

AWAY FROM HOME: HOW SOCIAL INNOVATIONS RESPOND TO MIGRATION

How is social innovation assisting in tackling the needs of migrants and refugees, as well as of the host and sending societies? At the present time, war and terrorism are the headline grabbing migration drivers, but the universal desire of people to achieve a better life is the main underlying cause.

Jeremy Millard

WORLDWIDE PHENOMENON

The United Nations show that the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide reached over 65m in 2016, the highest since 1945. Of these, 22m were refugees, 2.8m of whom were asylum seekers with the others being displaced persons within their own countries. [1] Second only to the environmental crisis, the World Economic Forum describes large scale migration as the greatest global risk. [2] Whilst recognizing this risk, the European Commission notes the huge benefits migration brings to host nations if it happens in a way that takes account of the needs of sending, receiving and transit countries, as well as of the migrants themselves. The arrival in Europe of over 1.2m first-time asylum seekers in 2015, more than double that of 2014, should be seen in this context, although numbers have dropped sharply since then. [3]

REACTING RAPIDLY TO THE 'URGENT CHALLENGE' OF MIGRATION RESULTS IN HUGE VARIATION

Despite this long history of migration, but in clear response to its recent upsurge, the involvement of most actors, including social innovators, has tended to be reactive rather than proactive over the last few years. However, research has shown that there has been a rapid response by social innovators attempting to meet the multiple and acute needs of both migrants and the societies into which they arrive. This has resulted in social innovations tackling migration that are considerably more diverse in terms of organisation, action taken and impact than most other types of social innovation. [4] This clearly results from how the 2015 'migration crisis' impacts different countries in different ways

due to their individual geographic positions, domestic policies and civil responses. Thus despite the long history of social innovations, migration requires new solutions, reflected in the fact that most initiatives are still at a relatively early and experimental stage with limited widespread impacts to date. [4]

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WHOSE NEEDS ARE BEING ADDRESSED?

The evidence provided by the SI-DRIVE (www.si-drive.eu) project indicates that migration-related social innovations having the most widespread success and impact are able to address multiple needs, e.g. when directly serving the needs of both the host society as well as of the migrants themselves. This is illustrated by four examples [4]:

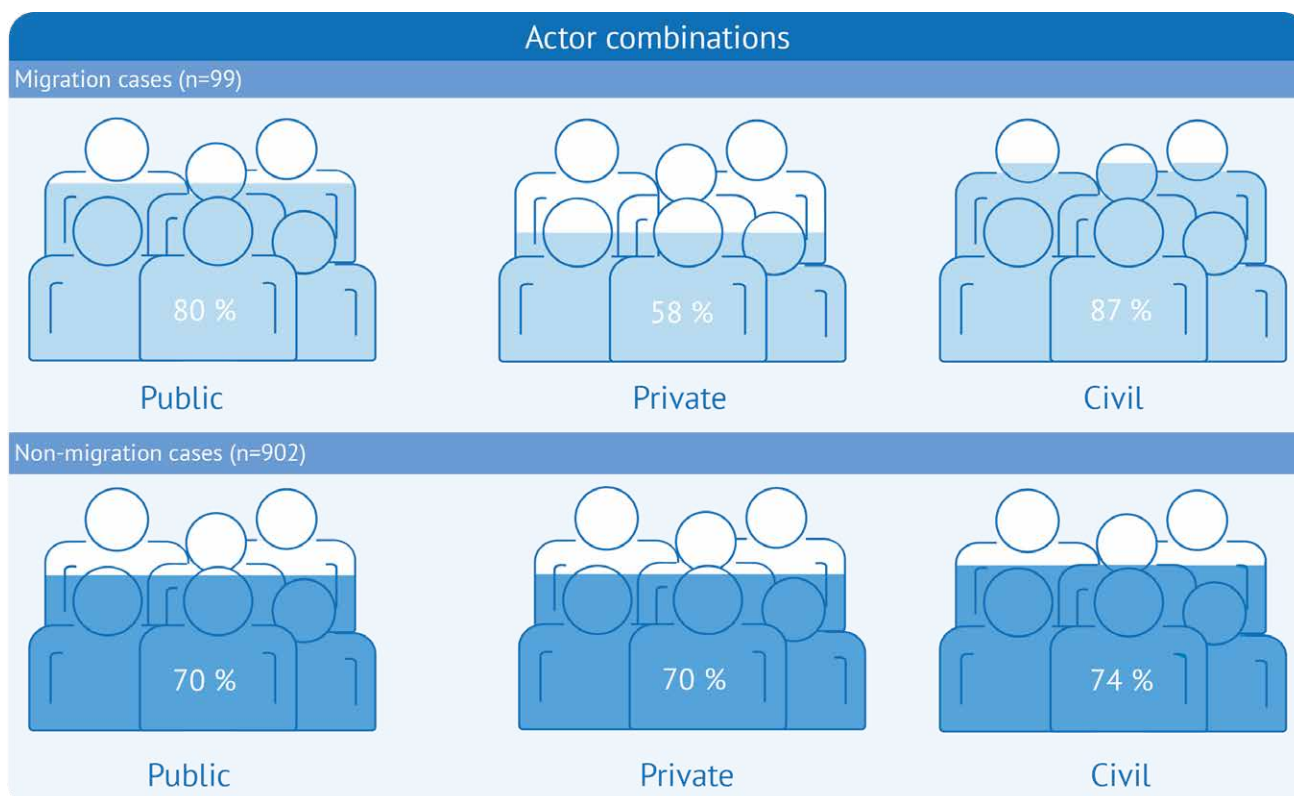
- The **Learning Circles for Displacement (Colombia)** initiative targets children in vulnerable situations, like forced displacement due to recent armed insurgencies, who are likely to be living in poverty and to have higher rates of school disturbance or absenteeism, often because they have to work or care for family members. These children are included actively as participants at the centre of an education model in which teachers act as guides rather than knowledge or authority figures. The children are placed in groups of 12 to 16 and then subdivided into

