

ANNEX 3

Key Findings from the Breakout Rooms

20 March 2025 (online)

GROUP 1

Topic: Can material support foster participation in training or other integration services, and how does it need to be adapted to be inclusive of all groups in need?

Facilitators: Márton Csillag & Rimgailė Baltutė

Practice discussed: Les Restos du Cœur (France)

- Material support can serve as a powerful entry point to training and integration services, but it needs to be clearly linked to these pathways through accessible communication and referral mechanisms.
- Volunteer capacity plays a central role in service delivery and outreach, particularly in the case of Les Restos du Cœur, which relies heavily on volunteers across France. However, disparities in volunteer availability and skill levels can lead to regional inconsistencies, highlighting the need for structured volunteer training and coordination.
- Tailored support is essential for inclusivity, especially when addressing language barriers, basic skills needs, or childcare. For example, in Les Restos du Cœur, special attention is given to single mothers and families with infants to ensure meaningful access.
- Stronger and more formalised partnerships between NGOs, local authorities, and employment services can significantly enhance the sustainability and impact of integrated approaches. Shared responsibilities and better coordination can help to address complex needs more effectively.
- The meaningful participation of service users in the design and delivery of programmes was also highlighted as a critical factor. Involving beneficiaries in shaping services improves accessibility, relevance, and trust.

GROUP 2

Topic: Can material support foster participation in training or other integration services, and how does it need to be adapted to be inclusive of all groups in need?

Facilitators: Erika Borg & Ágota Scharle

Practice discussed: CEPAC / Mercearia Social Sabura (Portugal)

- The discussion highlighted the advantages of NGOs in providing flexible, personalised, and community-based services. Their proximity to local contexts allows them to act as trusted intermediaries between beneficiaries and public services.
- NGOs often fulfil a dual role, delivering support while also advocating on behalf of their target groups. In the case of CEPAC, this includes using focus groups to gather feedback and ensure that the voices of migrants and undocumented persons are reflected in service design and policy dialogue.
- Participants noted that while NGOs have valuable insights to contribute to public policy, their involvement in policymaking remains inconsistent. Engagement often depends on the political climate or policy area, with more challenges in fields that are highly politicised, such as migration.
- Despite the ESF+ commitment to the partnership principle, NGO involvement in programme planning and monitoring remains limited or ad hoc in many Member States. This is particularly evident in some Eastern European contexts, where historical mistrust may still inhibit cooperation.
- There was broad agreement that more needs to be done to build trust and enable meaningful NGO participation in ESF+ projects and governance processes at an early stage.
- Finally, participants emphasised the fragility of NGO funding. While NGOs are expected to contribute to policy and service innovation, they are rarely funded for advocacy or strategic engagement. Strengthening their financial sustainability is essential to maintain their role in integrated support ecosystems.

GROUP 3

Topic: How to organise the joint provision of material support, training and other integration services to ensure that they are more accessible and inclusive for material support users, migrants, and other vulnerable communities?

Facilitators: Jörg Markowitsch & Angela Frigo

Practice discussed: Lahti Diaconia Foundation - Dila (Finland)

- The discussion began with in-depth insights into the Lahti model. The initiative emerged in response to three local challenges: high unemployment, the demeaning experience of queuing for food in harsh weather, and the absence of structured food aid support in the city. In response, the foundation developed an online food aid service integrated with supported voluntary work placements for long-term unemployed individuals.
- The practice combines food distribution with work experience and informal skills development, while also contributing to a sense of community and belonging among participants. Probationers involved in logistics and operations benefit from both routine and structured engagement with staff and social workers.
- A complementary example from Spain was shared, highlighting a model in which social services first identify beneficiaries, who then receive food aid, followed by mandatory accompanying measures. This structured sequence, with food aid as the entry point, followed by training or social services, is seen as critical to the effectiveness of the Spanish system.
- Participants briefly discussed whether participation in training or integration services should be mandatory or voluntary. The conversation noted that practices vary across Member States and may depend on local administrative structures, service cultures, and target group characteristics.
- The session concluded with the recognition that many of these issues warrant further exploration in future events, particularly in relation to the organisation, sequencing, and governance of integrated support models.