



Co-funded by
the European Union

Recipes for community- sponsored integration

HUMAK[®]

KIRKKO-⁺
HALLITUS

Finnish Red Cross 



Johanna Matikainen, Aurora Nisso and Satu Riikonen (eds).

Recipes for community-sponsored integration

©Authors, Humak University of Applied Sciences and the Red Cross 2025.

Layout: Takomo Tuotanto Oy



Co-funded by
the European Union

HUMAK[®]

KIRKKO-⁺
HALLITUS

Finnish Red Cross 

Contents

Starters for the reader	4
Establish a communal kitchen	6
Invite everyone to cook	9
Recipe: A pathway to community sponsor activities for people going through integration	11
Prepare and cook	12
Recipe: volunteer's pathway to becoming a community sponsor	14
Recipe: community sponsor training	15
Discover local ingredients	18
Recipe: launching local activities	19
Recipe: approaching churches and other religious communities	21
Place the ingredients on one tray	22
Recipe: treats for the integration platform tray	24
Reading for after the meal	26
Aurora Nisso: The power of communities – community-sponsored activities in Finland and abroad	27
Eeva Mäntylä and Satu Riikonen: Supporting the agency of people going through integration	29
Johanna Matikainen: The Finnish model for community-sponsored integration – experiences from a pilot project	31
Sources and tips	35

Starters for the reader

Dear integration expert!

This recipe book provides practical examples of the possibilities of communal activities. You can also use many of the ideas to develop your current activities in a more community-oriented direction.

For starters, you can find tips on what types of thinking and operating models on which community-sponsored integration is based.

The recipe book then explains the importance of the perspective of people going through integration in community-sponsored activities and explains in more detail how to find volunteers and start community sponsor activities.

Before the last chapter, the book presents a range of tools to help you start cooperation.

Finally, the recipe book illustrates models of community-sponsored integration in Finland and abroad, discusses how to strengthen the inclusion of people going through integration and presents the Finnish model of community-sponsored integration.



Are you willing to try new ways of preparing everyday dishes for integration, use fresh ingredients and test new spices in a way that suits your locality?

Keep reading to discover the flavours of community-sponsored activities.

Good luck with trying the recipes in your locality!

Establish a communal kitchen

Study **the community-sponsored integration guidelines** on the next page and sample, section by section, what the idea of community-sponsored activities tastes and feels like. Can you identify local operators and their characteristics? Do you know how many people live in your locality and how to reach them? Are the doors of local organisations open to newcomers?

Are you part of an organisation or community that would like to cooperate more with other organisations? Are you a local operator who is enthusiastic about working with organisations?

Are you willing to try community-sponsored activities, where people of different languages meet people they know and are not familiar with at events, meeting cafés and hobbies? Are these flavours right for your locality?

Do not start the activities on your own, even if you are impatient! It takes more time to get things up and running together than doing it alone, but the results can be much more long-lasting.

In Kaarina, a meeting place was set up to bring together different associations and other operators to plan and arrange the activities together.

In Suomussalmi, communal meetings received excellent feedback from both people going through integration and municipal employees. The meetings had a nice atmosphere and made everyone feel welcome: “Last autumn was the best ever for our communal activities.”

At Kokkola’s community evenings, the people going through integration prepared the food and drinks in turns, and people of all ages were welcome.

“In a small municipality, support is always available close by. We can also go with the flow instead of adhering to the established practices. It is important to understand the needs and desires of individuals and to listen to them carefully.” Rautjärvi Municipality Manager Harri Anttila interviewed by Yle on 27 February 2020.

Community-sponsored integration guidelines



1. Community-sponsored activities bring the different operators in the locality closer together.

2. Community-sponsored activities do not replace or reduce the need for basic integration support operations.

3. Community-sponsored activities are based on the needs and aspirations of people going through integration.

4. A community sponsor is a fellow traveller with whom people going through integration can find routes into their local community.

5. The community sponsors have completed training or orientation or have become qualified through practice.

6. Community-sponsored activities are based on equal relationships and joint planning.

7. Communities and organisations can evolve and grow stronger through the inclusion of people going through integration.

If you overcook it....

In some cases, there may be misconceptions that by working together, the value of one's own activities is diminished.

Experience shows that by participating, you usually get something more: energy, joy from activities, new ideas.

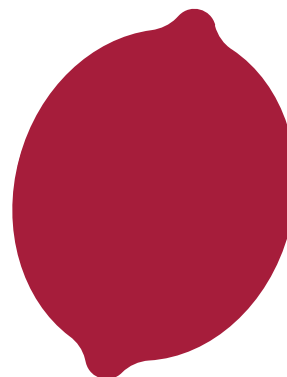
Established networks have established habits. Sometimes, it is difficult to change the mindset, "because it has always been done like this". If you can share greetings from people going through integration and their real wishes to a network like this, you might make a small difference.



In some cases, recognising the underlying idea of community sponsorship requires abandoning preconceptions and adopting new ways of working.



In some cases, if the locality has the will to arrange activities that support the sense of community and the participation of people going through integration, the activities will start spontaneously!



The Together We Are More event in Kouvola was organised jointly by 14 stakeholders. There were different activities for people of different ages. How many children rode hobby horses at the racecourse? How many adults participated? Tip: count the refreshments and prizes! In the hobby horse competition, 60 lollipops were awarded to the participants. 180 coffee mugs were used.



Invite everyone to cook

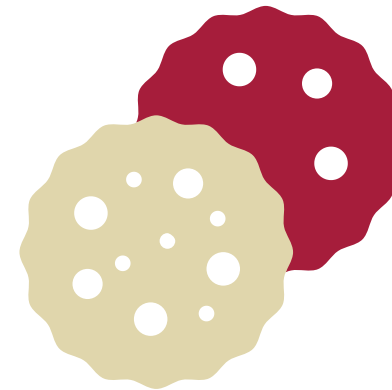
Study **the guidelines for people going through integration** on the next page and sample the activity possibilities for the person going through integration, section by section. Can you apply the guidelines to promote your activities? Think about what makes you personally feel welcome in new places. How have you yourself joined, been accepted or invited to join a community in the past? Are you part of an organisation or community that would like to cooperate more with other organisations and people going through integration?

