (e.g. work visas, student visas).	Movement without legal status (e.g. overstaying a visa, unauthorised border crossing).

Note: In many cases, the act of claiming asylum is, de facto, a request to regularise a necessarily initially undocumented status.

Asylum Seeker v Refugee

Asylum is a fundamental right and an international obligation for countries, as recognised in the 1951 Geneva Convention on the protection of refugees. The granting of asylum is based on a well-founded fear of persecution, war or violence in the person's home country.

Asylum Seeker	Refugee
A person who has fled their home country and is seeking international protection.	A person who has already been granted international protection (asylum) under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The crucial role of cities in migrant reception

Responsibility for migration and asylum policy in Europe is shared between the EU institutions and Member States. (See following page for more details and a timeline of key policy updates.) However, it is at the local level where migration actually 'happens' and where its effects need to be managed. Despite having no authority over asylum claims, local authorities are on the front lines of migrant and refugee reception.

Notably, cities play a crucial role in ensuring access to services including housing, education and health, as well as to work and training. They are also confronted with the challenge of ensuring social cohesion and addressing any potential conflicts with the local population.

The role of cities in managing the local impacts of migration is only growing. At the same time, cities typically suffer from a lack of sufficient resources to manage the migration they experience.

Migration & asylum policy at European level

EU migration and asylum policy is within the area of freedom, security and justice, established to develop and harmonise principles and measures used by Member States to regulate migration processes and to manage issues concerning asylum and refugee status in the EU.

The EU's Dublin Regulation determines which EU country is responsible for an application from someone seeking international protection (asylum) – usually the first country of entry. Key criticisms of this Regulation have been that it places an unfair burden on external border regions of the EU and fails to adequately guarantee the welfare and access to rights of people transferred from one EU country to another under these provisions.

The most recent 2024 update of the Dublin Regulation – which will come into force in 2026 – has sought to introduce greater solidarity between countries.

Migration & asylum policy at national level

Each EU Member State manages its own migration policies, including managing its borders and granting asylum and visas, in line with EU laws and agreements.

National policies determine integration policies and, for example, when an asylum seeker has the right to work in the country.

Application of the Dublin Regulation provides national governments the right to transfer asylum seekers back to the EU country deemed responsible for their claim. However, human rights groups have argued that people transferred under these provisions have not always been able to access their rights effectively or have the welfare adequately protected.

The role of local migration strategies

As stated on the previous page, cities play a crucial role in managing the arrival of new migrants. Many cities develop local migration strategies to guide this work. In many cases, city policies can be more welcoming and open to new arrivals than national policies. For example, some European cities (e.g. Barcelona and Berlin) have declared themselves 'sanctuary cities' or 'welcoming cities', providing protection for undocumented migrants.

Migration and Asylum policy in Europe: A short history

1997 – The **Dublin Convention** comes into force determining responsibility for processing asylum claims (usually: first country of entry).

1999 – The EU establishes a **Common European Asylum System (CEAS)** to ensure asylum seekers are treated equally, wherever they apply.

2001 – the **Temporary Protection Directive** provides for immediate, temporary protection for displaced people during a crisis (see 2022).

2003 – **Dublin II Regulation** updates the Dublin Convention, reinforcing the rule that the first country of entry processes asylum claims.

2004 – **Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency)** is established to strengthen external border management.

2008 – EU introduces the **Blue Card Directive** to attract highly skilled workers.

2011 – The **European Asylum Support Office (EASO)** is established to support national asylum systems and harmonise procedures

2013 – **Dublin III Regulation** updates asylum rules, improving appeals processes and rights for asylum seekers.

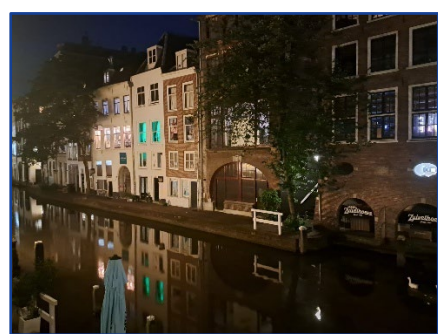
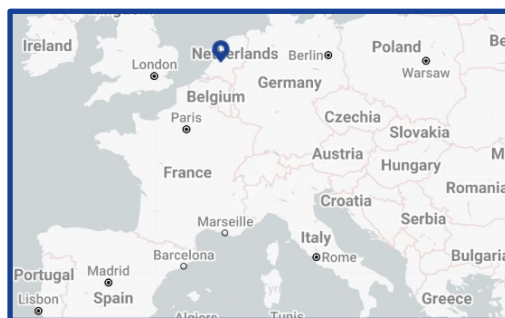
2022 – The **Temporary Protection Directive** is activated for the first time to protect Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian invasion.

2024 – **The New Pact on Migration and Asylum** is adopted, aiming for a more balanced system of responsibility-sharing and faster procedures.

1.3. Utrecht's Plan Einstein Journey

Introduction to the City of Utrecht

Utrecht is the fourth-largest in the Netherlands, with a population of around 360,000. Located in the centre of mainland Netherlands, the city is part of the larger Randstad conurbation that also includes Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. Due to its central position within the country, it is an important transport hub with the busiest railway station in the country and only 30 minutes from Schiphol airport.



Utrecht is a university town – home to one of the largest universities in the Netherlands – and known for its large student population of more than 70,000. This gives the city a relatively young population and the most highly educated workforce in the country with a well-developed knowledge-based economy.

The historic city centre of Utrecht is characterised by canals, wharfs, narrow streets and many buildings and structures dating back as far as the High Middle Ages, including its famous Dom Tower. Utrecht also has a rich culture, with many national and international festivals. It is also a biking city, characterised by a large number of cyclists and bike paths.

The qualities of the city and its surroundings make Utrecht a good environment for residents, businesses and visitors. In recent decades Utrecht has been the fastest growing large city in the Netherlands with its population forecast to reach 450,000 by 2040. However, this trend is also creating significant pressures on space, housing and mobility.

To address some of its urban challenges, Utrecht has participated in previous URBACT networks, including URGE, focused on introducing circular economy principles into the construction sector, and Tourism-Friendly Cities exploring more sustainable forms of tourism.

Background to the innovative practice

Utrecht has had an asylum centre (accommodation) in the city since 1993. This first facility was located in a former military hospital (located at Haydenlaan) and operated along quite traditional lines. There was limited contact between migrants and locals in the neighbourhood. At the same time, there were relatively few issues and little impetus to change things.

However, in 2015, Utrecht – like many cities across Europe – was faced with unprecedented numbers of new arrivals due to the migrant 'crisis' when more than 1.3 million people arrived in Europe requesting asylum from countries including Syria. At one point, city officials were told that buses would be arriving within two days with 500 refugees that needed housing. The only solution the city could offer were temporary accommodation (reception) facilities based on traditional models and surrounded by fences for 'security' – whether of new arrivals, locals or both.

Reception policy in the Netherlands is managed by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and has long been to locate most reception centres in fenced-off sites outside of cities, such as in former military camps. Under this policy, a typical asylum seeker is moved five times between different reception facilities while they wait for their application to be reviewed.

However, experience showed that these existing models isolated new arrivals from local communities, creating distance and often distrust between them. This failure was creating long-term problems for city neighbourhoods where resentment was building up, integration was slow and the well-being of the refugees negatively affected as they were effectively ‘held in limbo’ often for more than a year as they waited for their asylum claim to be reviewed.

Confronted by the urgency of the 2015 crisis, aware that current policies were creating long-term local problems and conscious that this wave of migrants was considered unlikely to be the last, high-ranking city officials argued that another approach was needed.

Local officials at the City of Utrecht, Jan Braat and Niene Oepkes, started to create the idea of Plan Einstein based on a completely new way of imagining the way that migrants and asylum seekers were received. The central idea was to put the reception centre at the heart of a city community, offering a more stable space in which contact with the host community would be encouraged to speed up integration and build relations with locals.

The Urban Innovative Action

As their ideas took shape – together with new partners, such as the Entrepreneurship Department of the University of Utrecht – the timing was perfect to apply for and receive funding under Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) to test their innovative ideas under the name [Utrecht Refugee Launchpad](#).

Their project aimed to house asylum seekers alongside local young people also in need of housing solutions and to provide activities and opportunities for people to live together, learn together, work together. Key aims were: social connections and good local relations; improved futureproof skills and labour market activation; and better wellbeing for all.

They received nearly EUR 2.8 million in UIA funding (European Regional Development Fund) for the project which ran for three years from November 2016 to October 2019.

The first location was a pair of former office buildings located on ‘Einsteinreed’ in the relatively deprived Utrecht neighbourhood of Overvecht. Since many local residents initially opposed the development of a new migrant reception facility in their neighbourhood, the deputy mayor promised that it would be only a temporary facility in use for only two years.

One of the buildings was developed by Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) as the **refugee reception centre** (accommodation). Under the project, the second building was converted by Socius housing company into 38 residential **rooms for local young people** as well as **classrooms and an incubator space**. The local young tenants had their rent discounted by ten per cent in exchange for a commitment to be involved in activities in the project.

The accommodation for refugees and local youngsters had a **shared courtyard** which was also improved so that outdoor activities and events could take place. There was also an open welcoming space, open to asylum seekers and locals alike.

Alongside, a range of activities were organised aimed at both asylum seekers and locals. These included **training courses in English, entrepreneurship and business incubation**. It also included less formal activities, such as eating together and Dutch-language tutoring, which were mostly organised by partner organisations or tenants themselves. Some of these were regular planned activities, whilst others were more spontaneous and ad hoc.

Highly positive initial results to build on

Keeping the deputy mayor's promise meant that the centre in Overvecht had to be closed when the three years of the original lease ended in November 2018. However, the pilot had already demonstrated its success during a two-year implementation period (following a slight delay in opening).

During its two years of operation, the reception facility took in 558 refugees and the courses proved a very successful way to bring asylum seekers and local people together on an equal footing. In addition, 65 one-off social activities took place in the two years bringing together migrants and local people (with about one third involving also people from the surrounding neighbourhood). Many of these were coordinated by associations, but others were more spontaneous and bottom up reflecting the hopes of the project that interactions would be increasingly natural and casual.

Even more significantly than these numbers, local attitudes towards the centre had significantly improved. Many locals who were initially opposed to the opening of the original centre now wanted it to remain open. This was a major development when the process of getting the centre ready to open had seen protests on the streets and the need for police intervention.



The project's successes convinced the City of Utrecht to open a second centre in a former military hospital at Haydnlaan (in another neighbourhood) to replace the closed pilot centre supported under UIA. However, the name of the original site at Einsteindreef, had already given the overall concept a new name. The project became known as 'Plan Einstein' and the new location was called 'Plan Einstein Haydn'.



Plan Einstein now official local policy in Utrecht

In 2019, Plan Einstein was adopted as local policy for the reception and inclusion of migrants by unanimity – including parties at all ends of the political spectrum. This has enabled, for example, the Municipality to point to local policy when receiving a request from the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) to house asylum seekers under the national policy. It can be done, but the implementation needs to respect Plan Einstein principles.

It has also enabled the Municipality to continue to roll out Plan Einstein locations within the city, each of which have demonstrated different applications according to the specific neighbourhood context and target groups. In summary:

- **Plan Einstein Haydn** has introduced Plan Einstein principles to Utrecht's longest standing refugee shelter. It was not possible to introduce a co-housing element, but the approach delivered an attractive, open space for meaningful encounters in a loft space in a neighbouring building, demonstrating excellent design principles and diverse activities.



