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Integrating refugee and migrant population in urban communities

Centers of Social Integration and
Habitat Co-Creation



IntegrHabitat

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Background

One of the primary challenges of the present moment includes how to best harness benefits and opportunities that mixed migratory movements offer to catalyze the integral development of host cities. However, the integration of refugees and migrants from Venezuela is a complex issue also from an academic and political perspective. Integration is linked to numerous political, sociological, and fundamental economic spheres, including those concerning: the protection of human rights, promotion of zero discrimination, employment policies, public safety, social stability and peace, public health, education, foreign affairs, citizenship and development, recognition and participation, as well as the design of urban spaces, access to/availability of adequate housing, etc¹.

Some experts posit that the notion of integrating the refugee and migrant population can be understood as the process by which these groups become part of host communities² (assimilation or hegemonic unidirectionality of integration³). This understanding emphasizes stability and unity of the receiving population, adopting a normative and cohesive perspective of how this population can be organized, including in regards to social, economic, cultural, and even political relations⁴. However, said understanding simultaneously negates heterogeneity and various intangibles related to the affections, fears, loneliness, tastes, and feeling of belonging/social acceptance of refugees and migrants.

There seem to be consensus that integration is achieved through access to rights and the reduction of vulnerabilities and social barriers, as well as via the exercise of social and collective responsibilities and duties. These processes necessarily take place within living environments which permit dissent, multiculturalism, pluralism, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the use of cultural exchanges, knowledge, and experiences for the benefit of all involved parties.



The aforementioned situations must allow for the positive appreciation of both the host community and of the refugee and migrant population, facilitating the sharing of contributions for the common good that are generated through integration processes.

The 2030 Agenda highlights the importance of improving access to rights and assumes that each person should have

¹ Gil Araujo, Sandra (2010). Las argucias de la integración. Políticas migratorias, construcción nacional y cuestión social. Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos para América Latina y África (IEPALA).

² OECD (2006). De la Inmigración a la Integración: Soluciones locales para un desafío global.

³ Albar, María Jesús; García-Ramírez, Manuel; El Karkri, Mustapha; Luque-Ribelles, Violeta; Paloma, Virginia; Camacho, Carlos; El Jebari, Turia; Hernández-Plaza, Sonia; Paloma-Castro, Olga y Sevillano, José M. (2010). Contribuciones de la psicología de la liberación a la integración de la población inmigrante. *Intervención Psicosocial*, 19(3), 223-234. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5093/in2010v19n3a3>

⁴ Dedeoglu, S. (2014). Migrants, Work and Social Integration. Women's Labour in the Turkish Ethnic Economy. Londres: Palgrave Macmillan; citado en: Estudio sobre el perfil socio económico de la población venezolana y sus comunidades de acogida: una mirada hacia la inclusión; Fundación Panamericana para el Desarrollo; Lima; agosto de 2019

the ability to contribute to the development of communities on all scales, with no one being left behind. In particular, the New Urban Agenda introduces the notion of the “Right to the City” or “Cities for All” as the right to co-creation, whilst presenting enjoyment of the city as a framework for the common good which not only facilitates access to services and opportunities, but which must create conditions for the generation of value at the social, economic, and cultural levels (favored by urban quality and agglomerations) that benefits all individuals without exception.

Today, the high degree of human mobility— with cities being in many cases the point of arrival due to various political and socio-economic reasons as people seek better opportunities or flee from violence and conflicts —constitutes an important challenge for cities that must manage important migratory flows. However, diversity of origins and competition for resources (whether real or perceived) can affect social cohesion in consolidated communities, particularly in regards to identity elements and community dynamics based on permanence.

In this context, an effective approach is being promoted which fosters the inclusion of refugees and migrants into urban systems and promotes inclusive and sustainable urban development that facilitates rapid transition from humanitarian aid to development. This approach simultaneously demonstrates how effective process of integration can allow refugees and migrants to contribute to the prosperity of cities and communities, transforming human mobility into an opportunity for social, economic and cultural development.

Embracing the aforementioned approach, UNHCR, IOM, and ONU-Habitat are collaborating within the framework of the regional Project “Inclusive Cities, Solidarity Communities” (henceforth Project CICS) each making use of its expertise and mandate assigned by the United Nations system. The Project is financed by the European Union and aims to support local governments, refugees, migrants, and host communities in order to advance integration processes in various Latin American cities.

This present document serves as a proposal for a new generation of aid and counseling centers for refugees and migrants as well as other people in vulnerable situations, which can be located at the center of host communities and serve as drivers of change for inclusive neighborhood transformation, in a context of social cohesion grounded in new models of coexistence that leverage diversity. In this sense, these innovative spaces will be able to influence the social and physical construction of the Habitat—which is defined as a platform for participation and co-creation in all its dimensions of planning, governance, and management contributing to quality of life.