shared round tables of up to six where they receive personalised and relatively intensive attention. Many of the country's education institutions provide spaces and resources for the purpose of assisting their successful transition into the formal system after 1-2 years, thereby also improving the functioning of the overall education service and causing much less stress on the host society. This learning circle model for vulnerable migrant populations has expanded across many regions of Colombia as well as in many other countries.

- **Scattered Hospitality (Italy)** aims to support refugees and tackle the lack of temporary housing facilities they experience by accommodating them with local families in their own homes. The initiative assists both the hosting family and refugees through financial support as well as social and supervision services in order to help refugees through the difficult transition between the asylum request and starting an independent life in European society which is the longer-term aim. This family hospitality, lasting between 6 to 12 months, provides stability to build a network, improve knowledge and capacities and to find a job. For the host families, it is an opportunity to experience multi-culturalism and solidarity in their own homes and to better understand and empathise with the plight of many refugees. The initiative started in the city of Turin and was then adopted as a model by the Italian Government in 2014 under its national SPRAR and CAS Programmes.

- **Taste of Home (ToH) (Croatia)** draws on the cooking and gastronomic, as well as language, skills of refugees to assist in their economic emancipation as a part of their intercultural inclusion and integration into the host society. The initiative seeks to provide pathways both for immigrants and host populations to interact in a positive shared atmosphere, whilst enabling immigrants to develop marketable skills they can use to become full economic contributors and beneficiaries. It started as a culinary-cultural-research project that introduced the culture, customs and societies of origin of refugees by recording their memories of home and the smells and tastes of their cuisine in an experiment in sharing life stories and culinary skills of both refugees and the host population. The model has developed from its origin in the town of Pakrac through cooperation with the national NGO Centre for Peace Studies, as well as both the Croatian and Slovenian Platforms for Solidarity and International Cooperation by setting up in Zagreb and in a restaurant run by migrants in Ljubljana, as well as with the European network for development cooperation. There has also been a growth in partners over time, but typically in a quite unstructured manner attempting to respond to rapidly changing challenges as well as opportunities as these arise.