In community-sponsored integration, it is important to identify the wishes and needs of the person going through integration.

You can use the guidelines for people going through integration to explain the activities of community-sponsored integration to the person and other volunteers. The aim is to help the person going through integration find new communities in their new area.

You can ask the person going through integration about their thoughts, for example, by using the How Are You questionnaire. Try to determine, for example, if they are familiar with different leisure activities in their new place of residence. Has it been easy to get to know local people? What things are interesting and important to them? What has been challenging or disappointing?

Local volunteers should also consult the guidelines for people going through integration, as they encourage equal planning and activities.



Read more about the How Are You discussions on the Red Cross :

<https://www.redcross.fi/our-work/domestic/help-for-immigrants/community-sponsored-integration/>

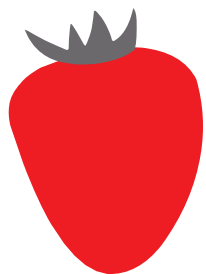
Guidelines for people going through integration



- 1.** Welcome to your new home town!
- 2.** Would you like to get to know the community sponsors? They are volunteers with a good knowledge of local activities. They can show you what you can do in your new environment.
- 3.** In organisations and communities, you can be active, learn and meet new people. It is important to do things together, and it will also help you find people with similar interests.
- 4.** Volunteering allows you to meet new people and find joy and energy in your life.
- 5.** You can talk to the community sponsors about your own wishes and needs related to your integration or free time.
- 6.** The aim is to help you find the right people and groups, where you can achieve your goals and experience the joy of success.
- 7.** Join the activities! You will get support, inspiration and maybe new friends.

Recipe: A pathway to community sponsor activities for people going through integration

1. Cooperate with the municipality's authorities. Send invitations to activities through them, or visit a language course, for example, to introduce the activities.
2. Build trust and familiarity, for example, by attending the celebrations of different cultures, sending invites to activities, having a coffee. Use translation apps if your language skills are not yet sufficient.
3. Tell the people going through integration about local activities, communities and hobbies, and if they become interested, tell them about community sponsor activities and how to get involved.
4. Make use of visual aids and stories when telling about the activities.



“The Kajaani Red Cross Café WhatsApp group has almost 400 members who are kept up to date about the activities and communicate with each other. Messages and invitations are written in Finnish and English.”



The Enjoy Life Together group participants in Jyväskylä decide on the content of the group's activities.

The Utajärvi Spring Party was planned and implemented together with people going through integration.

Listen more, talk less. Give people going through integration space to do and plan things from the very beginning!



If you overcook it....

Sometimes, and quite often, activities are planned according to the organisation's own ideas well before invites are sent to people going through integration. Then, the doors are opened and the coffee is brewed, but no one is attending. First, get to know the potential participants, ask what kind of activities they would like and find out what time or day of the week would be suitable for them.



Prepare and cook

Take a look at **the community sponsor guidelines** on the next page and sample, section by section, what the idea of community-sponsored volunteering tastes and feels like.

Think about what could be done more communally in volunteering activities. Would this kind of volunteering be suitable for your community? How can the role of community sponsors be clarified and how can the needs and aspirations of people going through integration be met in the activities? Can you find volunteers in your area who would like to try out new recipes?

Community sponsors are volunteers who work with people going through integration to plan suitable routes to the activities of different organisations and listen to their needs and wishes. At their best, a community sponsor is an expert on local networks, with strong links to various local organisations.

“Community sponsors can promote the integration process by visiting different workplaces and employment networks with the people going through integration.”

In the Turku region, community sponsors have been recruited

through educational institutions, for example. Hirvensalmi has been hosting quota refugees for many years, while volunteers have also gained experience. Even experienced operators can try out new approaches!

Think about the limits of helping and do not belittle others with your help.

If you overcook it....

In some cases, people going through integration are not given the space to act independently because it is believed that they do not yet know enough about Finnish society. Therefore, volunteers are happy to provide help and support. However, people going through integration may feel that too much help makes them seem to be more insignificant, even if they are happy to receive it.



Community sponsor guidelines



1. The community sponsor operations are built on the needs and wishes of people going through integration, as well as the strengths of the sponsors.

2. As a community sponsor, you have completed the related training or orientation or have become qualified through practice.

3. As a community sponsor, you are interested in a variety of activities, familiar with local activity opportunities and able to look for more information about them, when necessary.

4. As a community sponsor, you will promote the participation of the people going through integration in the activities of different communities and organisations based on the participants' hopes and wishes.

5. As a community sponsor, you can act alone or as a member of a group.

6. As a community sponsor, you promote good population relationships in your locality.

Volunteer's pathway to becoming a community sponsor

1. Talk about community sponsor training and community-sponsored activities in various places, for example, educational institutions, multicultural associations and sports clubs. Approach new operators with an open mind!
2. Make the most of social media in marketing. Create an attractive post or video. Explain what community sponsors do together with people going through integration and why these activities are important.
3. Use accessible, clear language and material in your own language in all communications.

Community sponsor training has received positive feedback. The training is perceived to be very communal (avg 4.9) and the atmosphere is equal and safe (avg 4.7). The training has provided good information on integration (avg 4.8) and has inspired enthusiasm and interest in becoming a community sponsor (avg 4.7). Rating scale 1–5 (1= strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree.)

If you overcook it....

An agreement on a common direction of activity cannot always be reached. You should start with small steps and be flexible if the original plan changes. Misunderstandings can easily arise when there is not yet much common vocabulary.



There can be a lot to do, and the desire to help is strong. Volunteers can take on too much without realising it. It is good to recognise and stick to your own limits.

