

# Engagiert sein - “Be engaged” – Increasing and supporting civil engagement through volunteer coordinators and engaged persons in municipalities



Refugees running the self-help office in support of other refugees  
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## Location

18 municipalities in northern Vorarlberg

## Country

Austria

## Short summarizing description

“Be engaged” is a LEADER project aiming at increasing and supporting civil engagement through volunteer coordinators and engaged persons. It is active in 18 municipalities in the rural area of the Bregenzerwald and Leiblachtal. The project has set up 5 coordinators who are mobilising citizens for volunteering. By now, they have accompanied 40 initiatives which are implemented by almost 200 volunteers. Many of them deal with migration, 2 are highlighted in this application: “We are active”: Following the principle of helping people to help themselves, an office was established and staffed with refugees on a voluntary basis, supported by citizens. One major task consisted in organising volunteer work by refugees in support of the local population. Job orientation: the self-help office also organised job orientation visits for refugees in local companies.

Therefore, a comprehensive concept was worked out based on the principle of traineeship and defended towards the authorities.

## Key Terms

Civil engagement, labour market integration, helping people to help themselves

## Context and background, Which problems/challenges does your measure try to solve/cope with?

Behaviours of persons have changed in the past years: more persons prefer to get engaged spontaneously, without a formalised background such as an association or club. People try to contribute to solve challenges in society such as integration on an individual level. How can such unstructured engagements be supported? Previous activities have shown that voluntary engagement is even more successful if there is a local coordination and mobilisation, with the support from existing institutions. Regarding job orientation, possibilities for action are limited by laws and regulations. Local inhabitants fear to get into contact with newcomers, especially with migrants.

## Which are the key objectives of your measure?

Main objective: strengthen self-regulation capacities of local societies through civil engagement in selected municipalities by making local societies resilient towards external factors and to help them cope with changing environments

## Who are the main target groups and beneficiaries of your measure?

- Citizens
- Migrants
- Municipalities
- Local and regional institutions which benefit from end-of-pipe contacts (eg Familie plus, centers for assisted learning, ...)

The project strengthens regional stakeholder networks. The coordinators are in close contact with the civil society, with municipalities and with social network institutions. In particular, they ensure a link between institutions and private persons. They play an “end of pipe” role by bringing services and projects to the people.

## Which actions have already been implemented and which results have been achieved so far?

The project has set up and educated 5 coordinators for active citizenship who are active in 18 municipalities in rural areas of northern Vorarlberg. By now, they have accompanied more than 40 initiatives which have been or are implemented by almost 200 volunteers. Many of the initiatives deal with migration/integration issues: e.g. intercultural cooking evenings, regular encounter of local and migrant women and children, multi-cultural (Christmas) markets. Mutual trust has been created through interpersonal relationships and meetings (eg between local and refugee women at the “Begegnungscafé”). Language skills are improved through (family) mentorships in all municipalities. “We are active” organised in the first year more than 1000 hours of migrant’s volunteer work in support of the local population. Job integration: all local refugees have found a job and the office for self-help could be closed. This task has been established on the long-term in a regional structure.

## Which were the main problems and challenges you were/are facing when implementing the project and how did/do you (try to) overcome them?

Legal regulations constituted a major challenge. Talks with all kind of competent institutions helped to find solutions which could be integrated into the existing legal framework. Some role conflicts came up with institutions fearing that the project would act in a field which is their competence. This was also solved by intensive exchanges and by showing possible solutions. Another challenge was to motivate local individuals to get into contact with migrants. This could be achieved by providing supportive framework conditions.

### Link to website

<http://www.regio-v.at/projects/8/engagiert-sein>

### Starting date

2015-10-22

### Duration

42

### Regional scale

2 - small region (some municipalities, a mountain valley etc.)