- **Neighbourhood Mothers (Denmark)** supports isolated immigrant women in Copenhagen by offering information and support relevant to their own personal situation, their family and children. Such women typically have little

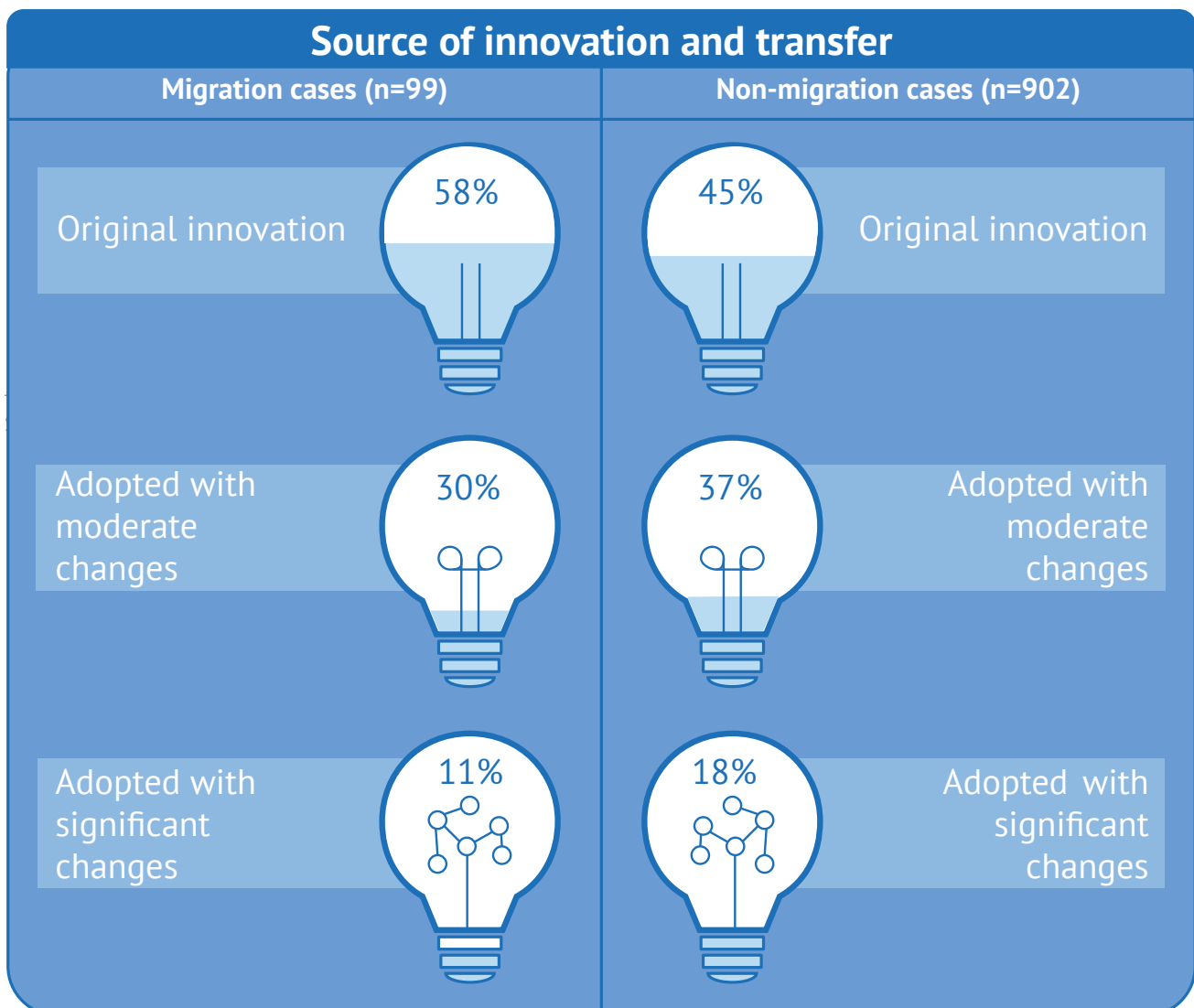


knowledge of Danish society, are challenged by the Danish language and may distrust official institutions. The neighbourhood mothers are themselves mainly volunteers with the same cultural and linguistic background of those they are helping, so the initiative is in effect an example of a vulnerable immigrant group helping itself using its own resources and capacities. They receive basic training around the themes of family, health, society and the methods they use through strong personal involvement, building bridges between those they are helping and the authorities and other groups, as well as networking in the local neighbourhood and more widely. Although basically still a bottom-up locally-resourced initiative, funding also now comes from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, a philanthropic foundation and Copenhagen Municipality.