Volunteers should always know where to get support if a task seems to be stressful.

A person who has trouble managing their life is thinking about becoming a community sponsor. It is advisable to raise the issue as soon as possible and look for other volunteering opportunities.

“Community sponsors keep regularly in touch with each other in a WhatsApp group!”

Recipe: community sponsor training

Ingredients

1–3 coaches

3–11 volunteers willing to become community sponsors

1 comfortable space that allows for open discussion
Sufficient seating arranged in a circle
Sufficient coffee and tea to start the training session
Accessibility checked before starting

Preparations

Be active, talk with local partners and operators and agree on how they could be involved in community sponsor training (provision of information, ideas, organisation, etc.).

Planning the training

Start planning and working with your training partner.
By training together, the atmosphere becomes conversational and also engages the participants in dialogue.

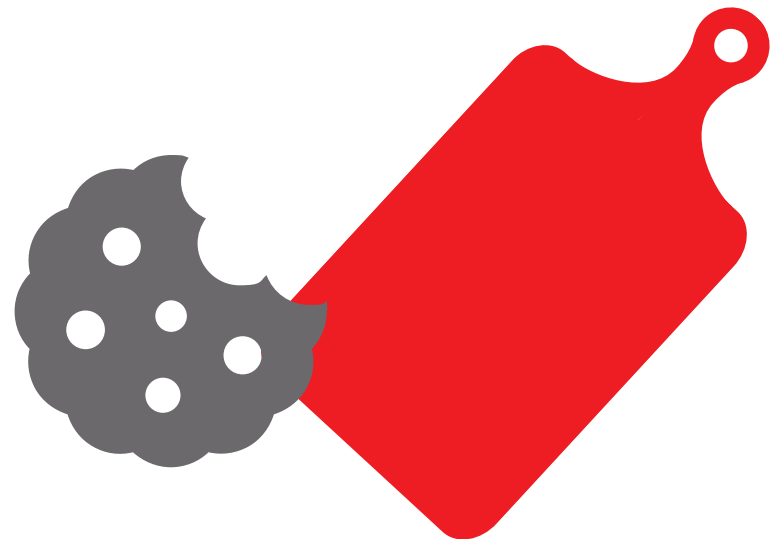
Instructions:

Emphasise the importance of communities in integration from the very beginning of the training.

Explain how community sponsors can support people going through integration in building networks.

The role of the coach is facilitative and participant-oriented.

Make sure the atmosphere is based on dialogue and respect. The starting point is equality and equal training, where community orientation is the basis from the very first moment.



An example of the themes and flow of community sponsor training:

Theme 1: Welcome and introduction (1–2 hours).

It is advisable to let everyone become acquainted. This can be done with one of the following methods. Examples include: Choose a flashcard and tell us about yourself, or: Introduce yourself with your keyring. The aim is to create a safe atmosphere. It is often easier to introduce the topic if the speaker has a concrete object in their hand. If possible, community sponsor coaching should be conducted in a dialogue circle or at tables where participants are in small groups.

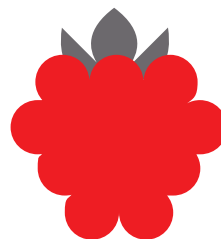
Theme 2: Communality and community orientation (1–2 hours).

The next step is to look at community orientation. This can be done by reflecting on the participants' own communities, drawing a community map and mapping local communities, for example, using the integration platform for organisations. This is a good opportunity to discuss the importance of communities to integration and any barriers that may prevent access to them.

The first community sponsor training was organised in Äänekoski in autumn 2023.

Theme 3: Immigrants moving to Finland (1–2 hours)

Community sponsors need basic information about moving to Finland, the concepts and the local situation and integration services. This topic may not be necessary if the participants in the community sponsor training have already done integration work or voluntary work or studied basic integration issues. The municipal immigration coordinator can be asked to be involved in this part of the training. To ensure that the discussion of the theme is not just a one-way communication exercise, you can, for example, set up a quiz or ask participants to prepare quiz questions for other groups.



“Think about your own community and your own roots. Recognise that others have their own roots, experiences and community. Look for and find similarities. Build a shared story.”

“Make sure that the perspective of the person going through integration is included in training.”



Theme 4: Integration process (1–2 hours)

The integration timeline is a good tool to give participants a general idea of the different situations and resources of people going through integration. It is a good idea to study it and encourage participants to reflect together on the areas where volunteers can provide the best support to people going through integration. The integration process is individual, which should be emphasised to the participants. The use of case studies is also a good idea in this theme. Experts by experience can be found, for example, through Ehjä ry.

Theme 5: Gathering ideas for activities (1–2 hours)

The final theme of the training is launching the activities. The activities can be brainstormed already during community sponsor training, but it is very important that the actual planning is done together with the people going through integration. At the end of the community sponsor training, a meeting is arranged between the community sponsor(s) and a person going through integration. The community sponsors are informed about further training and the activities and communication methods of the community sponsor group. The aim is that some of the community sponsors will take responsibility for community sponsor activities and cooperation with the municipal immigration coordinator and a representative of the association responsible for the activities (possibly FRC).

In the Turku region, people going through integration and community sponsors living in the Turku, Lieto, Kaarina and Raisio areas move flexibly across municipal boundaries.

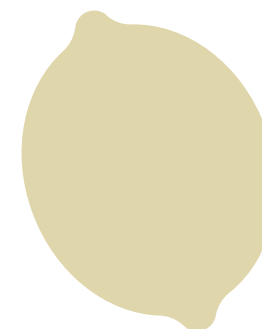
If you overcook it....

Many people sign up for community sponsor training, but only a handful show up. Do not hesitate to involve the participants in planning the training!



“Divide the training session into two parts to give the participants time to process what they have learned and to complete interim exercises.”

“As the quota refugees received the help and support they needed in the early stages, they later surprised us with a cake and brought a party to the community sponsors. There is always time for celebrations.”