- **Plan Einstein Pahud** has demonstrated a partnership with COA to provide housing for asylum seekers alongside housing for local young people. There are shared spaces for meaningful encounters between migrants and locals, plus diverse activities. The location includes an open welcoming space and classrooms.

- **Plan Einstein Hercules** has introduced a welcoming open space and activities for meaningful encounters in a neighbourhood where lots of Ukrainian refugees are already housed. There is no co-housing element, but plenty of joint activities, both formal and informal.
- **A 4th Plan Einstein Location** is opening in March 2025, as a shelter offering accommodation for 300 asylum seekers and a groundfloor welcoming open space for Plan Einstein activities.

Utrecht is also working increasing with '**Plan Einstein hubs**'. These are centres of activity outside (but mostly nearby) to the main Plain Einstein locations. They are created in partnership with other groups who control relevant spaces and can host relevant activities – building on the idea of the Plan Einstein ecosystem approach – not everything has to take place in the 'central' location.

1.4. Understanding Plan Einstein in Detail

This report has so far presented the core benefits of Plan Einstein and the key elements of Utrecht's journey in developing the approach. However, any attempt to transfer this practice requires a deeper understanding of what makes Plan Einstein, Plan Einstein. This was the core focus of the Deep Dive visit to Utrecht in late November 2024 and the online sessions held in January 2025 that respectively marked the 2nd and 3rd Transnational Exchange meetings of the project partnership.

The following builds on the lessons of not only the original Urban Innovative Action, but also Utrecht's subsequent experiences of implementing Plan Einstein in different local contexts.

High-level Principles

A. A Human Rights-Based Approach

Plan Einstein is grounded in respect for international human rights standards, which state that human rights apply to all people, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other characteristic and cannot be taken away except in specific legal circumstances. All human rights—civil, political, economic, social, and cultural—are equally important and interconnected.

Human rights-based approaches are important in shifting the focus from charity-based or needs-based approaches (which treat people as passive recipients) to a justice-based approach (where people are active rights holders). They aim to empower individuals and communities—particularly marginalised or vulnerable groups—to claim their rights while ensuring that governments and institutions are held accountable for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling these rights.

B. A Future-Free Approach

Plan Einstein advocates a future-free approach that includes two important and inter-related dimensions. On the one hand, it refers to policies or practices that focus on immediate, unconditional inclusion rather than making rights, opportunities, or status conditional on future events (such as economic contributions, long-term residency, or assimilation). Support is offered based on dignity and human rights (see previous principle) rather than future expectations.

On the other hand, support is provided in ways that can be expected to benefit individuals regardless of where their life path takes them next, even if that future is in another country. For example, trainings are focused on developing skills and competences which can be useful in different national and local contexts, rather than being necessarily targeted at local 'integration'.

C. Self-Narrative Restoration

Plan Einstein's approach is based on self-narrative restoration, a concept used in psychology to refer to the process of rebuilding a coherent, meaningful personal story after experiencing events that disrupt one's sense of identity, purpose, or continuity. It is closely linked to post traumatic growth, which is the idea that people can find meaning, strength, and new possibilities after adversity.

Neither concept deny the reality of personal trauma or suffering, but argue that individuals can find ways to grow and transform their lives positively in the face of these experiences. Clearly, the environment in which people find themselves has a big impact on their ability to do this and Plan Einstein seeks to provide a direct contrast to traditional approaches which typically leave asylum seekers in limbo while they wait for a decision, unable to work, train or take part in local society.

Implementation Principles

The high-level principles set out above are absolutely essential and fundamental to everything Plan Einstein is about – and should also be fundamental principles of any planned transfer of the Plan Einstein approach to another city. However, as the Deep Dive in Utrecht highlighted, it is not immediately obvious how to take these principles and implement them in practice.

To understand Plan Einstein in more practical terms, it is useful to think in terms of ‘implementation principles’ that can more directly guide specific actions. The Deep Dive and subsequent discussions with the Lead Partner team helped identify the following six ‘implementation principles’ that can help make a bridge between the high-level principles and concrete action.

1) Addressing the wants and needs of newcomers ‘from Day 1’.

Addressing the wants and needs of newcomers as soon as they arrive, starting by asking them about their hopes, skills, preferences and experiences has proved to be an extremely valuable way of avoiding situations where people’s mental health deteriorates due to forced inactivity as they wait for a decision on their asylum application. Indeed, in many cases, the fact of being socially active and engaged can help to improve feelings of personal wellbeing and lessen the impact of trauma.

What these wants and needs will be will obviously vary for every individual. What is important is the principle of engaging with people from their arrival. In the Utrecht context, the Dutch Council for Refugees – an independent volunteer organisation with over 9,000 volunteers – plays a crucial role in starting conversations with new arrivals on Day 1 to find out about them and support their first steps towards inclusion. It is a key part of implementing a human-rights based approach.

2) Activities supporting personal development.

Another key to the Plan Einstein approach is supporting personal development of both new arrivals and locals. This is an important component of both human-rights-based and future-free approaches. What is important is supporting the personal development of the individual not the real or perceived requirements of the hosting society or government. This aims to help the immediate well-being and future of the individual wherever this future takes them.

In Utrecht, this meant providing training courses for example in English and in entrepreneurship both of which were intended to be useful to all, whether remaining in Utrecht/the Netherlands, or moving on to another country, including returning to a different country of origin at some point.

3) Providing attractive spaces for meaningful encounters between locals and newcomers.

A key concept that emerged from the piloting of the UIA project was the importance of providing physical ‘spaces for meaningful encounters’ between new arrivals and locals. These must be attractive spaces where people want to come, but there is no single design that must be followed. Rather, whatever space is used must be accessible, open, attractive, welcoming and safe.

In Utrecht, the Haydnlaan Plan Einstein location has an attractive open space on the top floor of a former military hospital located next to a migrant reception (accommodation) facility. Meanwhile, the different Plan Einstein Pahud location has an open welcoming space (in a building with meeting rooms and classrooms) next to a co-housing facility accommodating migrants and local youngsters. At both locations locals and migrants drop in for organised and impromptu meetings and exchanges.

4) Joint activities for locals and newcomers on an equal footing.

Beyond, and in addition to, the provision of physical spaces, an important implementation principle of Plan Einstein is to organise and/or facilitate activities that bring locals and newcomers together as equals. One of the limitations of many traditional migrant reception approaches is that they treat new arrivals as ‘passive beneficiaries’ of support provided by locals, for example to learn the local language. Such ‘paternalistic’ approaches can be well-meaning but can quickly become problematic, being based on a clear imbalance in relationship and risking to maintain ‘us versus them’ mentalities.

Plan Einstein has demonstrated that activities that bring locals and migrants together as equals – for example to learn English or entrepreneurship in the same class – create more positive interactions and relationships between new arrivals and locals. Many participants ended up being surprised how much they had in common as they worked together on the same lesson content on an equal footing. Beyond these courses, activities based around aspects including food, music, art and culture also proved successful at bringing local and newcomers together as equals.

5) Addressing wants and needs within the local community.

An easy-to-overlook implementation principle of Plan Einstein is that services and approaches need also to identify and respond directly to local needs in order to avoid the build up of resentment and antagonism and to support positive relationships and mutual understanding between locals and newcomers. Another problem with many common forms of migrant inclusion policy (even well-meaning ones) is that local populations all-too-often become convinced that local authorities are spending valuable resources on newcomers, which should be used to support local people.

Utrecht has demonstrated the tremendous value in providing training courses, activities and services that also respond to the needs of local people, for example housing for local young people, training to help locals improve their English skills and open cultural activities. By doing so, they have not only achieved that locals and newcomers get to know each other individually, but also that local communities are happy to see Plan Einstein services in their neighbourhood. They recognise that the services are also for them. It is noteworthy here that the name change from ‘Utrecht Refugee Launchpad’ to ‘Plan Einstein’ was very important in this context.

6) Mobilising a supportive ecosystem of stakeholders.

Another core implementation principle of the Plan Einstein approach is that it is delivered through an engaged ecosystem of organisations and stakeholders. The local authority does not pretend to know exactly which activities should be organised for which groups and when. Rather, the philosophy is to support and enable a range of organisations who have something to offer in terms of activities, services, competences and skills.

For the City of Utrecht this has included working with: the Refugee Council (e.g. training volunteers and Day 1 engagement with new arrivals); the University of Utrecht (entrepreneurship courses); ‘Socius’ housing company (co-housing); Welkom in Utrecht (an NGO created in 2015 which e.g. manages open spaces and activities); Social Impact Factory (Business incubator); People’s University of Utrecht (business English courses); and an increasing range of arts and culture organisations including New Dutch Connections (matching to businesses and empowerment), StUT (theatre workshops and ‘Radio Einstein’), Eet Mee (eating together), De Voorkamer (e.g. creative workshops), Het Wilde Westen (e.g. music-based activities) and De Buitenkamer (gardening).

The essence of Plan Einstein: a one-page overview

At the highest level, Plan Einstein needs to be understood as a set of fundamental or ‘overarching principles’ which need to be respected.

Level 1 – Three ‘Overarching principles’

A. Respect for Human Rights	B. A Future-Free Approach	C. Self-Narrative Restoration
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These principles are absolutely essential and fundamental to everything Plan Einstein is about – and should also be fundamental principles of any planned transfer of the Plan Einstein approach to another city. However, as relatively ‘high-level’ principles they are not easy to implement without further understanding of how to do so.

Level 2 – Six ‘Implementation Principles’

1)	Addressing the wants and needs of newcomers ‘from Day 1’ .
2)	Activities supporting personal development
3)	Providing attractive spaces for meaningful encounters between locals and newcomers.
4)	Joint activities for locals and newcomers on an equal footing .
5)	Addressing wants and needs within the local community .
6)	Mobilising a supportive ecosystem of stakeholders.

These six principles were identified during the Deep Dive as ways of understanding how to turn the high-level overarching principles into action. This level was considered a useful new layer of understanding of the overall approach – sitting in between the high-level principles and specific activities on the ground.

Level 3 – A range of possible activities on the ground

The six implementation principles still need to be implemented through specific actions. However, there is no single set way of doing this. No activity or action is itself obligatory. For example, local implementation could include a co-housing solution, or it could not. It could include English-language lessons or not. The same is true for any and all of the other possible activities. The important thing is that whatever constellation of activities and services are proposed, that these respect and put into practice the above-mentioned principles.

Each local implementation of Plan Einstein can be a unique constellation of actions.



1.5. Utrecht's continuity plan

In many ways Utrecht has already planned and is delivering continuity of the Plan Einstein innovation demonstrated in the original UIA project. However, it is also an approach that allows for constant evolution, so Utrecht is always thinking about how to build on its Plan Einstein successes.

One area of interest is how to increase the focus on work and entrepreneurship, engaging migrants demonstrating both voluntary as well as involuntary migration, as well as the local population. Another area of interest is monitoring and evaluation of the long-term impact of Plan Einstein in Utrecht, in particular to review progress five years on from the new local policy.

1.6. Overall Transfer Potential

The findings of the first six months of our work in the Plan Einstein Academy are that the transfer potential of Utrecht's innovation to other cities in Europe is extremely high. Perhaps the most important reason is the flexibility of the approach – in which adaptation to different local contexts and needs is 'built in' to the fundamental concept.