In continuation, various institutional and operative antecedents are listed below, from which practices and lessons can be considered for the conceptualization of what will be called *Centers of Social Integration and Habitat Co-Creation (IntegrHa-bitat)*.





Centers of popular integration and of promotion of participation

The government structure of many cities includes decentralized functions which serve to meet and channel the demands of citizens and facilitate access to services, as well as to promote citizen participation and social inclusion.

In some cases, these platforms have utilized or emphasized various instruments that exist to promote and facilitate participation in governance and in the construction of the urban environment, which eventually contribute to integration processes, such as: participatory planning, participatory budgets, community co-management of local development, community or volunteer work for common goods, citizen oversight for social control of public management results, environmental defense committees, etc.

Some examples that produced interesting impacts in terms of integration include: the “Casas Vecinales” in Lima; the “Centros de Integración Popular” and the “Centros Comunales” in Colombia; (See Annex 1).



Centers / workshops for the formulation and implementation of Master Plans and neighborhood improvement programs

These kind of platforms are constituted casuistically and are traditionally utilized for the induction of formulation processes for urban-neighborhood improvement plans and programs. The aforementioned spaces also become centers for community engagement and action, and for the dissemination of information in order to consolidate commitment towards a common vision and to enable technical and community inputs through participation.

Moreover, they may be consolidated or adapted into centers for cultural activities and for co-creation based on memory, heritage and local identity. These functions not only facilitate the formulation of and community adherence to urban transformation plans (and implementation, but also allow them to serve as innovative spaces for coexistence, contributing to the social life of a neighborhood.



From the point of view of contemporary urbanism, the conceptualization of these spaces is often born from a demand or regulated requirement of the local administration’s planning processes. Said spaces can often materialize as neuralgic points from which the urban-neighborhood transformation is activated.

Interesting examples may be associated with large urban projects such as “park-libraries of Medellín” (*“parque-bibliotecas de Medellín”*) inspired by the notion of “pedagogical urbanism”, the Program of Neighborhood and Community Improvement in Mexico City and its structuring workshops, or the *“Plan Casa para Todos”* in Ecuador.



Centers of information, counseling, and specialized services - One Stop (Youth) Centres⁵

Another inspiring example includes orientation centers, which may serve as one-stop sources for information regarding services and opportunities for the general community, as well as for specific groups like youth.

One example is the *One Stop Youth Centre* approach promoted by UN-Habitat, which is grounded in the notion that the participation and empowerment of young people, via capacity building, is key to tackle challenges faced by this age group. These centers are constituted as heterogeneous facilities but are alike in how each offers programs related to the promotion of employment, arts, sports, professional training, tutoring, and information on reproductive health, among other topics. These

⁵ UN-Habitat One Stop Youth resource centre model: <https://tinyurl.com/ydxbxue9b>

centers also have the attribute of being sites where the overall development capacity of neighborhoods and cities are strengthened through involving young people in local decision-making and city development strategies with a youth perspective.

The model of the *One Stop Youth Centre* is the result of an association or alliance between UN-Habitat and local governments and utilizes an integrated approach to youth development by providing safe spaces in urban settings where they can meet and access information and critical resources for their development. Moreover, such centers may also serve as tools for peacebuilding, research, and the development/implementation of policies.



Art and cultural centers for local integration

Culture and art particularly in cities, have always generated spaces for free expression, dialogue, research, and social exploration, in addition to be a formidable platform for the consolidation of collective identity. Public cultural centers, increasingly spurred by private and/or community initiatives, are being consolidated as actors of local integration.

The best integrated cultural centers are those that work closely with diverse associations and organizations that focus on issues related to society, artistic disciplines, or a specific target audience. Some independent cultural centers integrate themselves locally, contributing to artistic and cultural education in the neighborhood. These centers can work hand in hand with schools, periodically organizing specific shows and workshops in city centers or classrooms. Some even dedicate a large part of their programming to activities for children and students, leading them to maintain close relationships with academias and universities.



Citizen-oriented programming, dedicated to individual empowerment or local collective issues, makes cultural centers vital venues for their local audiences. For some independent cultural centers, local integration is accompanied by outside activities, such as the scheduling of artistic and cultural activities in public spaces (plazas, streets, parks) or on digital circuits/platforms, such as free online radio.

In independent centers run by artists and innovators, cultural mediation is often naturally facilitated. The artists themselves can present their work and discuss the message that they wish to convey, encouraging the public to ask questions and educate themselves in art. The direct exchange between an artist who can skillfully explain their work and the audience allows the art to be understood by any kind of viewer.