Discover local ingredients

Is there a need to develop a community-sponsored operating method in your locality? Which operators could act as natural communities for community-sponsored integration?

Do you find that people going through integration lack natural pathways into communities, even if there are identified needs and wishes for common activities?

You can start developing community-sponsored activities yourself. Municipalities and Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment can also make an initiative, or it can be proposed by local organisations or other communities, together or separately. What is only needed is that the locality has the will to increase cooperation between communities and to develop activities that support integration in line with the wishes of people going through integration.

Once the baseline for activities and the needs to develop or launch a community-oriented approach have been internalised, follow the recipe on the next page.

Learn more about launching regional community-sponsored integration activities [here](#).



Recipe: launching local activities

Where to begin?

1. Arrange meetings with the authorities to start cooperation (Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, municipalities). You will get information about the people going through integration, needs and environment in the locality. Agree with the authorities on the objectives and roles of cooperation (first month).
2. Increase your expertise in the themes of integration and community-sponsored activities. For example, study the community-sponsored integration recipe book and other current information on integration and promoting communality (first month).
3. Analyse the operating environment of the municipality. Meet people who have integrated into the locality, learn about their activities, attend events and invite them to plan community-sponsored activities. Identify the municipality's networks, opportunities and challenges in the field of integration and assemble a network of partners (associations and other interested organisations) to start the activities. Make use of the integration platform for organisations and organise a workshop about the use of the platform. (1–4 months).

When studying the operating environment, you can list the different language groups in the locality, the schedule arrivals of quota refugees and identify key operators.

Invite different operators, together and separately, for coffee and ask them to tell you about their activities. Become known!

“Although these instructions are for you, community-sponsored integration is always done in cooperation! You will find the best local partners to work with.”

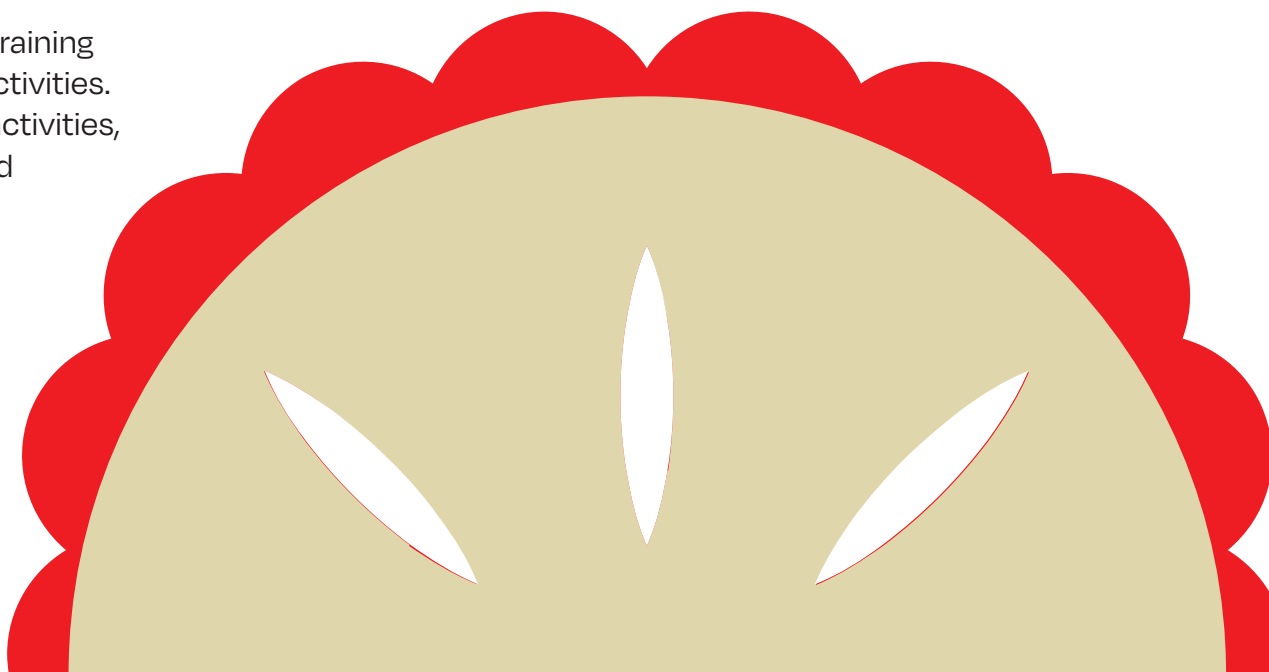


4. Join existing networks or start new ones. Do not arrange the activities alone. Remember, this is about community-sponsored activity! Partners for the activities may be found in municipal integration services or local associations. (1–4 months).
5. Plan community sponsor training and recruit community sponsors. Based on the cooperation you started and the analysis of the local operating environment, you will be ready to design a community sponsor training programme tailored according to the needs of the locality. Recruit sponsors interested in the activities: Sponsors can be found in your own networks. (months 5 to 6).
6. Arrange your first community sponsor training course and start community sponsor activities. Make sure that in community sponsor activities, the people going through integration and the community sponsors plan the activities together.

If you overcook it....

In some cases, the launch process may stall and common objectives at the local level are not set successfully.

Try doing things in a different order!



Recipe: approaching churches and other religious communities

Ingredients:

1 dash of local operators

1 pinch of trust and respect for different beliefs

1 handful of well-established regional partnerships

Lots of interaction and community spirit
Season with multidisciplinary expertise and the support of volunteers

Method:

Start with local operators. For example, choose the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as your partner. It works on the principle of brotherly love.

Use the role of the parish to your advantage. Parishes often play an established and reliable role both regionally and nationally. This makes them excellent partners in supporting integration.

Add skills and experience. The parish staff and volunteers have strong interaction skills. Their activities support community building and bring different groups of people together.

