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Summary report on Refugees Welcome experiences - Desk Research

Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus and Réfugiés Bienvenue were both founded back in 2015 during the so called “Refugees Crisis” as part of the growing international Refugees welcome network (currently active in 18 countries in Europe and across the world). Both were founded as a response of the abject standard of living refugees were facing all over Europe and both promoted and support a cultural change within our societies towards refugees and asylum seekers. By focusing on a

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community and family based approach and by involving private citizenship in supporting refugees in their quest for autonomy and social integration, those 2 organizations provide a tangible alternative to the Institutionalized reception system that far from removing the obstacles and the causes of discrimination within society, it simply reiterates them. Both organizations developed a solid methodology and a working model that follows a bottom up approach and requires active participation of hosting families, mentors and beneficiaries who play a crucial role in their own social inclusion process as opposed of being just passive recipients of services. Within this context, housing refugees become more than just a solidarity act but acquire a political meaning, a clear testament of a would be different society.

Difference

While Réfugiés Bienvenue was actually founded by a group of law students at the Sorbonne, therefore liaising with a well-known tradition grounded in the French society where Universities are “par definition” place for social change and active citizenship, Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus was founded by several social activists scattered all over Italy (some of them were actually working at University but most of them were just part of civil society). While the former focused their effort and their activities mainly in the Ile de France region, the latter regard itself as a national organization trying from the very

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beginning to establish networks, links and alliances with like-minded organizations in different towns and regions in Italy. As a result Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus ended up developing a peculiar structure based on a network of local teams made of volunteers that after an intense training, select refugees and hosting families and support the former in the integration process.

Governance

As non profit organization both organizations have a democratic governance model. As far as Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus is concerned there are two main organs: the General Assembly, the sovereign body who is in charge for strategic decisions and is participated by all members of the association (they congregate twice a year) and the Board who manages the overall organization and ensure the coherence of the implemented activities with the Statute. Réfugiés Bienvenue is an association as defined by French law with the same general structure as Refugees Welcome Italia: a sovereign general assembly made up of all members who agree on strategic decisions and an Administrative Board that manages organization and implementation of the decisions made by the general assembly.

Methodology and approach

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As stated both organization developed a sound working model based on the participation of both refugees and activists. Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus also managed to design and draft domestic housing guidelines where consolidates the process, the actors and all the steps required to successfully matched refugees and hosting families. The Guidelines (available at the following link: <https://wiki.refugees-welcome.it/site>) are open source so they can be used, amended and changed according to needs of the organizations involved and the specific context conditions. The guidelines represent so far the most ambitious attempt to aggregate and consolidate the widely spread organization know how as well as de facto starting point for all the organizations that want to experience and get to know the topics and the challenges related to domestic housing (as we write Guidelines on Mentoring are also currently being drafted).

Challenges ahead

As both organizations stressed the crucial role of the relationship in the empowerment process, they are both struggling facing the social distance limitation linked with Pandemic Covid 19 which make more complicated matching refugees with hosting families as well as promoting and organizing events and awareness activities in the field.

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Economic sustainability can also be an issue as both organizations largely depend on grants and private funds which mainly address the operational costs of projects and activities (costs structure are indeed crucial for ensuring sustainability and broader social impact and to make sure organizations do not fall in the so called “ Non profit Starvation Cycle”). Lack of adequate resources affects also the capacity of both organizations of scaling up and bringing in new paid staff.

In terms of development both organizations realize the importance of strengthening the collaboration with the different European chapters linked to RW network, but the different national, political and legal conditions as well as the different business and work models require adequate time and resources to properly address the situation.

Result and achievements

Housing arrangement

- Réfugiés Bienvenue: 150 (20 currently active)
- Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus: 270 (currently active 72)

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- Réfugiés Bienvenue: 11 months
- Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus: 9 months (minimum 6 months)

Number of activists involved

- Réfugiés Bienvenue: 30
- Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus: 200

Number of hosting families involved

- Réfugiés Bienvenue : 150
- Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus: 250 (over 1000 enrolled on our digital platform)

Number of stakeholders profit and no profit involved

- Réfugiés Bienvenue: 6
- Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus: 30

Number of Local Institutions involved

- Réfugiés Bienvenue: 20
- Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus: 9

Number of Mentors/Supporting Families involved

- Réfugiés Bienvenue: 20
- Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus: 55

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Number of employees

- Réfugiés Bienvenue: 2 full time, 2 paid interns
- Refugees Welcome Italia Onlus: 2 full time staff, 20 part time

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