



Case Study 2

Exploring Integration Practices Using the FOCUS Approach

Austrian Red Cross Informative Podcasts

The FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration is a framework that aims to strengthen existing integration practices and to support the development of promising integration practices.

The case study conducted by the Austrian Red Cross (ARC) explores the relevance of the Participatory & Co-creative approaches dimension of the FOCUS Approach.

Austrian Red Cross (ARC)

The Austrian Red Cross is extensively involved in the care of refugees and asylum seekers especially through its federal units. The organisation plays a particularly important role in the early stages of people seeking the benefit of international protection. The ARC's unit in Upper Austria operates accommodation facilities hosting asylum seekers from different countries, with some persons staying a few weeks, and others for months.

Co-Creation of Podcasts for Recent Arrivals

In recent years, due to increasing migration to the region and a lack of resources (staff and housing), it has been difficult to provide adequate care for all new arrivals and to ensure they receive the necessary information that will facilitate their access to essential services and ultimately support integration.

The specific objective of this case study was to explore the use of a participatory approach to design an activity that better caters to the needs of residents of the ARC accommodation facilities and provides the information they need to ease their transition within Austrian society. A participatory approach was chosen to ensure that the activity would accurately target the concerns and strengths of the participants. In addition, it was hoped the participatory nature would result in the creation of an activity that supports the wellbeing of participants.

Critically, **the programme began without any pre-prescribed activity or topics.** It was shaped directly through active engagement with recent arrivals and peers at a more advanced stage of integration.



Format

Before developing the activity to be explored in this case study, the ARC together with the International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support (PSC) developed a framework for engaging with recent arrivals in an iterative process for creating and implementing a relevant programme. The proposed approach, including evaluation, was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Innsbruck.

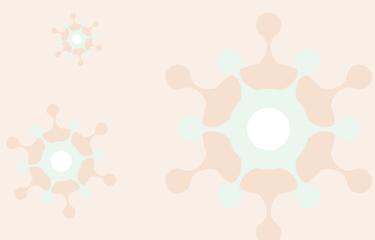
Four specific steps were followed:

- 1. Developing the core idea.** Focus groups to identify a meaningful activity were held with members of the arriving community. Podcasts relevant to issues around the early period of arrival were identified as being most pertinent to support the needs of new arrivals.
- 2. Shaping specific actions.** Interviews to determine contents of podcasts were held with members of the arriving community at various stages of the migration journey (including newly arrived persons and persons who had received settlement status in Austria).
- 3. Implementing the action.** Podcasts were developed on the topics that were identified to be most important to new arrivals (preparing for the asylum status hearing and the rules which apply within asylum accommodation facilities).
- 4. Evaluation.** Interviews were held with persons who listened to the podcasts to explore their reactions, recommendations for improvement and any potential impact the podcasts might have had on listener wellbeing.

The podcasts, focus groups and interviews used the language of the arriving community (Arabic) and were facilitated by active case workers in ARC facilities.

Timing & Impact of COVID

The changing nature of pandemic restrictions during the period of implementation required a flexible approach. Some activities had to be completed online and through different technologies due to differing levels of access.



Use of the FOCUS Approach

The primary focus of the case study was on the participatory and co-creative dimension of the FOCUS Approach. Everyone involved in the development of the case study was trained in the background and practical dimensions of this as well as the FOCUS Approach in general. Following the completion of the programme, the Approach was used as a guide for reviewing the programme.

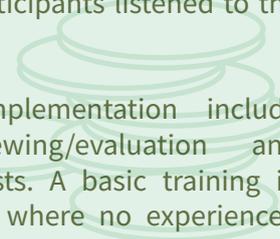
Resources



This project is viewed as having a relatively **low level of financial and resource commitment**. The initial start-up elements of the programme (which are broadly not required for ongoing implementation) took c.3 months inclusive of a lengthy ethical review which would normally not be needed if implemented as part of standard practice. Overall, excluding the ethical review process, six weeks were required for the core work of the co-creation of topics for the podcasts and implementation (writing the script and recording), and development of the interview guides.

The time required to conduct an individual interview varied from person to person. On average, it took approximately 30-45 minutes. The pre-interviews were conducted on one day. Post-interviews were conducted 10 days later over two days. In between, all participants listened to the podcasts in one day.

Skills required for implementation include interpretation, interviewing/evaluation and the recording of podcasts. A basic training in interviewing is required where no experienced staff are available.



Evaluation & Recommendations

A detailed evaluation was undertaken through key informant interviews with listeners. The principal focus was on the impact of the podcasts.

The project was found to be effective in enabling a co-creative and participatory approach linked to an activity of practical assistance to the arriving community, with a sense of co-ownership evident.

Time and support are essential to assisting participants in reaching a stage where they both feel comfortable giving their input.

Participants responded positively to the podcasts and reported a significant improvement in the knowledge of their priority topics.

Creating a space for expression and dialogue in a supportive atmosphere was considered instrumental to supporting wellbeing. This raises important practical implications for the FOCUS Approach.

Recommendations for further developing this activity

Integrating the FOCUS Approach element of Arriving & Receiving communities would be helpful. This could be done for example by involving volunteers.

While the focus here was on recently arrived persons seeking international protection, **a longer-term approach would need to address topics such as language, education and labour market participation.** This would broaden the range of expertise required.

In developing a genuinely participative and co-creative programme it is important to emphasise from the outset how multiple methodological approaches are required. This was achieved even though it had not been defined as an objective from the outset.

Recommendations for the FOCUS Approach and accompanying Implementation Guidance

Participatory and co-creative methodologies appear to be crucial at the early stages of activity development. **Offering participants an opportunity to design an activity based on their own needs was reportedly highly appreciated by participants** and had an added impact by supporting participants to feel heard. The FOCUS Approach should ensure participatory methodologies are employed to inform the inception phase of programme development.

The FOCUS Approach needs to highlight the importance of socioeconomic factors such as education and labour market opportunities for supporting dynamic integration.

Participants reported benefits to engaging in key informant interviews, even though these interviews were not originally considered a part of the activity but were used to gather evaluation information. **This unexpected finding highlights the importance of creating a safe space and providing an opportunity for open dialogue with arriving community members.** Implementation considerations for the FOCUS Approach should provide guidance to practitioners on how to create such a supportive space.

The FOCUS project

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