Furthermore, Utrecht has already itself demonstrated transfer of the original innovation to different locations in the city. This includes Plan Einstein locations which already demonstrate significant practical differences in the way that the principles are applied. For example:

- Plan Einstein Pahud has a co-housing solution with local young people, shared outdoor facilities and a ground floor welcoming open space in a relatively disadvantaged area.
- Plan Einstein Haydn has no co-housing, but an open space on the top floor of a building next to the city's oldest reception facility and works with several local 'hubs'.
- Plan Einstein Hercules provides a ground-floor welcoming space in a relatively gentrified neighbourhood, aimed at refugees from Ukraine living in multiple nearby locations.

As stated on the previous page, no specific individual activity is obligatory for implementing the Plan Einstein philosophy and approach. It is not obligatory to put in place a co-housing solution. It is not necessary to have a migrant reception (accommodation) centre to base activities around. Transfer could focus on a specific neighbourhood or be city-wide. In either case, it could be focused on one location or the development of a network of 'hubs' or a combination of both.

Implementation of the principles could involve providing specific training courses, or it might be based solely on more informal types of activity – for example based around food, music, sports, arts, language or culture. Activities could be (part-)funded by the municipality or based on the existing resources of partners or based on volunteering.

The scale of the activities and ambitions can be shaped by local needs, local challenges, local opportunities and local resources. It will be possible for cities to 'start small', building up implementation of a Plan Einstein approach based on existing spaces, existing partners and existing activities. All that may be needed to start making progress may be specific targeted modifications to current, standard 'ways of working' in order to implement Plan Einstein principles.

At the same time, partners should consider – and the network will encourage them to consider – planning investments that could help implementation of Plan Einstein principles in the most impactful possible ways. This could include, for example, similar physical investments foreseen in the original Urban Innovative Action, in terms of providing ambitious housing solutions or new and attractive welcoming spaces.

Implementation success factors and transfer challenges identified at the Deep Dive

Perceived Success Factors of Utrecht's innovation	Perceived Implementation Challenges for transferring Plan Einstein to other cities
1. Local visionary/ies –who developed and pushed the idea of a radical new approach and achieved buy-in from others. 2. Initial philosophy and mindset – of wanting to make life better for newcomers. 3. Local political support – decision-makers who bought into the new approach. 4. Money – both the initial UIA innovation funding and current sustainable financing. 5. A strong local partnership – bringing together a range of complementary skills, competences and resources. 6. Local culture –perceived as being relatively open to newcomers (despite Utrecht's stories of local resistance). 7. Available space – both in terms of refugee shelters located within/near local communities and available 'attractive spaces for meaningful encounters'. 8. Existing expertise – in terms of knowledge, experience and competence related to migrant inclusion policy and practice. 9. Effective coordination – of Plan Einstein locations, and of partners and stakeholders. 10. A healthy sense of humour! – including the ability to remain positive in the face of setbacks and challenges.	1. Communicating the idea effectively – particularly to change 'closed' minds. 2. Lack of physical infrastructure – in terms of both appropriately located shelters and potential spaces for meaningful encounters. 3. Lack of money – in terms of both any potential physical investments that might be needed and ongoing running costs. 4. Resistance from the local community – including the perceived potential for considerable resistance and even conflict. 5. Diversity of migrant profiles – including important perceived differences in working with e.g. transiting migrants, Ukrainian refugees and economic migrants. 6. Lack of local political support – including potential lack of buy-in or even resistance. 7. Relationship with the national authorities – given their crucial role/responsibilities on asylum decisions, reception facilities etc. 8. Diversity of possible activities – it is not obvious what to do when no individual activities are indispensable. 9. Partnership building – it can take time to identify partners, create a shared vision and build effective working relationships. 10. The right skills and mindsets – including having a listening culture and not losing touch with the fundamental principles.

Key tips based on the experience of Utrecht

✓ Think about both activities <u>and</u> physical spaces for supporting inclusion. ✓ Think about the design of truly attractive and welcoming open spaces. ✓ Find and empower trusted partners – building the ecosystem over time. ✓ Train partners and volunteers in the Plan Einstein philosophy. ✓ Don't micro-manage - allow new activities to emerge from the ecosystem.	✓ Capitalise on existing 'hubs' of activity and social networks. ✓ Words matter – give activities and spaces names that seem open to locals. ✓ Give it time for relationships to develop and for activities to become popular. ✓ Be sensitive to, but not overly driven by dominant narratives of hostility. ✓ Celebrate your successes to help change mindsets.
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Section 2: Partner Profiles

2.1 Introduction

The Plan Einstein Academy network is characterised by its diversity.

This diversity is apparent in several aspects including: city size, geographic location, migrant profiles, local experiences of migrant reception and local policies towards migrant inclusion.

Notably, the network has

- **two capital cities:** Warsaw and Zagreb.
- **two western European cities:** Utrecht and Coimbra.
- **two cities near the ‘frontline’ of refugee reception from Ukraine:** Warsaw and Suceava
- **two south-east European cities,** particularly impacted by mass migration at early stages along the ‘Balkan route’: Thessaloniki and Zagreb.
- **two cities particularly keen to retain migrants** to balance out local demographic trends and address gaps in the labour market: Coimbra and Suceava.
- **two cities from more developed regions:** Utrecht and Warsaw
- **two cities with limited previous experience of mass arrivals:** Coimbra and Suceava
- **two metropolitan cities with populations over 1 million:** Warsaw and Thessaloniki
- **one ‘city partner’ participating on the basis of intermunicipal cooperation:** Coimbra
- **two cities that have relatively large refugee reception centres/shelters managed by national authorities in the suburbs of their city:** Zagreb and Thessaloniki.
- **one city that manages its own refugee reception centres/shelters:** Warsaw

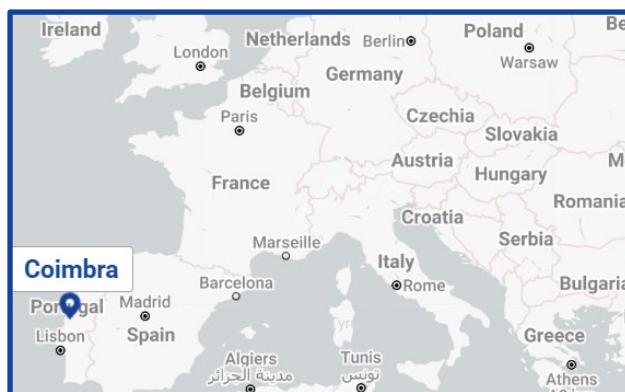
Map OF PARTNERSHIP

The diversity of the transfer partners matches with the flexibility and adaptability of the Plan Einstein approach to create unique combinations of possibilities, opportunities and preferences for transfer. These are further explored in the partner profiles on the following pages.

2.2 Coimbra (Portugal)

The Intermunicipal Community of Coimbra

The Intermunicipal Community of Coimbra Region is the largest Intermunicipal Community (CIM) in the country, located in the Central Region of Portugal, approximately half-way between the cities of Lisbon to the south and Porto to the north.



It includes 19 municipalities from three different districts (Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu), covering an area of 4336 km² and with around 460,000 inhabitants. It is inevitably very heterogeneous, in terms of population densities, age structure and level of education, comprising diverse coastal, rural and urban areas. It includes several cities and towns with historical and functional links, giving it a high capacity for metropolisation.

With the process of decentralisation of powers, the CIMs and local authorities have taken on a more active role in structuring local and regional strategies and policies on issues such as migration, equality, education, health, housing, social and economic integration, and democratic participation.



The city of Coimbra itself is known for its university – one of the oldest in Europe and its historic buildings, which were classified as a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 2013: "Coimbra offers an outstanding example of an integrated university city with a specific urban typology as well as its own ceremonial and cultural traditions that have been kept alive through the ages".

One of the biggest challenges that the Coimbra region faces is the general ageing of the local population, which is a reality throughout the country, which results in a lack of workforce across different economic sectors, but mostly construction, agriculture and tourism. Many of the more rural parts of the territory were also very seriously impacted by the large 2017 forest fires.

Migrant profiles

Whilst there is a diverse migrant population across the Coimbra region, including refugees, beneficiaries of international and temporary protection, most migrants come through voluntary migration in search of work and/or better living conditions. In the 1970s, a significant proportion of migrants was from the former Portuguese colonies. However, in more recent times, there has been a growing diversification of migrant residents from countries such as Nepal, India, China and Brazil.

In recent years, this growth in migration has only increased. From 2018 to 2022, the region saw a 75% increase in its migrant population, with particular increases in migrants from Brazil (+95%), Angola and United Kingdom. All but one of the Coimbra CIM's 19 municipalities has seen an increase in the population of foreign nationality in that time. Overall, the most prevalent nationalities in the region are now: Brazilian, British, Italian, French, Indian and Nepalese.

National reception policies

The national Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA) is responsible for national reception policy, operating under the legal framework provided by a 2007 law that regulates the Entry, Permanence, Exit and Removal of Foreigners from The National Territory.

Portugal established a process for workers in an irregular migration situation to register, enabling them to work without a visa for one year and then receive a two-year (renewable) resident permit. However, due to the accumulation of 400,000 pending cases, which was too many to manage, the mechanism was stopped. Since June 2024, migrants must enter Portugal with the appropriate visa.

Currently, the biggest challenge at national level is the length of time it takes to legalise migrants, , resulting in great difficulty in accessing social and health support until they have their papers. The government recently created a task force to resolve the 400,000 pending legalisation requests, with more physical service centres and online mechanisms set up to facilitate the processes.

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund Programme (FAMI2030) co-financed by the EU is intended to contribute to the effective management of migration flows and to the strengthening of asylum and immigration policies, in line with the Union acquis and in full respect of the international obligations of the Union and the Member States.

A 'More Social' Region

The Integrated Territorial Development Strategy (EIDT) for the Coimbra Region for the period 2021-2027 promises a Region committed to enhancing its endogenous potential, facilitating mobility and guaranteeing equal access to employment, health, education, culture and social rights. One of its priority intervention areas is: 'A More Social Region' - Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. In this context, the CIM brings together thematic working groups (under the coordination of a Supra-Council Social Platform to analyse social problems and potential solutions.

The Coimbra CIM has been a signatory of the Portuguese Charter for Diversity since February 2024, assuming diversity "as an ethical imperative, translating into a basic and guiding principle of its internal and external actions, forming part of its values and institutional identity".

In 2019, CIM Coimbra Region coordinated the creation of 19 individual diagnoses and Municipal Plans for Equality and Non-Discrimination, which were approved in December 2022. The aim is now to create a regional strategy. It has similar ambitions in the field of migrant integration (see below).

Ambitious intermunicipal plans for migrant integration

In 2024, CIM of Coimbra Region submitted an application to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2030 (FAMI2023) to draw up one Intermunicipal Plan for the Integration of Migrants and its Action Plan, and to draw up/revise 19 Municipal Plans for the Integration of Migrants and their action plans. The aim is to promote the reception and socio-economic integration of migrants and to contribute to an integrated, comprehensive and cross-cutting vision of migration policies.

A second FAMI2023 application is currently being prepared, focused specifically on labour migration from the Valle del Cauca in Colombia, in partnership with the Government of Valle del Cauca. The main objective is to promote legal and informed labour migration, in accordance with the needs of both the territory of the Coimbra Region and the migrants involved, contributing to their integration and social and economic inclusion. The project idea includes both awareness-raising and information actions in Colombia and information and training actions for employers in the Coimbra region.