### Other involved partners

18 municipalities in the Bregenzerwald and Leiblachtal

### Contact person

Regio V

[office@regio-v.at](mailto:office@regio-v.at)

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## Category 1, Managing social change

“Be engaged” and “We are active” help local societies to deal with the integration of migrants into local societies by motivating citizens to participate in the integration process. Personal contacts between local residents and migrants allow creating mutual trust and for migrants feeling being welcomed and accepted. It reduces the fear of local residents of getting into contact with foreigners. Individuals who want to get active in civil engagement outside traditional structures get professional support through the coordinators. Regional institutions benefit from the interface “Be engaged” provides between themselves and the local population. The population was asked to come to the self-help office „We are active“ to ask for work assignments. This conveyed the message that migrants do not “take away” but that they also contribute something. Through the work assignments (organised help to neighbours) for private persons, prejudices were reduced and the “strangers” received appreciation.

## Category 2: Integrating migrants into the local/,regional labour market

Integration of migrants into the local labour market has been successfully implemented by the job orientation initiative. The initiative paid attention to implement the principle of helping people to help themselves. Therefore, an office was established and staffed with refugees on a voluntary basis. Engaged citizens supported the refugees. The office served as a contact point for many concerns; its major task consisted in organising job orientation visits for refugees in local companies. To enable job orientation visits, a comprehensive concept was worked out based on the principle of traineeship and it was defended towards the authorities. Qualified mentors were engaged to assist the trainees instead of an education institution. All refugees involved in the initiative could be integrated into the labour market. The office could be closed and the job orientation task is now ensured by the regional institution Regio Bregenzerwald which has employed a coordinator for migration issues.

## Category 5, PR impact and awareness raising

Be engaged is raising awareness in local societies on the importance of civil engagement and on positive aspects of including strangers into local societies. The demand for engagement is particularly big in the field of integration of migrants. PR activities are the publication of a postcard collection presenting the initiatives, flyers, etc. The project has attracted much interest from the media and the public. Besides this, a changed attitude of locals is achieved through personal contacts with foreigners. "We are active": the initiative has enabled personal contacts of equals of the local population and migrants. Job orientation: companies could get personal contacts with refugees in a legally secure context. This increased their awareness on the potentials of migration and gave it a positive image.

## Category 6, Innovative dimension

Civil engagement needs services and support on an individual level and in the municipalities. The project supports new types of civil engagement outside of classical association structures. The project detects societal needs for civil engagement and offers solutions. It enables volunteers for civil engagement. "We are active" is based on the principle of helping people to help themselves. Coaching refugees made contacts with the local population possible on an equal level. Make self-help possible: by providing an office infrastructure, refugees received trust and became actors – change of roles from aid recipient to helper. Job orientation: The volunteering model was adapted to enable refugees for getting to know local companies and work culture, in a legally secure framework for the companies. Companies got the possibility to get to know new skilled labour and their capacities. An early integration into the labour market was possible before the official admission by the job service

## Category 7, Transferability

The existing institutions often do not have a direct access to their potential "clients" and beneficiaries. Therefore, the local support in the municipalities by the coordinators is beneficial to the regional institutions. Within the project, the transfer of the coordinator jobs into a long-term structure for civil engagement on the local level will be verified. This model can be transferred to any other region. "We are active": it can be transferred to any other region. Job orientation: from the pilot activity a transfer has already taken place into a regional structure. The support office has been closed and is now professionalised in an existing regional structure (Regio Bregenzerwald).

## Category 8, Embedment in a comprehensive welcoming strategy

The project contributes to the regional strategy for local development (LES2020) and its topics on strengthening regional resilience, mobilisation of social engagement and creating structures for social engagement. The project has been widely appreciated on a political level, in particular through the involvement of the 18 participating municipalities. It is assumed that project outcomes will help to include the topic of civil engagement in particular related to migration in the strategies of the Land Vorarlberg.

### Further Information



Workshop with refugees in the frame of the “We are active” initiative to help them with job integration  
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 [Presentation we-are-active\\_english.pdf](#) — 1456Kb

Presentation of the “We are active” initiative (in English language)

 [EngagiertSeinPostkarten.pdf](#) — 2461Kb

Fact sheets on some of the “Be engaged” initiatives in relation to integration of migrants (in German language)

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