

# Civil society's role and experiences in the reception of refugees

**Eero Janson**, Estonian Refugee Council

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# Civil society roles

- Integration services
  - Especially support person service
- Advocacy and policy work
- Awareness raising
- Expert advice to other service providers

# Support person service

- Individual counselling and support to refugees, adaptive to specific needs and individuals
- Relatively unique in the EU
- Two main service providers:
  - Estonian Refugee Council (volunteer-based)
  - Johannes Mihkelson Centre (AMIF-funded)

# Support person service

- **Function 1: formalities**
  - Putting the refugee in contact with the municipality, Unemployment Office, schools/kindergartens, medical centre, etc.
  - Helping with applications (documents, initial benefits, family reunification) and contracts (rental, employment)

# Support person service

- **Function 2: practical advice & directions**
  - Where's the nearest shop? The nearest pharmacy?
  - How to get around the city?
  - How to search for a job?
  - Where to continue higher education?
  - How to get a local phone number / bank account?

# Support person service

- **Function 3: cultural interpretation**
  - Helping to understand the cultural nuances that underlie communications, thereby preventing miscommunication and conflicts
    - Why was s/he upset when I ...?
    - Should I be offended when ...?
    - What does it mean when ...?

# Other integration services

- Language training (incl. individual)
- Translation & interpretation
- Mentor families?
- International houses/centres?
- Central tenet: **everyone can help!**

# Gaps & opportunities

- Integration services mostly NGO-based, municipalities playing ambiguous role
  - Need for stronger commitment and taking the lead in integration measures from municipalities
  - NGOs retaining their expert & voluntary support role
  - Need for clear and sustainable funding schemes for integration of relocated *and* spontaneous arrivals



# Gaps & opportunities

- Pathway to independence
  - Entering the labour market as soon as possible
    - Educational opportunities
    - Recognition of earlier qualifications
    - Access to the labour market for asylum seekers
  - Innovative and integrated services
    - Language training & orientation courses at workplace
    - Professional training courses using language immersion

# Gaps & opportunities

- General attitudes
  - It's in everyone's best interest for refugees to do well in our society (incl. financial independence, using one's potential to the fullest)
  - Reconceptualizing refugees as an opportunity
  - Xenophobia remains a challenge

# Thank you!

# Questions?

**Eero Janson**

Estonian Refugee Council

eero@pagulasabi.ee