Co-working and Innovation Spaces

Collaborative or co-working spaces are sites recently related to the dissemination of the innovation paradigm and the opportunities offered by new information and communication technologies. These spaces have proliferated with an approach that creates conditions for collaboration which tend to be highly dynamic and seek to add value among collaborators.

These are usually service spaces that tend to be places conditioned for work, with solutions adapted for users, in such a way that they can be used by groups or companies from all sectors that in some way form part of a social and professional community.

The traditional definition of coworking refers to a form of labor where different and independent professionals, SMEs, and entrepreneurs—who do not necessarily belong to the same sector—work together in a shared physical space and may cultivate a feeling of belonging around ideas and innovative approaches. In their design and conception these become spaces that facilitate alliances between individuals and actors with different expertise, which in many cases create important opportunities and synergies from the labor, social, and innovation point of view.



Assistance and Orientation Centers for Refugees and Migrants

Under the coordination of Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), co-led by UNHCR and IOM, care centers⁶ for people in human mobility conditions, mainly refugees and migrants, have been consolidated in the LAC region and at a global scale. In Latin America, the operation of these spaces has been adapted to the specific context in their given location, leading them to function in different manners and names.

Among the existing centers, the Points of Attention and Orientation (PAO) stand out, as spaces managed by UNHCR or its implementing partners to provide attention to the needs of the refugee, migrant, displaced, and host population. Their main services include information and guidance on routes, mechanisms and processes available to access public services and fundamental rights such as health, education and legal assistance; information on regularization procedures; data collection on people in need of protection and referral to care routes, institutions and specialized organizations; help for re-establishing contacts and family reunification; protective spaces for children, adolescents, and pregnant/breastfeeding women; safe areas for rest and recovery; medical care and vaccination, among others.

Likewise, since 2018, the IOM, through the Emergency and Stabilization Program (E&ES), with the financial support of the Office of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) of the Department of State of the United States, implements the Points of Reference and Orientation (PRO). Its offer of

services reaches people in transit on roads, also known as walkers; to Venezuelan nationals with a vocation of permanence, to Colombian returnees, and the population of host communities in vulnerable conditions. According to their structural make-up, PROs can be classified into mobiles (vehicles equipped to provide itinerant care on roads and reach places that are difficult to access) or fixed (in structures such as tents, containers adapted for care, or buildings located in key sites of mixed migratory flows from Venezuela). In these spaces, refugees and migrants from Venezuela receive information about their rights and duties. In addition, information is provided on how to register children for the prevention of statelessness, protection risks during their mobility (including human trafficking and smuggling), as well as forms of regularization of immigration status, homologation of university degrees, access to social services, and other relevant information to prepare them for their arrival in Colombia.

For additional information:

<https://somospanascolombia.com/lineasdeatencion/>

<https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/r4v-factsheet-espacios-de-apoyo-marzo-2020>

<https://colombia.iom.int/la-oim-colombia-cuenta-con-17-puntos-de-referenciacion-y-orientacion-pro-para-atender-refugiados-y>

⁶ These spaces acquire different names on a regional scale. Those which serve the refugee and migrant population of Venezuelan origin are known as Support Spaces and Points of Assistance and Orientation.

Innovative proposal:

IntegrHabitat



In line with the multidimensional approach promoted by the Project “**Ciudades Incluyentes Comunidades Solidarias**” for the integration of the refugee and migrant population in host communities from the perspective of sustainable urban development, we propose a new generation of community centers open to all. These innovative spaces will incorporate the dimension of assistance and orientation for the most vulnerable but also co-creation of solutions and opportunities along with place making processes as fundamental elements for effective socioeconomic integration. These multipurpose centers will be key to advance multicultural dialogues for peaceful coexistence and social cohesion

leveraging diversity for innovation, favoring social construction of places, communities and opportunities. They will be instrumental to connect plans promoted by the institutions with local visions and other “bottom-up” processes of governance and management of the urban transformation in an inclusive and sustainable framework.

Taking as references the practices listed above, from which the respective strengths can be integrated, the Center for Social Integration and Habitat Co-creation (**IntegrHA-bitat Center**) will be characterized by the following elements:



Open to all and for all

Assistance to refugee and migrant⁷ population, as well as action focused on other vulnerable groups should be an important component, but not the sole one function performed by the **IntegrHA-bitat**. The space and services must be open to everyone, embrace diversity and facilitate the exchange of information, the convergence of demand and supply, and respond to multiple needs and aspirations, against which it will continually have to position itself.

Its open attention to the entire population, independent of migration status, but based on vulnerability criteria seeks to bring—as close as possible to people—a portfolio of services and a space for active engagement towards positive transformations with a perspective of rights and recognition of a diverse society as valuable asset.

Likewise, open attention to the entire community will allow its sustainability and ensure adequate support from the population, once the integration process between the different community groups begins to consolidate.



Localized perspective —The location counts!