IMPORTANT COMMONALITIES IN SOCIAL INNOVATIONS FOCUSING ON MIGRATION

As the above examples show, civil society is by far the main actor in social innovations tackling migration, whether locally, regionally or nationally, much more so than most other types of social innovation. [4] Migration initiatives often arise from significant volunteer input, normally but not always initially supported by public policy and resources, and/or strong pressure groups able to persuade governments or philanthropic organisations to fund them, with local governments and civil organisations typically acting at local level. In contrast, private sector actors have been much slower to get involved, mainly because of the unstable nature of many social innovations tackling migration and the increased likelihood of controversy and political difficulties that can ensue. Migrants and refugees are sometimes equated with new types of challenges that need tackling, even extended to the perceived associated threats of terrorism

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Selected characteristics of cases tackling migration: Source of innovation and transfer [4]

and the instigation of 'de-radicalisation' programmes in some European countries.

A complementary pattern is provided by the innovation sources and types of transfer that characterise social innovations addressing migration compared to non-migration cases. These are more likely than other types to be original, one-off and home-grown, designed and developed to address a very specific and typically unique challenge. Similarly, migration-related social innovations are less likely to be adopted from examples elsewhere, reflecting their relatively more recent provenance

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that limits the time and energy needed for inter-case learning. The first trigger of many of these cases is often the result of pressure from local civil society groups, citizens and movements able to persuade governments and/or philanthropic organisations to provide funding and support. [5] Inclusion, gender, equality and diversity issues also tend to be more important in driving many of these cases compared to the average. For example, at a 2017 migration workshop in Berlin, it was made clear by one of the presenters that "if you want to find the solution to the problems of refugees, you have to talk to refugees, not talk about refugees". [6]

SOME LESSONS LEARNT

Important lessons can be drawn about successful migrant-related social innovations. First, the local level is often best able to respect the human rights and local cultures of all actors including those of host societies. This includes understanding that the problems and needs of actors mutate over time, especially in the context of wider societal developments and their changing relationships. A strong vision and clear long-term goals are also needed, as is taking a holistic people-centred as opposed to siloed approach. Overall impact can be considerably increased by addressing

the needs of the host society as well as those of migrants. Being very quick to experiment and adapt is also important as challenges and opportunities change very fast, as is deploying democratic processes through advocacy, dialogue and networking. Complementary innovations are often important as these can help tailor the innovation as precisely as possible to local acceptance of multi-culturalism and of 'outsiders'. It is also useful to undertake agile organisational innovations to meet fast changing needs, as well as to deploy simple, cheap but powerful ICT and social media applications that can be readily used by ordinary people.

Success is also promoted by individuals and groups working closely together and building strong local, national and international networks, including with public bodies and linking to policy programmes. Given the need for significant funding, it is necessary to find good and consistent sources, either from public bodies or philanthropic and other funders. Despite pressing needs, it can sometimes be difficult to identify and engage with the displaced and refugees, for example because of uncertainty, lack of identity, language and cultural issues, as well as the possibility of negative backlashes from elements in society.

In terms of impacts, migrant-related social innovations generally exhibit low overall transfer success compared to the average, probably because on-the-ground challenges are so distinct and complex, and that in the last few years there has been a dramatic rise in the need for innovation that just keeping abreast of change is difficult. However, within a specific national policy and regulatory context, there can be highly successful transfers, whilst good basic ideas can also provide international lessons. Such transfer has tended to take place, not so much through the efforts of local actors, perhaps because of the pressures they face during displacement and refugee crises, but more by external actors through their wider networks.

A highlight lesson is that the existing experiences, assets and competencies of the migrants and refugees themselves, despite their vulnerable situation, can be key to success. However, further developing these competencies and aligning them as far as possible into the host society, so they become complementary rather than in opposition to each other, is often crucial.

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