Local reception policies

In the context of local labour shortages and the significant increase in the number and diversity of migrants arriving in the region, it is considered essential to work locally to promote improved reception and integration of migrants. Six municipalities in the Coimbra region – Arganil, Mealhada, Góis, Cantanhede, Coimbra and Tábua – have set up local support centres for the integration of migrants (CLAIMs). These form part of an increasingly broad national network started in 2005.

CLAIMs are reception, information and support offices whose mission is to support the whole process of welcoming and integrating migrants and promoting interculturality at local level. CLAIMs are the result of partnerships established between the High Commission for Migration, local authorities and various local structures, working collaboratively to provide personalised services.

Local Example: Arganil

Arganil has a Municipal Plan for Integration of Migrants. It is one of the municipalities in Coimbra CIM that has a CLAIM. This has: produced a series of guides and leaflets (e.g. Arganil Welcomes and School Welcome Guide for Parents); translated info/forms of local services to English; delivered training /awareness activities on e.g. non-discrimination, Portuguese and how to start an association; and organised intercultural activities around crafts, food, music and dance, including annual festivals, group walks and 'the family next door' lunches.

CLAIMs provide general support and information in various areas, such as regularisation, nationality, family reunification, housing, voluntary return, work, health and education. A large percentage of the requests are from some of the most vulnerable migrants needing support with the legalisation process, or to meet their basic needs in situations of unemployment or precarity.

Local ecosystem

Coimbra CIM is dealing with an ecosystem at intermunicipal level, which includes: the Regional Development Agency, the Directorate General for Educational Institutions; the Public Employment Service; the Union of Portuguese Misericórdias and NGOs such as Caritas, the Red Cross and 'A Casa' which has 120 volunteers on activities including integration of migrants.

However, each of the 19 municipalities also has their own unique local ecosystem typically involving engaged citizens, active neighbourhood groups and local associations of diverse types.

Initial Ideas for Transfer of Plan Einstein

1. Integrate Plan Einstein principles into the new Inter-Municipal Plan for the Integration of Migrants + the 19 individual municipal plans.
2. Build Plan Einstein principles into the work/spaces of local support centres for the integration of migrants (CLAIMs).
3. Develop a range of small-scale activities providing meaningful encounters e.g. local, festivals, food with neighbours etc.
4. Increase meaningful encounters focused on responding to specific local needs in often rural areas e.g. forest fire brigades, building a house for young people with disabilities.

Key strengths / opportunities to build on in Coimbra

1. Plans for a new Inter-Municipal Plan for the Integration of Migrants
2. Plans for 19 new Municipal Plans for the Integration of Migrants
3. Politically open to attract new arrivals for local labour market
4. Local support centres for the integration of migrants (CLAIMs)
5. A strong capacity for mobilising European funding in CIM Coimbra.

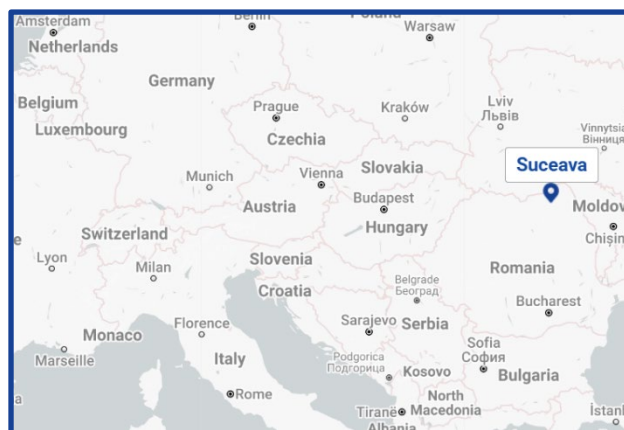
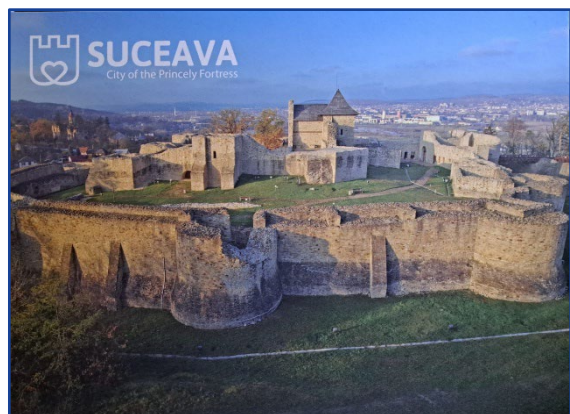
2.3 Suceava (Romania)

Introduction to the City of Suceava

Suceava is a city of 84,322 people, the 22nd largest in Romania. It is located in the Bukovina region in the northeast of Romania, just 43 km from the nearest border crossing with Ukraine and 450 km from the capital Bucharest.

One of the oldest settlements in Romania,

Suceava is known for its Medieval Seat Fortress overlooking the city. This important historic monument has seen considerable renovation in recent years with ERDF support. More broadly, the



region is known for its many 'painted monasteries' of Bucovina, eight of which are on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

In recent years, the city has been keen to attract foreign investment and is undergoing major renovation to improve the quality of life of its citizens, but also to boost its potential for tourism and as a base for new industries. This has had to a significant increase in demand for labour in construction, logistics and tourism.

The city has its own airport, located 12km east of the centre. It is also home to the University of Suceava (Stefan the Great University).

European policies are a permanent concern of the local authorities. The inclusion of Suceava Municipality as one of the EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 is considered a notable success in this context. The city has ambitious goals to slash emissions rapidly and pioneer innovative approaches with citizens and stakeholders.

Migrant profiles

Suceava has long had a small minority Ukrainian population. However, the Siret border crossing in Suceava County became an important entry point for Ukrainians fleeing the war after 2022. Overall, Romania received the third largest number of border crossings from Ukraine (after Poland and Hungary), with 6 million crossings recorded since the start of the war. In 2024, the Suceava branch of the Union of Ukrainians from Romania had 8,506 members.

In 2024, the police officers of the Suceava Immigration Office registered 3,566 applications for residence permits and work visas from foreign citizens: 813 from the European Union and the rest from other third countries, notably: Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Turkey, China and Bangladesh. Around 2,800 requests were granted in 2024.

At the end of 2024, 172 labour contracts were active for Ukrainian refugees. More than 220 students have been enrolled in Suceava schools following an integration procedure (see below).

National reception policies

National reception centres (accommodation) for asylum seekers are managed by the General Inspectorate for Immigration. The closest such centre to Suceava is 35 km away in Radauti City, serving the four counties of Suceava, Iasi, Neamt and Botosani. It has 150 beds.

Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection have the right to financial support and the same rights to social and health services as Romanian citizens. Those unable to find a job can also access unemployment benefit of 130 EUR per month for 6-12 months.

Support for integration in the school system is provided in four stages: i) registration as an 'audience student'; ii) an introductory Romanian course - six hours per week, for a minimum period of 36 weeks; iii) a language skills assessment; iv) on receipt of a language-skills certificate, the child is enrolled and acquires the status of a student. Nevertheless, adapting to the complex needs of children traumatised by war and forced displacement has been challenging for all involved.

At the same time, national authorities also conduct controls to combat unauthorised ('illegal') stay by foreigners. In 2024, 103 foreigners were detected in such situations, mostly from Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Following these checks, 25 return decisions were issued with a 15- or 30-day deadline for voluntary departure from the territory of Romania.

Local reception policies

Despite feeling quite unprepared and having no local policy on migrant inclusion, the municipality of Suceava provided a local response to the Ukraine refugee crisis as one of the nearest cities to the border.

A temporary reception point for refugees was established in February 2022 at the 'Miron Costin' Secondary School, in the Burdujeni district of the city. This provided more than 200 beds and the provision of services to meet refugees' basic needs, including warm meals, hygiene products and health services.



However, the municipality soon realised that the crisis was not about to end and this temporary solution was not a good quality medium-term option for refugees. This initial emergency response was closed already in August 2022 and replaced with a lump sum payment to refugees, which was also soon found to be too expensive.

Now, for the first four months there is a payment of 150 EUR per month for a single person or 400 EUR per month for families. For the next six months, there is a minimum income of 70 EUR per month per family member, plus additional support for older people and families with children.

Although there is still no local policy on migrant inclusion, refugees are also provided with free passes for local public transport.

‘Arta’ Multifunctional Centre

Suceava benefits from a multifunctional centre built with European regional development funding and opened in summer 2023. It is located in the Itcani neighbourhood of the city, outside of the city centre.

This space includes a section run by the municipal library, a computer room and a modern theatre-style cinema, with regular showings for the local community.

The space is often used to host groups of schoolchildren for cultural and other activities



Local ecosystem of support for new arrivals

Suceava has a relatively small ecosystem of stakeholders engaged on topics of migrant inclusion. These include:

- **Local Administrative Institutions** – including Suceava Municipality Directorate of Social Assistance, the Suceava Prefect's Institution Department for Foreigners and the Suceava Immigration Office.
- **Sectoral Agencies** – including the County Employment Agency and County School Inspectorate.
- **Save the Children** – working with migrant children.
- **Union of Ukrainians from Romania - Suceava Branch** – which represents the Ukrainian diaspora in Suceava County.
- **Roma Cultural Mediators** – conducting outreach work to identify needs and support access to support services.
- **Post-Secondary School of Health** – which has worked to include Ukrainian students in its nursing, balneophysiotherapy, cosmetics and massage therapy programmes.
- **Petru Rares National College** – which includes a resource centre, providing a computer lab, a theatre/debate space and documentation centre, conceived as a community space.

Initial Ideas for Transfer of Plan Einstein

1. Create space for meaningful encounters at a city-centre location.
2. Create space for meaningful encounters at Arta Multifunctional Centre.
3. Develop a range of small-scale activities providing meaningful encounters. e.g. first aid courses for migrants and locals by the School of Health

Key strengths / opportunities to build on in Suceava

1. City open to attract new arrivals for local labour market
2. Cultural mediators who work with different migrant groups.
3. ‘Arta’ Multifunctional Centre
4. Empty municipality-owned city centre locations
5. A new local administration (Oct24) keen to find local successes.

2.4 Thessaloniki (Greece)

Introduction to the City of Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki is the second-largest city in Greece, located in Central Macedonia, on the Thermaic Gulf, at the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea. Covering an area of 19.3 km², the Municipality of Thessaloniki has a population of 319,045. More than 1 million people live in the wider metropolitan area of Thessaloniki (11 municipalities).

Thessaloniki is characterised by a strong mix of historic Greek and Roman buildings with modern urban development and high-rise flats. It has a relatively vibrant job market, especially in agriculture, hospitality, and more recently in construction.



The city's main university, Aristotle University, is the largest in Greece and the Balkans. The city is also renowned for its festivals, events and vibrant cultural life, including internationally important events such as the Thessaloniki International Fair and the Thessaloniki International Film Festival. On the other hand, affordable housing remains a major challenge in the city for locals as well as newcomers.

Thessaloniki is strategically located near Greece's northern border with North Macedonia, making it a common entry point for migrants looking to take the

Balkan route to northern Europe, in particular since the 'refugee crisis' of 2015. The city is also a transportation hub, making it accessible by train, bus, and road to people coming from the south of Greece or from the north (Turkey).