Mix in current activities. Community-sponsored integration does not have to start from scratch – develop the current activities of the parish activities to support integration.

Add plenty of interaction. Provide opportunities for migrants to participate and meet others. For many, the church can be a familiar and safe operator that creates a sense of trust and belonging from the very beginning of integration.

Serving suggestion:

Enjoy working together, open interaction and a growing sense of community. Serve in a warm atmosphere – works best when both locals and immigrants are present.

Place the ingredients on the same tray

Think about what your community is like from the perspective of integration. Can you already identify the key operators, big and small? Can you list the 5–10 most important current integration support operators and what they do?

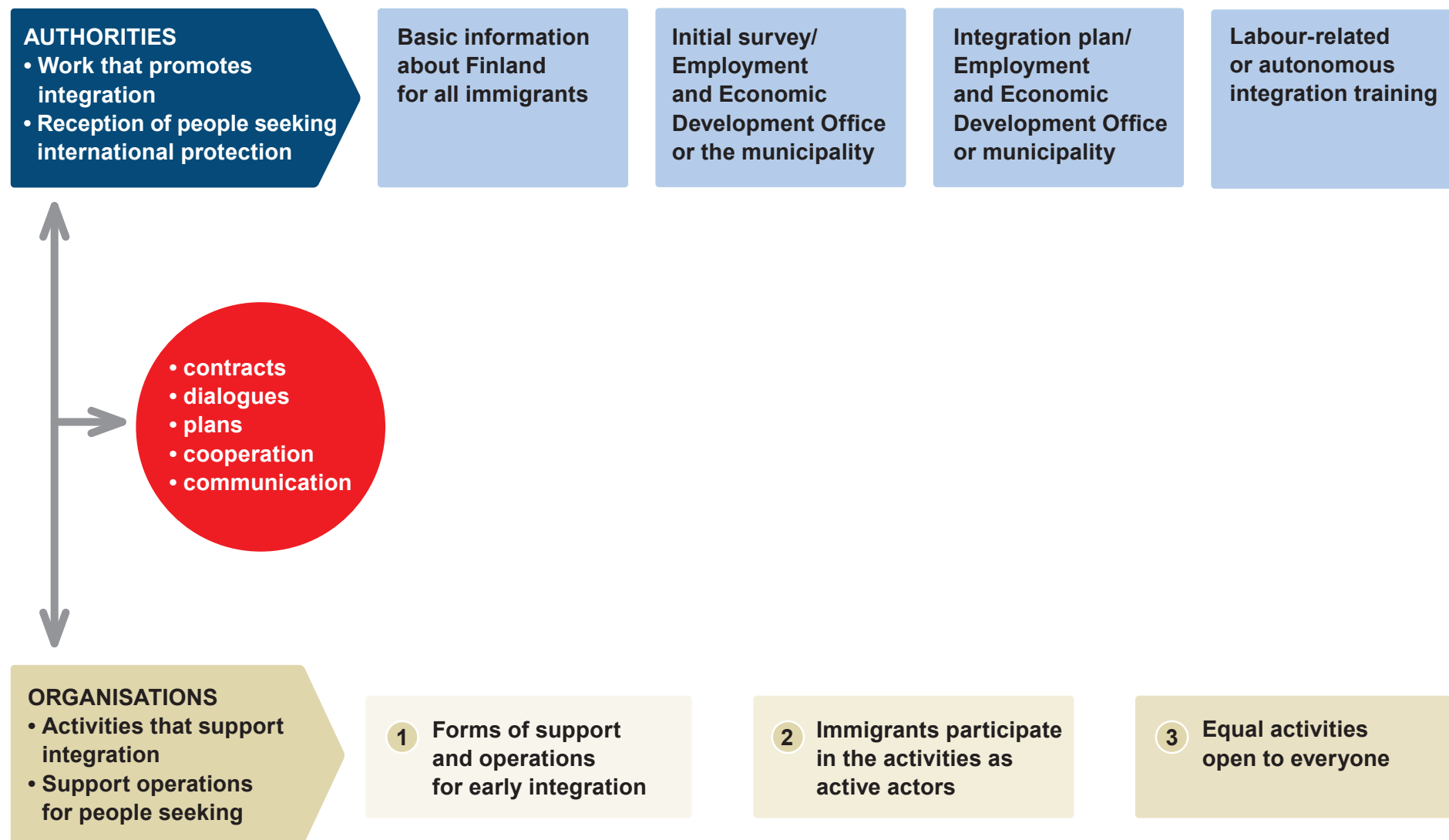
Do not worry if you cannot. You can work it out with local organisations, authorities and other communities by inviting them to a joint workshop.

The integration platform for organisations is a tool and method that brings together the activities of local authorities, organisations and other communities that support integration. It can be used to describe and analyse the current situation. It is also helpful in planning for the future (e.g. in six months' time, 30 quota refugees will arrive in the municipality, which organisations will be involved in the initial reception?). It also helps people going through integration to see what opportunities and possibilities are available in the locality. Another important aspect is to identify any overlapping or duplicate activities. In most cases, it is discovered that a key operator has not been invited or is unable to attend. The aim is that the integration platform for organisations is up-to-date and regularly updated.



Integration platform for organisations

Organisation: _____ Locality: _____ Date: _____



Recipe: treats for the integration platform tray

Ingredients/preparation:

Invite local authorities and experts as well as organisations, parishes and other operators to the same room.

Reserve enough time and provide an accessible space.

Show interest and appreciation for everyone's work.

Record the topics discussed and schedules for future cooperation.

How to arrange the workshop:

Greet each participant individually Organise a relaxed introduction round Introduce the idea

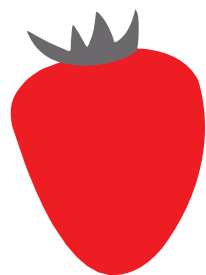
of the integration platform for organisations

Start filling in the integration platform tray

In the workshop, discuss the accessibility of different activities at different stages of integration:

- Our association provides support for early integration = early integration support and activities
- In our association, people going through integration already organise activities themselves = immigrants as creators in the activities
- In our association, it is the content that counts, not the background = equal opportunities for all

Finally, present the treats of the local integration platform tray together.

