

# PILOT ACTION



## REFUGEES AS SOCIAL CARETAKERS

*Supporting the neighbourhood is supporting refugees*



HOUSING  
HOLISTIC MIXED



SOCIAL AND  
CULTURAL SERVICES  
LEGAL COUNSELING

### AIM

After legal recognition and institutional reception many refugees find it difficult to rent a house and have access to a full social integration in the local community. The Pilot aimed to give an answer to both these problems, at the same time showing to the natives that refugees can be a resource for the community as a whole, counteracting racism/ discrimination.

### APPROACH OF THE PILOT

During the pilot, a group of refugees was trained to become “social caretakers” (“portieri sociali”): the idea is that, by living in the apartments traditionally dedicated to this figure (who has lately disappeared in most of the apartment blocks) they could offer to their co-inhabitants both practical help (helping people in need in their everyday commitments; small condominium maintenance etc.) and social support (conflict prevention and mediation; organizing social events and small services; approaching and engaging other foreign inhabitants).

### ACHIEVEMENTS / OUTCOMES

#### *Training and implementation:*

- 18 refugees attended the training;
- 4 social caretakers were activated in 2 apartments;
- 14 organizations (local institutions/ services, native and migrant associations, groups of volunteers) engaged in the pilot activities;

#### *Immediate improvements due to the Social caretakers:*

- Support of the elderly e.g. for grocery transportation;
- Support of and participation in recreational and social activities, e.g. for the elderly and the “fragile” categories living in the neighborhood.
- Monitoring and supporting waste separation;
- Conflict mediation between neighbors (e.g. on building’s regulations);
- Restoration of public furniture and a housing floor to open it to local native and migrant associations;
- Management of a free “digital help-desk”;



SiforREF

European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund



### THE PROJECT

**Social Innovation for Refugees** (SiforREF) examines and tests solutions with the aim to support societal and labour market integration of refugees after their arrival in five Central European cities. The team consists of researchers, representatives of local government and actors from civil society.

### THE PILOT ACTION

The Pilots are concrete actions for the inclusion of refugees into society and labour market. Seven pilots were conducted from April 2021 until September 2021. Each of them addresses a specific challenge, target group, goal and working approach in respect to refugee inclusion.

### PARTICIPATING REGIONS

Berlin, Germany (2)  
Bologna, Italy (1)  
Ljubljana, Slovenia (1)  
Parma, Italy (1)  
Vienna, Austria (2)

### AIM

The findings from each Pilot contribute to develop social innovative and inclusive practices and policies that are mainstream and institutionalised.

### PILOT RESPONSIBILITY:



Comune di Parma



CIAC





## KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE PILOT

- Social integration is crucial both for refugees and local citizens;
- When refugees are seen as a resource for the neighborhood, this helps natives to change their mind about foreigners who are often perceived as a burden or a threat to security;
- Becoming social caretakers, refugees concretely contribute to peaceful and constructive intercultural relations in the place they live in, and at the same time they have good opportunities to enlarge their social networks, getting a mutual benefit from this experience;

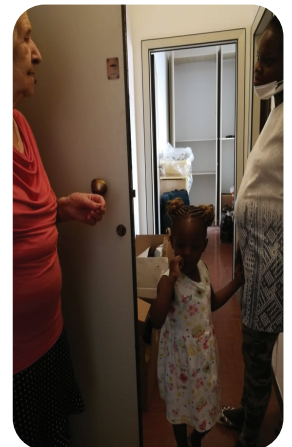
## FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

- Close synergy and constant connection between the 3 promoters of the Project (Municipality, Ciac, Coop. Connessioni);
- Wide participation by the world of local volunteering, associations etc.;
- Full cooperation from the caretakers and among the caretakers themselves;
- Characteristics of the neighbourhood: a positive environment, helping to foster sociality and conviviality in the community, presence of open and closed spaces and condominium gardens that favour human relational exchanges;



## STUMBLING BLOCKS

- Due to the Covid emergency, almost all of the initial training had to be carried out remotely and access to the neighborhood where the pilot takes place has been possible only when the refugees moved to the apartments which made it more difficult to actively engage the participants and the neighbourhood.
- Because of lockdowns and organizational delays (mainly due to the owner of the apartments), the pilot started months later than expected and which put a lot of pressure and uncertainties to the social caretakers, making it more difficult to keep them fully engaged in the project.
- Poor economic autonomy and uncertain perspectives on their future (because of precarious working conditions, lack of direct funding for their role and doubts on the possible extension of the pilot) influenced the full investment of the caretakers in the project.



## FUTURE POTENTIAL

- Possibility for the property owners to acquire, through experience in the field, a more far-sighted vision of the positive and negative dynamics in the neighbourhoods or in the real estate.
- Possibility for refugees to learn skills that can be spent in the community and be useful for socialization and for work/housing integration.
- Offer the possibility to associations and neighbourhood inhabitants to approach refugees with an inedited role: not as "people in need" but as subjects who can help to solve problems and respond to collective needs.