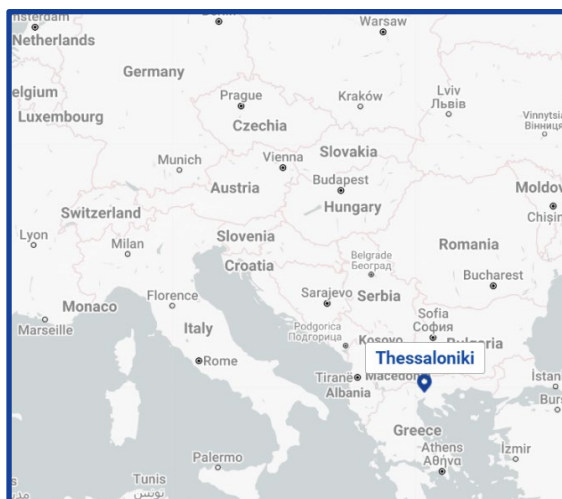
The refugee crisis led to the establishment of temporary camps and increased international aid efforts in the region. Many international NGOs still operate in Thessaloniki, providing aid, shelter (limited), and assistance to migrants and refugees.

Migrant profiles

Whilst the exact numbers fluctuate due to various migration trends, there are several thousand migrants living in Thessaloniki at any given time. Overall across Greece, it is estimated that 110 to 120 thousand people are seeking asylum and 450,000 residence permits are currently valid.

The migrant/refugee population in Thessaloniki is made up of people from different regions, including many long-term 'economic' migrants from countries such as Albania and Bulgaria as well as refugees and asylum seekers from countries including Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. There are also smaller numbers from African, South Asian, and Middle Eastern countries, including Nigeria, Somalia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and others.

A substantial portion of foreigners in Thessaloniki are asylum seekers waiting for their applications to be processed. This has led to an increase in legal uncertainty and reliance on humanitarian aid.



Many foreigners face exploitation in the labour market, often taking low-wage, seasonal, or informal jobs without legal protection. This further marginalizes them both socially and economically.

In recent years, due to the closure of borders and tighter immigration controls, the route through Thessaloniki has become less used as a passage to other European countries. However, people still arrive in the city as they search for better living conditions or await relocation to other EU countries.

Overall, while Thessaloniki continues to be a hub for migrants, it faces substantial challenges in providing adequate support, housing, and opportunities for integration.

National reception policies

The Ministry of Migration and Asylum of Greece has defined a National Strategy for the Social Integration of Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection. The latest version of this strategy from 2021 is the third such strategy and comprises four main pillars: pre-integration of asylum seekers; social integration of beneficiaries of international protection; prevention and protection from all forms of violence, exploitation & abuse; and monitoring the integration process.

Greece does not have a standard integration programme for all third-country nationals. However, the HELIOS project (Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection) was launched in 2018 and implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Greece. This initially received emergency ECHO finance and was then supported through AMIF funding 2019-2021. After that, it was maintained with national funding 2022-2024. It supported integration through: integration courses; accommodation support; employability support; integration monitoring; and sensitisation of the host community.

The HELIOS project was ended in November 2024 and replaced by HELIOS+ from January 2025, co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF+). This project is more explicitly focused on labour market integration of those granted asylum under the title 'Comprehensive Actions for the Integration of Third Country Nationals in the Labour Market'. It is coordinated by the Greek NGO Solidarity Now.

HELIOS+ services now include: career development and employability support; access to social and public services; language and communication skills; housing and independent living support; and community engagement and awareness. It also contains aspects aimed at the local population.

Also, Migrant Integration Centres (MICs) were set up under the national integration strategy. These offer one-stop-shop services in collaboration with local social services to cater to the individual needs of migrants, both beneficiaries of protection and other legally residing third-country nationals.

Nevertheless, Services mainly exist specifically for beneficiaries of international protection. Tailored services that can address needs of newcomers or those who are awaiting their asylum decision are very limited and, in practice, 'integration' starts once refugee status is formalised

Nationally managed reception centres in Thessaloniki

Diavata Reception and Identification Centre is one of the reception and identification centres managed by the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum located in Diavata, a suburb of Thessaloniki, around 15 km west of the city centre. Here, asylum seekers register their asylum claim and – as long as the application procedure is ongoing – the state provides temporary accommodation, healthcare and food.

The centre is designed to accommodate a large number of people, though it has faced challenges with overcrowding during peak migration periods. Occupancy in February 2025 was approximately 600 asylum seekers and recognised refugees.

Apart from Diavata, there are two more accommodation facilities for asylum seekers in the Metropolitan area of Thessaloniki managed by the national Ministry: at Lagadikia, hosting approximately 300 people; and at Vagiochori, hosting approximately 430 people.

Local reception policies

From the initial stages of the refugee crisis, Thessaloniki has shown a commitment to support processes prioritising principles linked to welcoming cities and that focus on integration and inclusion of newcomers and social cohesion. To support its knowledge development, it helped launch the National Network of Cities for Integration and also participates in the Eurocities Working Group for Migration and Integration.

In 2018, the Municipal Council of Thessaloniki endorsed an Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for Refugee and Migrant Integration - developed with support from the Regional Development Agency (MDAT) and the URBACT Arrival Cities Action Planning Network (2016-2018). The IAP set out plans for reform of administrative structures and services to aid integration and actions to empower individuals, while fostering collaboration with civil society to build a more inclusive city and society.

To implement the Arrival Cities IAP, the Municipality of Thessaloniki reformed its organisational chart, establishing a special Department for the Support and Integration of Migrants and Refugees. The Municipality operates the Municipal Advisory Board for the Integration of Migrants and Refugees as well as the one-stop service 'Migrant Integration Centre' (see next page), which are tools for implementing the national integration policy of third-country nationals at the local level.

The IAP and the structures and actions implemented by the Municipality of Thessaloniki are included in the Resilient Thessaloniki 2030 Strategy under the goal to "Co-create an inclusive city that invests in its human talent" and the specific objectives of "Welcoming Thessaloniki", "Co-creation of inclusive open spaces" and others.

The Municipality of Thessaloniki was the Lead Partner of the REACT project – Refugee Assistance Collaboration Thessaloniki – together with the neighbouring municipalities of Kalamaria and Neapoli-Sykies, the Regional Development Agency (MDAT) and some other (mainly NGO) partners. Since 2016, it has provided access to rented apartments, a small shelter and access to key support services, as well as educational and recreational activities for children with AMIF support.

At its peak the programme supported 979 people living in 177 apartments across the wider urban area. However, since 2020 the pressures to reduce costs only increased. The programme was transferred to the national Ministry and then stopped suddenly in 2024 with significant impact on those who had to be rehoused.

In several cases, activities aimed at supporting migrants and refugees are designed to be inclusive and open to local citizens as well, but in practice their participation remains extremely limited. This includes some occasional cultural and social events (food festivals, sports activities etc.), and some youth activities open to both local and migrant youth.

Migrant Integration Centre

Run by the Municipality of Thessaloniki, it acts as a 'one-stop-shop' and point of reference for all foreigners in the city, from undocumented migrants to EU citizens. Set up in 2017, it is funded by the Central Macedonia Operational Programme 2021-27 and the Greek Ministry of Labour. It provides access to social workers, intercultural mediators, job counsellors, legal advisors and psychologists. Key areas of request include help with accessing benefits, housing advice, asylum advice, educational opportunities and practical support. Its activities include offering a 5-week Greek course, a support group for parents, and information and signposting to other support services.



Blue refugee center

Created in 2016, based on the joint ideas of UNHCR and UNICEF to create 'blue dots' of access to integration support to asylum seekers and refugees, the 'Blue Refugee Center' is operated by the Greek NGO 'Solidarity Now'.

Located above shops, slightly outside the city centre, it offers services including legal support and advice, access to the internet, employability



support, psychosocial support, trainings, events and lots of smaller projects and activities. It is a free, open space, with attractive spaces for activities including arts and crafts and safe spaces for women,

It caters to both people living in the community and those living in camps. In 2024, it had around 3,000 unique users and about 8,000 sessions. It has noticed that people are increasingly looking to stay in Greece and realising it is harder to go to northern Europe. It lacks the capacity and funding to open up activities to the local community.

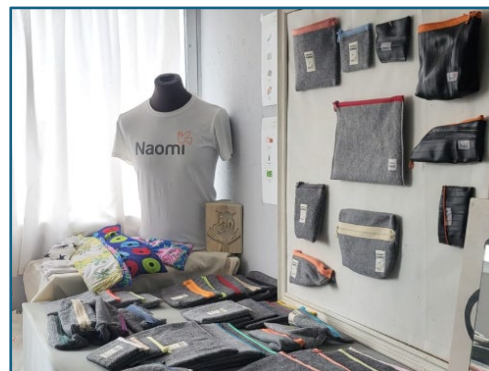
Local ecosystem

Thessaloniki is a historically diverse city with significant migration flows. As well as many international NGOs, there are therefore a number of local solidarity groups and community members who support newcomers. Members of the ecosystem in Thessaloniki include:

Key actors within the potential 'Plan Einstein' ecosystem in Thessaloniki include:

- **UNHCR** – protection services (legal, child protection, GBV) and services promoting integration (employability and language courses), as well as advocacy for refugee rights.
- **International Organisation for Migration (IOM)** - providing Greek lessons and housing; voluntary return and reintegration programs. Delivered the HELIOS project.

- **SolidarityNow** – Greek NGO that provides social services, legal support, and integration programs, helping migrants navigate bureaucratic processes and access basic services. It runs the 'Blue Refugee Shelter' in Thessaloniki.
- **YMCA** – creating opportunities for young migrants and refugees to engage in the community through e.g. sports, recreation and education.
- **Médecins du Monde Greece** – provides medical services focused on emergency medical assistance, mental health support, and primary healthcare.
- **IRIDA** – direct support and services to female migrants and Greeks, including legal assistance, shelter for gender-based violence (GBV), and psycho-social support.
- **GCR** – legal assistance, advocacy, and protection services for refugees and asylum seekers, helping to ensure they access their rights and entitlements.
- **ARSIS** – NGO focused on empowerment of marginalised groups, including refugees and migrants, providing psychosocial, educational, and legal services.
- **Praksis** – humanitarian organisation that offers various services to refugees, migrants, vulnerable Greeks, including healthcare, legal advice, and psychosocial support.
- **NAOMI** - Greek Ecumenical NGO created as an initiative of a group of local women to support refugee women and families after the 2015 crisis. It started with the provision of emergency support (e.g. hot meals) to people at the border, but from 2019 started focusing more on integration support. Its activities include sewing skills workshops, to both develop individuals' skills and upcycle waste materials into fashion accessories for sale.



Products from the NAOMI Ecumenical sewing workshop

Initial Ideas for Transfer of Plan Einstein

An initial set of potential ideas for transfer of the Plan Einstein approach and principles that emerged during the partner city visit include:

1. An ambitious project to integrate Plan Einstein and a new social housing project idea (Cities4CoHousing) – potentially seeking EUI innovation support.
2. A possible community-led housing initiative, where refugees and locals work together to create new housing solutions.
3. Seeking to integrate Plan Einstein principles into the spaces of the Blue Refugee Hub.
4. Building on the significant group of engaged local actors to provide a more coherent 'Plan Einstein' support ecosystem.