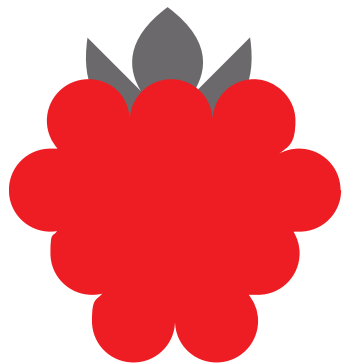
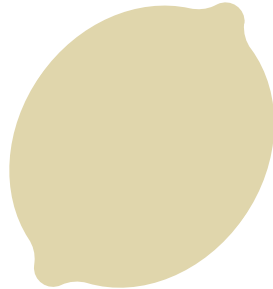


“Decide how you will market the activities to the people going through integration and how to get involved. Did the participants find common things to do and agree on?”

The integration platform for organisations was developed in cooperation between organisations and published in 2016. The background to this was the significant increase in the number of asylum seekers in 2015 and the resulting desire for closer cooperation between social and health organisations. The integration platform for organisations was published in the national reception services and integration support organisation network, which continues to meet. The event is hosted by the Red Cross.

Integration platform for organisations in Jakobstad
-a preliminary working method was presented and
left to simmer.

**“Support spontaneous
discussions and wild
brainstorming”**



**“Start by serving
to reduce tension.”**

If you overcook it....

No one wants to take
responsibility for updating the
integration platform.
Make an appointment for a
year from now and review the
situation then.



There is a wide range of early integration services.
Many organisations offer similar, overlapping
activities. Support is available for people going through
integration, but it is difficult for them to become equal
operators on their own volunteering path.

A place for introspection for organisations!

In the community-sponsored integration pilot, 14 local
integration platform trays were put together, involving around
170 different operators: organisations, authorities and different
communities. Everyone had their own special thing to bring
to the tray. Even a smaller operator's contribution serves
the whole and adds value to it.

**Reading
for after
the meal**

The power of communities – community-sponsored activities in Finland and abroad

Aurora Nisso

The community-sponsored integration support method is based on a decades-old model used in Canada, where communities and individuals play a key role in supporting the integration of refugees. The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Programme (PSR), established in Canada in the 1970s, is one of the best-known community-sponsored integration models and it has inspired the development of various community-sponsored models around the world.

Since 2015, in response to the refugee crisis, several European countries started to develop refugee reception and integration models based on the interest of grassroots operators and communities to support people fleeing conflicts, as well as the Canadian model. In the following years, several community-sponsored pilot programmes were launched in Europe. Since 2019, a number of community-sponsored pilot projects to improve the reception and integration of refugees have been supported by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

Community-sponsored models are activities that support reception and integration, bringing resettled refugees or people arriving through complementary routes together with individuals, groups or organisations. These parties are committed to providing support and assistance to refugees or other persons in need of international protection. The providers of help and support include, for example, associations, hobby clubs, companies, university communities and religious groups.

In many cases, countries have agreed on the coordination of community-sponsored activities with suitable organisations. National programmes in different countries often have common elements, for example, in their management and coordination structures. The community-sponsored integration activities associated with government-led resettlement programmes only begin once the refugees arrive. After their arrival, the associations, local organisations, hobby clubs and civil society as a whole help refugees to integrate and settle in their new locality.

Examples of community-sponsored integration models can be found, for example, in Germany and Ireland, where community-sponsored activities are based on resettlement-related integration activities and implemented largely by national support organisations. In Germany, a key role is played by the Civil Society Contact Point (Zivilgesellschaftliche Kontaktstelle, ZKS), which includes Caritas Germany, the German Red Cross and the Evangelical Church of Westphalia. In Ireland, the role of the national support organisation (The Open Community) is to coordinate and develop resources in partnership with four regional support organisations.

In March 2024, the Nordic Network for Community Support Programs and Similar Initiatives was launched, convened by UNHCR and Nordregio. The network developed the concept of community-sponsored integration from a Nordic perspective, and common principles for Nordic community support programmes were set. Nordic community support programmes focus on increasing the social contacts and receptiveness of local communities for those who arrive as refugees or asylum seekers.

As will be seen, there is no single method for community-sponsored integration. Different countries have different models for implementing community-based activities

adapted to their national systems. Activities can also vary from one country to another, as is the case in Finland, because the activities are closely linked to the civil society at regional and local levels. Many factors, such as the resources of the party launching the activities, the size of the locality, existing communities, the staff of the parish and municipality, have a major influence on the conditions for community-sponsored activities in the area.

Community-sponsored integration always seeks to harness the potential of each locality. As a guideline, community-sponsored models focus on the needs of the people going through integration, communities and individuals, as well as on equal interaction.

Supporting the agency of people going through integration

Eeva Mäntylä ja Satu Riikonen

Community-sponsored integration – strengthening inclusion and agency

The community support program was based on the idea that integration activities should not be planned or implemented without the active participation of the person going through integration. The needs and aspirations of people going through integration were widely listened to, and their role was strengthened in both the planning and arrangement of the activities.

In the community-sponsored integration pilot project, the term “person going through integration” was used specifically to refer to people who arrived in the municipalities as quota refugees, but the activities developed benefited all the people going through integration of the locality more broadly.

Inclusion at the heart of integration

During the pilot project, the relationship between inclusion and integration was explored in depth. Inclusion does not only mean taking part in pre-planned activities but also having the opportunity to have a say and play an active role. Several

levels of the inclusion of people going through integration were identified: inclusion in pre-planned activities, brainstorming in the background, active inclusion as a planner, coordination and decision-making, practical arrangements.

Community sponsors supporting integration

Community sponsors played a key role in the program. Their training emphasised interacting with people going through integration as individuals and abandoning preconceptions. For example, not all people going through integration want to join organised activities, spend time in an international café or try Finnish meals together – and that’s perfectly acceptable. Together with the people going through integration, community sponsors can identify what kind of activities they are interested in. The lack of a common language is a challenge, but it can be overcome. People going through integration have the skills and ability to play an active role in many areas from the early stages of settlement, although support is needed in day-to-day matters. Supporting integration requires sensitivity, especially in situations where language barriers or cultural differences make interaction difficult.

How Are You discussions support inclusion

The community support program developed a discussion model that can be used to identify the needs and wishes of people going through integration. It is a simple set of questions that the staff or volunteers organising the activity go through together with the people going through integration. These discussions were held in several localities and served as a basis for launching activities. The discussions were carried out with the help of an interpreter or in a common language, such as English, and provided valuable information about the wishes, skills and interests of the people going through integration.



The Finnish model for community-sponsored integration – experiences from a pilot project

Johanna Matikainen

The Finnish model for community-sponsored integration

The recipe booklet hopefully gives you an idea of the ingredients and cooking methods used in the pilot project.

The main initial concern was the relationship between the community-sponsored model and the activities currently arranged in the localities. The question was whether community-sponsored integration is arranged as a new activity or whether its role is to support current activities and perhaps help to create a new operating culture.

The importance of knowing the local environment and networks from the perspective of integration became apparent as the activities got underway. The cooperation between key operators allowed for genuine community orientation to be established. Communal work cannot be done alone. The parties developing the activities need to accept that supporting and promoting joint processes takes considerably more time than starting things on your own. Experience shows that what is planned and agreed together is more sustainable than what is offered as

a ready-made package. The local operating environment, such as the integration networks, the municipality's support for the activities, the size of the municipality and the number of quota refugees, affected the project's potential, pace and priorities. The activities took on different forms in different localities because the key operators and their relationships had been shaped before the pilot project. In other words, the pilot project adapted to an existing operating environment. The choice was, therefore, to support what was already in place, to value it and to be careful not to launch any duplicate or competing activities.

From the perspective of people going through integration, the community-sponsored approach of the volunteers opened up significantly more options to support their personal integration processes than individual volunteer contacts. The range of activities was wider and individual needs were better identified by working with the person going through integration to search for activities that were of interest to them and suited their needs.

For example, participating in joint events supported establishing local contacts and provided memorable experiences.

The contacts made in these events increased the social

network and self-confidence of people going through integration. In these events, the range of local activities became visible and it was possible to pick out suitable elements and the interfaces and memberships that matched the interests. Community-sponsored activity coordination helped to build an inclusive, receptive and equal culture with local communities, so the doors of organisations and other operators were perhaps more open than before.

The roles and tasks of community sponsors varied between localities. The pilot project focused primarily on supporting the initial integration of quota refugees. In the first few months after arrival in Finland, there is a wide range of challenges in settling in, and everyday help and support are important. After the first few months, the actual community sponsor activities can get underway once the integration process has become somewhat established.

The pilot project staff acted as facilitators and conveners in 14 localities. The key point was that the activities were always the subject of a cooperation agreement with the municipality. Joint activities, events and training were carried out with very limited resources. This caused concerns, but also led to imaginative solutions within the community.

What about the future?

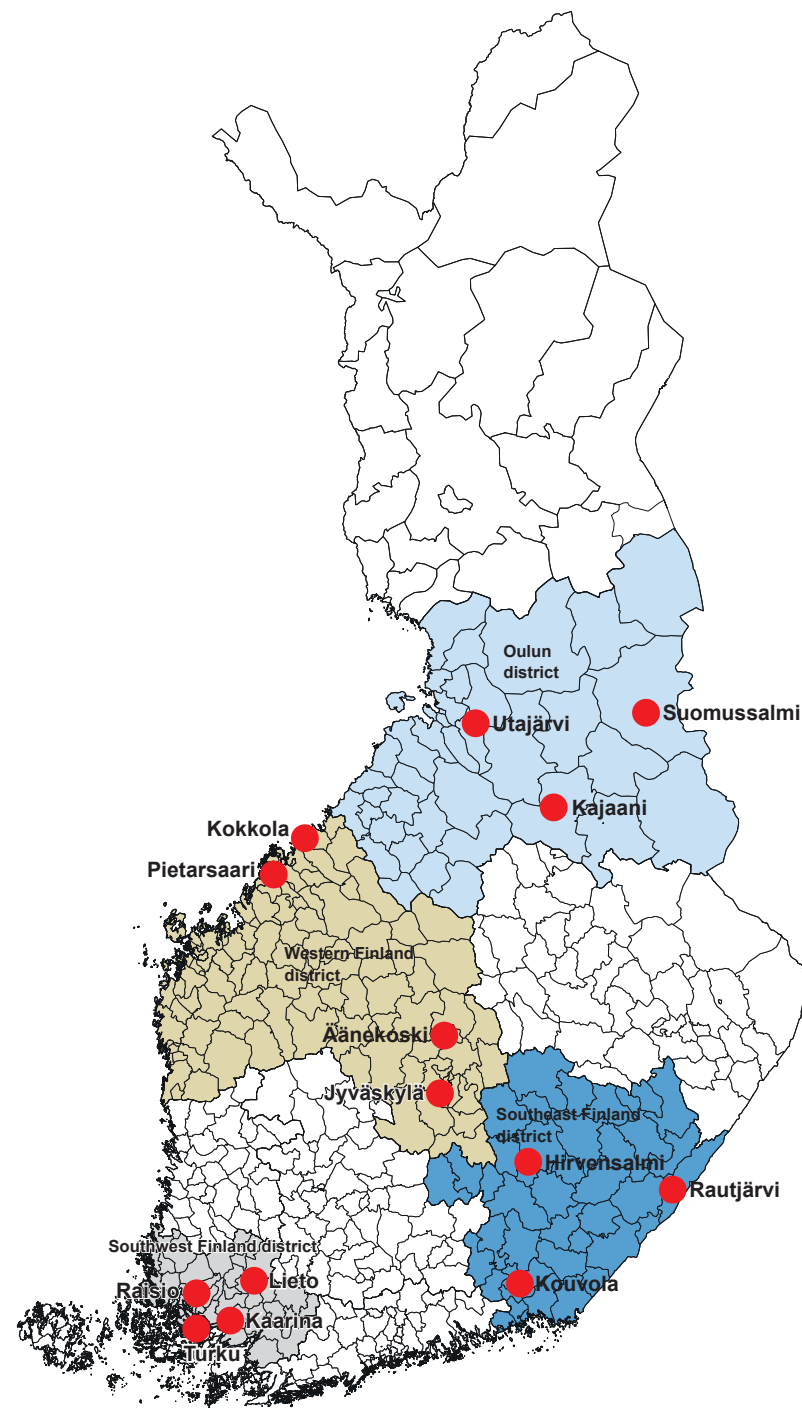
At the start of the pilot project, the activities were launched in municipalities hosting quota refugees, as jointly agreed by the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, municipalities and the Red Cross, in four FRC districts.