Key strengths / opportunities to build on in Thessaloniki

1. Participation in the Cities 4 Co-Housing Activity
2. Possible availability of historic building in the city, previously a self-organised shelter.
3. Dynamic group of active NGOs
4. Blue Refugee Centre
5. HELIOS+ project on labour market integration

2.5 Warsaw (Poland)

Introduction to the City of Warsaw

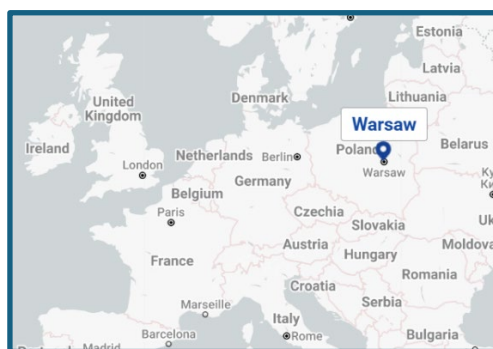
Warsaw is the capital and largest city of Poland situated in the east-central part of the country along the Vistula River. The municipality has the status of a city with county (powiat) rights and consists of 18... districts.

The city covers an area of approximately 517 square kilometres and has a population of around 1.9 million, reflecting a definite growth from previous years. The population includes a diverse demographic and a growing number of expatriates and



international students contributing to the city's multicultural atmosphere. Nevertheless, the city still experiences population ageing.

Warsaw is the largest labour market in Poland and offers academic attractiveness, hosting the leading universities in Poland and a high level of education in most schools. It also provides a diverse range of cultural opportunities with numerous cultural institutions located in the city.



In December 2023, the number of registered unemployed stood at 18,188 persons, 9.8% lower than the previous year. In 2019, there were 2,024 households waiting for housing assistance from the city administration; by 2023, this had fallen to 884 households. Nevertheless, availability of social housing remains an important challenge and the recent influx of refugees has strained housing markets, with rents in Warsaw increasing by 20%-30% in 2023-2024.

Migrant profiles

Warsaw has emerged as a significant centre for migration and refugees in recent years. A first important wave came from Belarus after its disputed presidential election of August 2020 and the subsequent persecution of protestors. Poland provided special instruments to facilitate their arrival, such as humanitarian visas, expedited access to the labour market and special business programmes.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, approximately 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees have sought asylum in Poland, with Warsaw hosting a substantial proportion due to its status. According to recent estimates, 112,722 Ukrainians benefitting from the EU's Temporary Protection Directive are resident in Warsaw (accounting for around 85% of Warsaw's foreign residents).

Since 2024, these trends have stabilised but remained high, including migrants from Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, and other Eastern European countries. Many have opted to stay in Warsaw, integrating into the workforce – often in low-wage sectors like hospitality, construction, and care services. In 2023, around 24,000 work permits for foreign migrants were issued, with the most represented countries being Turkey 21.2%, India 13.8% and Uzbekistan 6.7%.

Thanks to an agreement between the City of Warsaw with the Polish Centre for International Aid (PCPM) and UNICEF, several hundred Ukrainian teachers have been employed as assistant teachers in the capital's schools and kindergartens. A smaller but growing segment of migrants is expatriates and students from Asia and Africa, contributing to the city's increasing multicultural character.

The influx of refugees has presented both opportunities and challenges for the city's infrastructure, social services, and policy frameworks, including a sudden increase in demand for housing, health services and education. Around 26,000 pupils in Warsaw's schools (9%) are foreigners.

National Reception Policy

Whilst Ukrainian refugees have direct access to Temporary Protection, asylum seekers from other countries have to proceed through the standard national system, which can take a year to process applications. New arrivals have to submit their asylum application to the Border Guard (which has offices in Warsaw, though not in the centre) which in return has to provide them information on the asylum process, their rights and the address of the reception centre to which they have to report.

There are nine such reception centres for asylum seekers in locations across Poland with a total combined capacity of 1,479. As of 31 December 2023, 656 asylum seekers were residing in the centres. However, none of these are located in the city of Warsaw and in almost all cases they are located in the countryside far away from any population centres, creating risks of isolation. Another 3,493 asylum seekers were receiving assistance outside the centres.

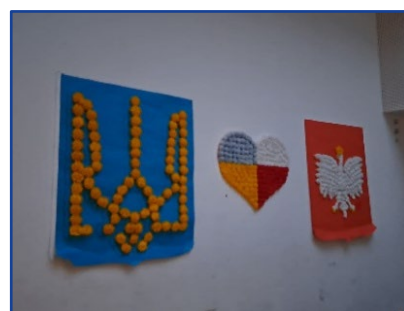
There is an Office for Foreigners also near the Border Guard offices in Warsaw where asylum seekers can submit applications for social assistance and receive services including health and psychological support and language classes (Polish and English). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is also present here and can provide more informal support.

Furthermore, in October 2024, the Polish government adopted a new migration strategy titled "Regain Control, Ensure Security," focusing on: Selective Migration Regulation (emphasising security and economic needs); Possibility of Temporary Suspension of Asylum Rights (in response to security concerns); and Restrictions on Student Visas. In November 2024, a civic public hearing was held on the topic of migration policy and how to implement it, with some highlighting the need to balance safety with human rights.

Emergency shelters for Ukrainian refugees

Since the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022, the Warsaw Family Support Centre – a governmental body funded by the municipality to run key family-focused services e.g. foster care and part of the Intercultural Centre for Social Development – has played the central role in providing emergency accommodation for the wave of refugee arrivals.

They have set up and operated as many as 13 refugee shelters since 2022, ranging from 30 to 400 places, although many of these were closed in 2023-2024. Some are still functioning, but no newcomers have been provided with accommodation there except in very urgent cases. As of January 2025, there were 491 places remaining in the city of Warsaw.



Artwork at one of the shelters for Ukrainian refugees

Local migrant integration policy

Despite its challenges, Warsaw continues to implement policies and programmes aimed at supporting integration. In May 2023, it opened a new **Foreigners' Social Integration Service** under the sign "Good to see you in Warsaw". It provides support services for migrants and refugees, including information services and signposting, legal advice, language courses, housing assistance, psychological support and career counselling.

There are meeting and consultation rooms, and also a small free, open space for people to sit and meet, including a play area for children. Social assistants can also go out to meet clients on request to provide support. The service is operated by the Intercultural Centre for Social Development.

Additional services also include a "Welcome to Warsaw" website, with information on the city and available support services. There is also a national smartphone application (app) launched in April 2024 by the national Office for Foreigners called 'Refugeebook' providing information on asylum procedures and social assistance, available in five languages: Polish, English, Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian.

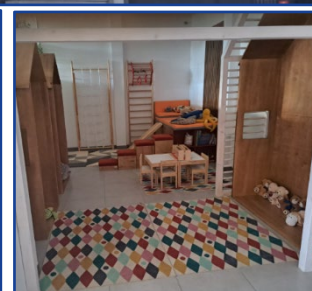
The national Social Integration Service also offers one-year Individual Programmes of Integration (IPs) for those granted international protection, operated in Warsaw through the Intercultural Centre for Social Development. These focus on supporting social integration, language integration and work integration and linked with the provision of financial assistance for housing, food and training. The number of IPs in Warsaw increased from 291 in 2019 to 1,181 in 2022.

Warsaw's project 'Supporting municipal action for refugees from Ukraine - engaging residents and community partners' was shortlisted for the European Social Services Awards 2023.

Warsaw Multicultural Centre

The Warsaw Multicultural Centre (CWW) is located at 54 Jagiellońska St is 'Warsaw's place for dialogue and integration'. It is a place for migrants and the local community, where each person can find an educational, cultural, counselling and information offer that is suitable for them. The centre supports the intercultural and civic integration of people living in Warsaw.

Downstairs it has a large open space area, where diverse activities are organised such as cooking workshops, coffee mornings and gatherings of local seniors (see photo, right). Upstairs there are meetings rooms and offices for managers and case workers.



Neighbourhood Activity Places (MALs)

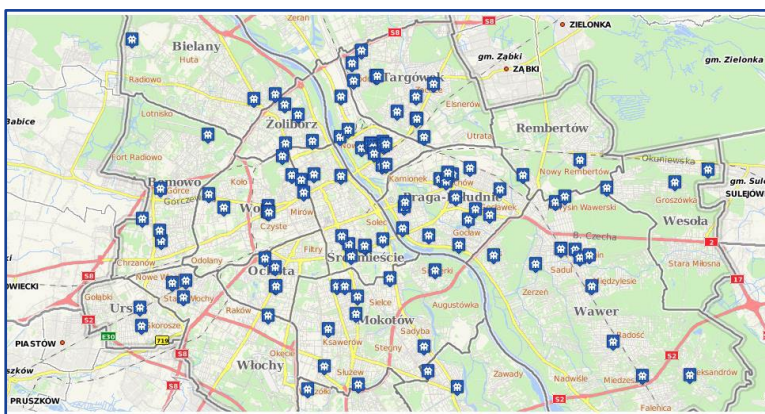
Warsaw has a local strategy in place called 'Warsaw 2030'. As well as seeking to increasing residents' engagement with local decision-making, one of the most relevant parts of this strategy from a Plan Einstein perspective is the operational objective that people living in Warsaw "spend time actively in [their] neighbourhood". Under this objective, the strategy specifically provides for the creation of local neighbourhood groups called 'neighbourhood activity places', known as MALs in Polish

Neighbourhood Activity Places (MALs) "will foster the establishment of interpersonal contacts, neighbour integration and cooperation, and the inclusion of newcomers to the local community."

Warsaw 2030 Strategy

MALs are based on the social commitment of people living in Warsaw, who realise their ideas, hold meetings and develop joint initiatives. The strategy makes specific reference to the inclusion of newcomers as part of the 'job description' of the MALs.

There are 120 MALs located in different neighbourhoods across Warsaw, including in local community centres, libraries, NGOs or cafes. In 2023, four new venues were created.



A map of 'local activity places' (MALs) across Warsaw

Local ecosystem of support for new arrivals

Warsaw has the largest third sector in the country with many thousands of active non-governmental organisations (NGOs), operating mainly in the fields of: education; research; tourism, recreation & sport; arts & culture; and social & humanitarian assistance.

More than a thousand such organisations cooperate with the City Council, which is organised mainly through the publication of open calls for proposals for the implementation of public tasks. In 2023, the regranting programme 'Warsaw - An Open City' provided 16 grants for the implementation of thematic projects aimed at migrants, such as tackling discrimination.

Key actors within the potential 'Plan Einstein' ecosystem in Warsaw include:

- **Polish Migration Forum** (established 2018) – an NGO helping migrants and refugees in Poland as well as Polish nationals returning from abroad, including through case work, educational support, psychological support, career counselling and a hotline.
- **Pathways International** – an international organisation specialising in developing safe and legal routes to protection and developing effective integration models for migrants
- **Catholic Intelligence Club (KIK)** – conducting activities for both younger and older people, increasingly including specific activities for Ukrainian children in Warsaw, including a school, safe spaces, young leaders programme and support to enter the Polish education system.
- **Neighbourhood Activity Places (MALs)** – see above.

- **Vela Foundation** – originally established in Greece in 2015, started operations in Warsaw in May 2022 to respond to needs of refugees from Ukraine, including distributing basic supplies and operating mobile child protection teams in emergency shelters.
- **Fundacja W Stronę Dialogu** (Towards Dialogue Foundation) – providing health, legal, employment, training and psychological support to Roma populations and refugees.
- **Multicultural Foundation** – focused on education, art and community building, including activities such as anti-discrimination workshops with locals, English language cafes and a multicultural arts collective.
- **Foundation for Freedom** – inclusive sport activities, such as the Etnoligo football league having teams of different migrant backgrounds and extra-curricular activities for children.
- **Career Centre for Foreigners** – dedicated service of the Public Employment Service.