Some of the activities launched during the project will continue and be developed further on their own as well as with the support of FRC. In some municipalities, the various Evangelical Lutheran parishes are certainly part of the functioning of the community that supports integration and provides opportunities for activities. Naturally, there will also be a reduction in activities when the support of the pilot project is withdrawn. The pilot project relied heavily on the Feasibility survey on the opportunities of community sponsorship in Finland ordered by the Government. The survey was based on a series of interviews with experts and included a proposal for the structure of the operation. The structure has been tested in the community-sponsored integration pilot project 2023–2025 and has been proven to work. In the Finnish model, joint agreements and action between authorities and organisations is desirable and important. Accountability and development would take place at local, regional and national levels.

The pilot project was carried out as a cooperation project with the Finnish Red Cross, the Humak University of Applied Science and the Church Council in 2023–2025. Co-funding was provided by the EU Commission through the AMIF fund. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment contributed to the national funding.

The community-sponsored integration model provided new impetus and synergies to the work of local organisations, other communities and authorities, and allowed for the development of integration support and activities tailored to the needs of people going through integration.

A warm thank you to everyone who participated in the activities and made them possible!



The main organiser of the community support program was the Red Cross headquarters, and the partners included, in addition to Humak University of Applied Sciences and the Church Council, four Red Cross districts: Southeast Finland, Western Finland, Oulu and Southwest Finland. The pilot covered 14 municipalities.

The project was co-financed by the EU's AMIF fund.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment covered part of the national contribution.

The project was carried out between 2023 and 2025.

In the pilot project, we were inspired and guided by the Church Council with regard to community building.

The purpose of community building is to inspire the network to produce its own structures that support and strengthen people's personal resources and social networks.

It is important to feel part of a community in a way that suits you.

This approach is based on the Cable method, which encourages and guides professionals to change their perspective from being omniscient experts to better listeners of those with whom they work.

One of the aims and goals of community building is conviviality.

Conclusion

The recipe booklet was produced by members of the community-sponsored integration pilot staff Sarianne Honkanen, Ari Kokko, Johanna Matikainen, Eeva Mäntylä, Milla Ukkonen, Aurora Nisso, Marika Parkkila, Satu Riikonen, Henriikka Saine, Juha Tervo and edited by Johanna Matikainen, Aurora Nisso and Satu Riikonen.

Copyright: Humak University of Applied Sciences, the Red Cross and the authors

Sources and tips

Castaneda, Anu; Mäki-Opas, Johanna; Jokela, Satu; Kivi, Nina; Lähteenmäki, Minna; Miettinen, Tanja; Nieminen, Satu & Santalahti Päivi (2018) Pakolaisten mielenterveyden tukeminen Suomessa PALOMA-käsikirja. Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. Retrieved 6 May 2025 from:

https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/136193/7.8.PALOMA_KA%cc%88SIKIRJA_WEB.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y

Heiskanen, Seija; Lehtineva, Eeva; Rautio, Hanna; Siirto Ulla (2022). Yhteisörakentajan muistikirja. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. Retrieved 6 May 2025 from:

https://jakobstad.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Opas_InklusiivisenYhdistystoiminnanRakennuspalikoita_2022.pdf

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (n.d.) Osallisuuden osa-alueet ja osallisuuden edistämisen periaatteet. Retrieved 6 May 2024 from:

<https://thl.fi/aiheet/hyvinvoinnin-ja-terveyden-edistamisen-johtaminen/osallisuuden-edistaminen/heikoimmassa-asemassa-olevien-osallisuus/osallisuuden-osa-alueet-ja-osallisuuden-edistamisen-periaatteet>

Turtiainen, Kati; Sapir, Henna (2021) Yhteisölähtöisen kotoutumisen mahdollisuudet Suomessa. Publications of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2021:30. Retrieved 6 May 2025 from:

<https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163151>

UNHCR (n.d.) Kotoutumista edistämässä. Osallistavia lähestymistapoja paikallistason ammattilaisille. Retrieved 6.5.2024 from:

<https://www.unhcr.org/us/sites/en-us/files/legacy-pdf/62b321264.pdf>

Learn more about the community-sponsored integration project - Red Cross:

<https://www.punainenristi.fi/tyomme/apua-maahanmuuttaneille/yhteisolahtoinen-kotoutuminen/>

EUAA, European Union Agency for Asylum (2024) Guidelines on the EU approach to community sponsorship retrieved from: [Guidelines on the EU approach to community sponsorship](#)



Co-funded by
the European Union

HUMAK[®]

KIRKKO-⁺
HALLITUS

Finnish Red Cross 