All these organisations and more have been invited into the URBACT Local Group. However, they already met together twice a year in networking meetings of ‘organisations supporting foreigners’.

Initial Ideas for Transfer of Plan Einstein to Warsaw

An initial set of potential ideas for transfer of the Plan Einstein approach and principles that emerged during the partner city visit include:

1. A new shelter for refugees and young adults leaving foster care in Warsaw (although considered unlikely in practice).
2. Creation of a Plan Einstein space next to one of the existing shelters for Ukrainian refugees.
3. Building more Plan Einstein-type activities into the work of one or more MAL (neighbourhood group) – potentially as pilots for broader take up.
4. Building on the existing ecosystem of engaged NGOs to develop a more coherent and strategic offer of Plan Einstein-type services and activities to both refugees and local communities.
5. Adapt the Multicultural Centre to increase its attractiveness as an open space for meaningful encounters between newcomers and the local community.
6. Adapting the public spaces of the Foreigners’ Social Integration Service (‘Good to See You in Warsaw’) to be more attractive spaces for meaningful encounters.

Key strengths / opportunities to build on in Warsaw

1. Neighbourhood Activity Places (as per Warsaw 2030 Strategy)
2. Dynamic group of active NGOs
3. Multicultural Centre
4. ‘Good to See You in Warsaw’ Migrant Integration Centre

2.6 Zagreb (Croatia)

The City of Zagreb

Zagreb is the largest and capital city of Croatia, situated close to the northern border with Slovenia. It has a population of around 770,000 and is known as the cultural, scientific, economic, political and administrative centre of the country.

The City Assembly of 48 directly elected representatives is the representative body of the citizens of the City of Zagreb. There are also 16 city administrative bodies, founded for performing activities within the self-administrative sphere and activities entrusted by the state administration.

Zagreb is the most important transport hub in Croatia – known locally as the point where Central Europe, the Mediterranean and Southeast Europe meet – being well-connected by rail and road to other major cities in Croatia and neighbouring countries. The main airport serving Zagreb is Franjo Tuđman Airport (ZAG), located about 10 km southeast of the city centre.

It is a city known for its diverse economy, high quality of living, museums, sporting, and



entertainment events. Almost all of the largest Croatian companies, media, and scientific institutions have their headquarters in the city. Major branches of Zagreb's economy include high-tech industries and the service sector.

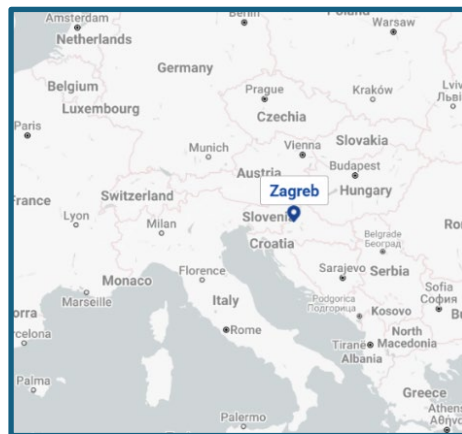
In March 2020 – during the Covid pandemic – the city was hit with an earthquake of magnitude 5.3 Mw, which caused substantial damage in the historical city centre. More than 1,900 buildings were reported to have been damaged to the point of being uninhabitable.

Migrant profiles

Official figures on the number of foreign nationals in Zagreb vary. According to the Statistical Yearbook of the City of Zagreb (2023), 13,628 of the city's inhabitants are foreign nationals. Meanwhile, Ministry of Interior data shows that 24,177 citizens of third countries had valid temporary residence permits for work purposes in the City of Zagreb in November 2024.

Amongst the main nationalities found in Zagreb are people from: Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nepal, Serbia, Philippines, India and Kosovo. New arrivals are also being seen from a greater diversity of countries, such as Burundi and Cuba. Migrants arriving as foreign workers from countries such as Nepal, Philippines and India tend to arrive through Franjo Tuđman Airport. Meanwhile others often cross the borders from neighbouring countries such as Serbia, Hungary, and Slovenia.

The increasing arrival of foreign workers in Zagreb – often working in low-wage sectors such as delivery riders or construction – has created new challenges for the city. Their arrival brings issues for integration, but also potential issues with visa overstay, exploitation of workers, trafficking issues, upholding workers' rights and so on.



Croatia is often a transit country and the city has been a stopover for many migrants' end route to Western Europe from countries affected by conflict in the Middle East. The city is now expecting a new wave of migrants being sent back to Croatia by other EU countries under the provisions of the updated Dublin III Regulations, since Croatia is a point of entry. The number of asylum seekers is expected to grow in the coming years, also in the face of ongoing regional instability in the Balkans.

National reception policies

Housing of persons under international protection and temporary protection is the responsibility of the state. Persons with approved international protection have the right to accommodation for a maximum of two years from the date of service of the decision on granting international protection. After the expiration of the two-year period, persons with approved international protection have the right to accommodation in accordance with the regulations governing the field of social welfare.

There is often a long wait for asylum applications to be considered, with limited resources within the Ministry of the Interior. Asylum seekers have the right to work after three months in Croatia.

While they are waiting, asylum applicants who lack funds are provided with accommodation in two national reception centres managed by the Service for Reception and Accommodation of Applicants for International Protection, of the Ministry of the Interior. The largest of these is located in Zagreb, in the building of the former Hotel Porin, a large Soviet-style hotel on the southeastern edge of the city. Housing more than 600 people, it opened as a centre in 2011.



The Porin reception centre is an open-type reception centre, meaning people staying there can enter and exit relatively freely between 11pm and 6am. It is situated on the outskirts of the residential part of the settlement, while a railway yard extends alongside the southern end of the centre. About three kilometres to the east of Porin, is a major landfill site in need of rehabilitation

Asylum seekers are accommodated in rooms with individuals of the same gender, unless they have arrived with their family. In addition, they receive other material support, including three daily meals, clothing, hygiene supplies, reimbursement for public transportation costs related to the international protection procedure, and financial assistance. A second smaller national reception centre is located at Kutina, a town of 13,735 inhabitants in a hilly region of central Croatia.

The Ministry of the Interior contracts NGOs to provide key services in the reception centres. It currently has contracts with two NGOs, who are the only ones allowed to access and work inside the centre: the Croatian Red Cross and Médecins du Monde, with the support of UNHCR.



Support activities provided include: social, arts & culture, educational and sports activities; individual and group psychosocial support; special care for vulnerable groups, emergency and long-term healthcare and practical assistance for everyday life.

The activities carried out in the Porin reception centre are not open to local citizens, and vice versa. Local residents generally have little interaction with the people accommodated in Porin, often perceiving them as a threat. Their views on asylum seekers from Porin tend to vary between compassion and concern, and fear and xenophobia.

Local reception policies

The City of Zagreb, recognising the importance of migration and integration of foreigners at the local level, started to participate in a number of AMIF-funded projects, with EURO CITIES. Under the CONNECTION project (CONNEcting Cities Towards Integration action), it developed the city's first Action Plan for the Integration of Applicants for International Protection and Persons Granted International Protection, which was adopted by the City Assembly for 2022.

The Action Plan provided for the establishment of a multi-stakeholder working body to steer all integration-related activities in the city: 'The Coordination Group for Integration'. Chaired by the Municipality, it currently consists of four representatives from city administrative bodies and five of migration populations, selected under an open call. This includes one person granted international protection, one under temporary protection and one non-EU foreign worker. One of its activities has been to oversee the development of updated annual action plans.

A second strategic document of local policy has been an Action Plan for the implementation of the Charter of Integrating Cities, which is focused on asylum seekers, persons granted international and temporary protection, and also foreign workers. Adopted by the City Assembly in 2023, it was initially foreseen for the 2023-2024 period, but its implementation was recently extended into 2025. There are plans to adopt a five-year strategic document implemented through annual Implementation Plans. The 2025 city budget allocates €130,000 for the integration plan.

The City of Zagreb has also adopted a Housing Decision that allows individuals under international protection to apply for city housing through a public tender, based on socio-economic status. Currently, the city is conducting focus group research to assess the evolving needs of the migrant community, ensuring that the results will be incorporated into the new integration strategy.

The City of Zagreb has no role within the Porin reception centre, but for example, cooperates with the national agency, for example to find places in schools for migrant children residing in the centre.

Welcome Centre in Zagreb (One-Stop Shop)

Under its local integration policy, the City of Zagreb established a one-stop shop 'Information Centre for Refugees and Migrants' for all foreign nationals, including refugees, asylum seekers and foreign workers. It opened its doors in a small location in the centre of Zagreb in September 2024.

It is delivered by the Municipality, in partnership with UNHCR, and in collaboration with various local legal advice services and NGOs.



By January 2025 it had received about 100 users, either in-person or via the phone. It helps people with all kinds of questions about local life, services and available support, including support and advice on access to work and legal questions of status.

Local ecosystem

Zagreb has a broad and active local ecosystem of NGOs and stakeholders working in the field of migrant inclusion. However, the NGO sector is under a lot of pressure in Croatia and there is limited funding for activities, with several NGOs having to close down activities. There are also significant limitations on space – particularly in the centre of the city. The ecosystem includes:

- **Jesuit Refugee Service** – With a building in a relatively deprived neighbourhood of Zagreb, an NGO providing language courses, translation services, intercultural meetings, cultural mediation, public outreach etc.
- **Croatian Red Cross** – NGO providing a Psychosocial Assistance and Protection Programme for asylum seekers.
- **Médecins du Monde (MdM)** – NGO providing emergency and long-term healthcare to asylum seekers.
- **Borders: none** – NGO offering Croatian language courses, familiarisation with local culture, public awareness about integration, IT workshops and employability support.
- **Cultural Centre Ribnikak** – Including an intercultural programme aimed at bringing locals and newcomers together. Includes: concerts mixing migrant and local musicians; regular activities aimed at migrant children; an 'Alternative Teaching' project in which migrants go into schools; and activities around the International Days of Migration/Refugees.
- **Center for Cultural Dialogue** – NGO promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue, supporting refugees in the integration process e.g. language courses, translations, cultural mediation, familiarisation with local culture, public awareness-raising, and capacity building of city officials.



Façade of the Jesuit Refugee Service building



Additional bodies providing support around language learning, empowerment, public awareness, integration support and capacity building: **Center for Peace Studies; Initiative Center for Education, Rehabilitation Center for Stress and Trauma; Zemljani - Are You Syrious; Living Studio Dajht Kralj.**

Initial Ideas for Transfer of Plan Einstein

1. New activities in the neighbourhood around the Porin reception centre to enable more meaningful encounters.
2. Integrate Plan Einstein into the next Action Plan on Integration.
3. Build a Plan Einstein-style ecosystem approach amongst the engaged stakeholders – coordinated by the Municipality or maybe the Coordination Group for Integration.
4. Adapt spaces provided by stakeholders in the local ecosystem to enhance their ability to act as spaces for meaningful encounters e.g. JRS, Center for Cultural Dialogue.
5. Turn the One-Stop Shop for migrants into a Plan Einstein 'hub'.

Key strengths / opportunities to build on in Zagreb

1. The presence of a large reception facility in the city.
2. New One-Stop Shop for migrants in the centre of the city.
3. Local Action Plan and 'Coordination Group' for Integration
4. Dynamic local ecosystem of engaged stakeholders

2.7 Transfer potential in summary

One of the really exciting aspects of the Plan Einstein Academy is that the partners are not just trying to transfer a project that finished in 2019. They are able to benefit from the experiences of Utrecht itself in ‘transferring’ that project into a sustainable model at local level. In many ways, the network is exploring the transfer of the current model as much as of the original innovation that inspired it.

This enables partners to also benefit from the lessons learned by Utrecht beyond the UIA funding and, for example, to see in person during the Deep Dive how Plan Einstein can be applied differently across more than one local context even within Utrecht.

Another enabling aspect of the transfer potential is that there are no specific individual activities that must be planned or implemented in the transfer cities. The starting point is not “You must do X, how will you fund it?”. The starting point is: “Here are some principles that need to be applied. How can you implement them in your context.” The flexibility and adaptability of Plan Einstein to local contexts is to a large extent ‘built in’ to the concept at its heart.

This enables, for example, Thessaloniki to start considering the possibility of planning a multi-million-euro investment in a new social housing project incorporating Plan Einstein philosophies and activities. It also enables, for example, Suceava, to start thinking about turning an empty city centre location – already owned by the municipality – into an attractive open space for meaningful encounters. Both these approaches fit coherently within the same network.

Another part of the flexibility of the approach is that it can also be applied to different target groups. Utrecht’s innovation was largely crisis-driven, starting out as an emergency response to the mass migration events of 2015 and the need to find a better way of receiving asylum seekers at local level to reduce the potential for conflict. However, Utrecht – and by extension the network – is also increasingly exploring the potential application of Plan Einstein principles to broader groups of migrants, including cases of voluntary migration moving in search of work or a better quality of life.

This flexibility means, for example, that Coimbra’s focus can if it wants be on how to apply Plan Einstein principles to support the retention of third country nationals from any country in order to support an inclusive vision that also aims to address challenges around demographic ageing and labour market shortages. On the other hand, it can enable Warsaw – if it so chooses – to maintain a focus on refugees and asylum seekers coming from Ukraine, Belarus and elsewhere.

Another area of flexibility is that it is possible to imagine transfer approaches that focus to different degrees on policy versus practice. In this context, the potential development of a new intermunicipal strategy for migrant inclusion in Coimbra seems a particularly interesting and promising opportunity to embed Plan Einstein into local policies. This may be strategically more important area of focus during the lifetime of the network than looking directly at specific local practices. Of course, it may be possible to do both.

In conclusion, the expectation at the end of the Understand Phase of the Plan Einstein Academy is that ALL cities will be able to plan and eventually implement the transfer of Plan Einstein in some way relevant to their local context – but also that each plan will be very different to the other reflecting the significant adaptability of Plan Einstein to specific local contexts, needs and preferences. Challenges remain, but the network will primarily adopt a positive approach, based on identifying and exploring opportunities in each city (see next section).

Section 3: Synthesis and methodology

3.1 Introduction

The Plan Einstein network partners have come a long way in the first six months of the project. The Deep Dive visit to Utrecht at the end of November 2024 was truly a deep dive – one that was inspiring, but also intimidating. A helpful analogy we used at the time was that Utrecht were presenting partners with something like a beautiful wedding cake. They allowed us to see it, to smell it, to taste it. They explained to us why it was important and the value it brought to the ‘wedding’. But, at the end of Day 1 in particular, many asked openly whether it could ever be possible to make such a cake in their city. Surely Utrecht was just the lucky beneficiary of a welcoming local population, some visionary local actors and some significant investment funding?

The Deep Dive was able to continue digging under these questions and the online TEX3 meeting in early January helped to clarify some of Utrecht’s journey to get where it is today. People increasingly understood both the challenges Utrecht had had to overcome and the adaptability of the Plan Einstein approach. Everyone understood, for example, that they did not necessarily have to develop a co-housing solution in their city, something that felt unattainable given both policy responsibilities and financial limitations in their contexts.

The city visits to each partner were also a crucial opportunity, not only to investigate local contexts, but to continue to dig deeper into a practical understanding of Plan Einstein with Utrecht’s Jan Braat.

3.2 Plan Einstein modules and network methodology

In certain ways, the above-outlined detailed reflections and discussions on Plan Einstein during the Understand Phase have already started the Adapt Phase of the network journey. The network partnership has already started thinking in some depth about how Plan Einstein can be adapted to different local contexts, taking inspiration from Utrecht’s own adaptation experiences since 2019.

At the same time, it feels like there is still more to understand about Plan Einstein itself, particularly in terms of understanding its adaptability and refining the thinking about what makes Plan Einstein, Plan Einstein. There are interesting questions to be further discussed about understanding how far you can bend the Plan Einstein principles before they break. e.g. When does an approach stop being a collection of ‘nice initiatives’ and start becoming an ‘ecosystem approach’? What really makes an open space for meaningful encounters? What does it take to put “Plan Einstein” up on the door?

To give some more structure to the ongoing reflections on further understanding and adapting Plan Einstein, the Plan Einstein ‘modules’ are divided into two categories:

- A. Continue to deepen understanding of the principles of the Plan Einstein philosophy** and how they can be implemented in practice.

‘Modules’ here include: i) Human-rights based approaches; ii) Future-free approaches; iii) Self-Narrative Restoration; and iv) Post-Traumatic Growth.

- B. Continue to deepen understanding of the practical implementation of Plan Einstein approaches**, including their key success factors and challenges for implementation.

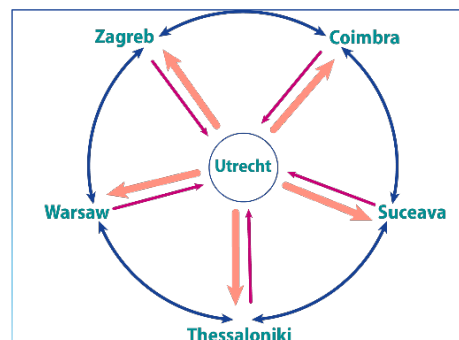
‘Modules’ here include: i) Spaces for meaningful encounters; ii) Activities enabling meaningful encounters; iii) Ecosystem approach; iv) Overcoming local resistance; v) Working with the media; vi) Achieving local political buy-in; vii) Working with national authorities.

Each aspect of the Plan Einstein philosophy will be frequently revisited during the lifetime of the network, but also made the key focus of the TEX5 online meeting in summer 2025, with support from specific Ad Hoc Experts with particular expertise on these principles and their implementation.

Each module of the practical implementation of Plan Einstein will be specifically addressed in at least one TEX meeting during the lifetime of the project. The typical approach will be to revisit Utrecht's experiences related to each module, being opening up into interactive sessions to explore understanding, ideas and inspiration for diverse local implementation approaches.

Knowledge Exchange model

A core part of the knowledge exchange/transfer is from the innovative practice city of Utrecht to the partners. However, there is also the important principle that each partner has ideas, practices and approaches to share. The learning and exchange is also back to Utrecht and between each partner. The knowledge exchange model of Plan Einstein Academy is presented in this diagram (right).



*Plan Einstein Academy
Knowledge Exchange Model*

The knowledge exchange model looks something like a wheel, containing elements of a radial model – from Utrecht in the centre out – but also of a carousel model with knowledge passing all the way round and among the partnership. (Note that lines between all partners are implied.)

This gives a third strand of content for the network's Transnational Exchange meetings:

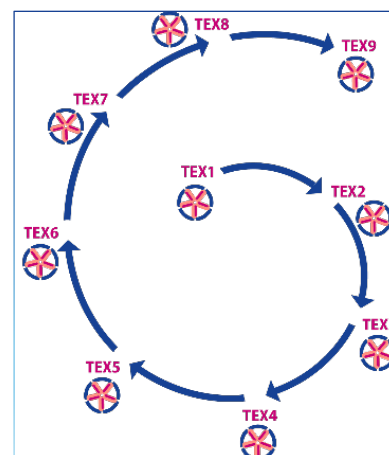
- C. Understand and share **inspiration from partner cities' approaches**, practices and ideas.

Networking model

At the same time that the knowledge exchange model looks like a wheel, the actual networking model looks more like a spiral. All partners are expected to participate in all transnational exchange meetings and to continue to take inspiration from Utrecht and each other at all stages. Partners will be on a collective journey together continuing the philosophy of acting as a 'family', whilst always thinking about how to adapt the learning to their own specific context.

This principle gives a fourth and final content strand for network transnational exchanges:

- D. Exchanging around key elements of the **Plan Einstein Academy network journey** to share progress, experiences, challenges and successes amongst the partnership.



*Plan Einstein Academy
Networking Model*

Topics here include: i) ULG creation and operation; ii) Testing actions; iii) Investment/Continuity Plans; iv) Mid-Term reflections; v) Peer Review of draft plans; vi) Lessons from the process; vii) Final report & Final event.

In addition, ad hoc 'trilateral' calls between a partner, the Lead Partner and the Lead Expert will be used to support the further development of specific local plans and respond to specific questions.

PLAN EINSTEIN ACADEMY NETWORK ROADMAP

UNDERSTAND PHASE (SEP 2024 - FEB 2025)

TEX1: Kick-off
Sep 2024, online
Getting to know each other; first steps & milestones

TEX3: Refining Understanding of Plan Einstein, Jan 2025, online
Understanding Utrecht's journey, follow-up from the Deep Dive

TEX2: Plan Einstein Deep Dive, Nov 2024, Utrecht (NL)
Study visits, workshops, exploring transfer potential etc.
Checking the emerging understanding

City Visits, Jan-Feb 2025
Study visits to all five Transfer Partners (by Lead Partner and Lead Expert only)

- ✓ Transferability Study
- ✓ Communications Plan
- ✓ 1st Network Article
- URBACT Local Groups in each city

ADAPT PHASE (MAR 2025 – FEB 2026)

TEX5: Revisiting the Philosophy, Jun 2025, online
Plan Einstein modules: Human Rights principles; Future-Free approaches; Self-Narrative Restoration; Post-Traumatic Growth; Role of local visionaries.
Network journey: Thinking on: testing actions; Investment Plans

TEX4: Reinforcing Local Partnerships, Mar 2025, Warsaw (PL)
Plan Einstein modules: Ecosystem approach; Spaces for meaningful encounters.
Partner exchanges: ULG developments; Inspiring local practices.
Network journey: Reflections from 'Understand Phase'; network comms plan.
Local partner site visits: Refugee shelter; Neighbourhood Group

TEX6: Overcoming Local Resistance
Oct 2025, Zagreb (HR)
Plan Einstein modules: Engaging the local community
Partner exchanges: Experiences from testing; Evolving partnerships
Network journey: Mid-Term Review
Local partner site visits: Refugee shelter; Migrant one-stop-shop

TEX7: Achieving Political Engagement, Feb 2026, online
Plan Einstein modules: Buy-in from local politicians; Working effectively with national authorities; Engaging the media.
Network journey: Developing the Investment Plans

PREPARE FOR RE-USE PHASE (MAR – AUG 2026)

TEX8: Local Plans and Strategies, Apr 2026, Coimbra (PT)
Plan Einstein modules: From local practice to local policy
Partner exchanges: Peer Review of draft Investment Plans
Network journey: Lessons on transfer; Final Report & Event
Local partner site visits: Neighbourhood approaches

TEX9: Celebration of Results
Jun 2026, Thessaloniki (EL)

- Six city Investment/Continuity Plans
- Lessons from transfer planning
- Ideas for Broadening Transfer
- Exploring funding opportunities
- Lessons for policy at all levels

- ✓ Quarterly Network Journals
- ✓ 2nd Network Article
- Draft city investment plans

- ✓ Network Final Report
- ✓ 3rd Network Article
- Final city investment plans