By having a localized perspective, the center will be nurtured by the tangible and intangible assets of the given territory where it is constructed, as well as its multiple cultural identities⁸ in order to influence integration processes, social cohesion, and coexistence in situ.

Having to provide a service and feed on the local sociocultural dynamics in order to favor change and facilitate the collective co-creation of space, the center must be close to the population it serves and when possible be located in a central, strategic, and adequate area from which it can exercise its transformative role more effectively. Furthermore, when devising the space, participatory design should be facilitated in order to reflect existing visions, and to promote ownership and a sense of belonging

⁷ This includes services such as legal assistance to facilitate the formalization of their regular permanent status, access to services provided by public, non-governmental, and cooperation institutions; provision of information for access to work and formalization of studies and experience; etc.

⁸ Within the framework of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted by the 31st session of the UNESCO General Conference held in Paris on November 2, 2001 (Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sp/professionalinterest/pages/culturaldiversity.aspx>)

Roles to be played by IntegrHabitat



Community governance and elements of self-management

The **IntegrHA-bitat** Center can be constituted as a platform for community mobilization and dialogue with institutions, in planning and decision-making processes for the territory, promoting participatory and transparent governance. In addition, the Center promotes the cooperation and coordination of different stakeholders such as the general population, the local authority, international cooperation, and civil society organizations that work on aspects related to the neighborhood, its development needs, and care for its population.

The Center should have important elements of self-management to promote free initiatives, ensure sustainability and continuous connection with the local community in order to become a pillar of community management and governance as well as strengthen a sense of belonging.


If well planned and managed, it could generate jobs and income that would be reinvested in the center itself or in the community.

Promotion of culture, creativity, and innovation

Promote creative initiatives (both of a social and economic nature) and the mixed cultural heritage of the community/neighborhood through art, culture, identity, and memory. The result will be the promotion of interculturality and diversity as values and resources for development, the spurring of prosperity and innovation, and the encouragement of free expression, coexistence and integration of different cultural identities.


Improving the life of the neighborhood will be a priority of the **IntegrHA-bitat** Center's cultural mission, which will organize original activities based around themes of memory and local identity to design a

better future for the neighborhood. These will give special attention to individual empowerment through the dissemination of open data, the exchange of knowledge, and the promotion of entrepreneurship being able to host local incubators.

 Cultivate civic sense and solidarity

Promote social integration through actions promoting coexistence within the population and the recognition of different needs and equal rights, all with special attention on vulnerable groups such as people in situation of human mobility, women, children and adolescents, the elderly, the LGTBQI + population, and differently abled individuals, among others.

In this way, the **IntegrHA-bitat** Center will become a space for collective construction that considers the needs of the most vulnerable groups in a distinct manner when considering accessibility of the habitat. Moreover, the Center will also provide opportunities for safety and access to rights in an universal way, promoting civic engagement and harmonious coexistence in diverse societies.


 Provide services related to social protection and rights, as well as support for socio-economic integration

The **IntegrHA-bitat** Center would not be constituted as static spaces, but rather, dynamic in responding to existing demands. Although, they must have permanent elements, such as those related to public assistance services, attention to and counseling of vulnerable populations—in particular to the refugee and migrant population.

Among the various activities and services, it must provide assistance and advice on access to municipal/district public services and on the protection and regularization of the population in human mobility. Moreover, the Center must: propel actions promoting the economy and generate opportunities for job creation based on local assets and the social capital of the communities; consolidate community

ties and strengthen capacities related to productivity and entrepreneurship to cultivate more prosperous and sustainable environments.



 Be the engine for a participatory neighborhood transformation

Generate dialogue, actions, and participation among all actors and settlers (refugees, migrants and host communities) in processes of co-creation and social construction applied to the Habitat, considered as ideal grounds through which to cement integration, social cohesion and inclusive development.

Specifically, the **IntegrHA-bitat** Center would materialize this function by proposing itself as a reference or by supporting existing mechanisms of active community participation in the formulation and implementation of urban development plans, land use planning and comprehensive neighborhood improvement programs⁹. Additionally, said function would also be realized in other institutional and/or community initiatives of different scales where the dimension of the physical space is valued according to the interest of all, pursuing impacts on a social, economic, and environmental level.

⁹ This could include specific processes within the same programs/plans, for example: Resettlement of homes that are located in high-risk areas, improvement of public spaces and service infrastructure, development of sustainable mobility projects, care and recovery of urban ecosystems, circular economy strategies and orange development areas, design of self-managed housing programs, etc

Bringing their services and participation platforms closer to the neighborhood level, the Center will permanently work on the consolidation of community ties, which allow consolidating safe spaces for the expression, participation, and incidence of groups with specific needs to materialize planning and physical transformation actions with a differential focus that is integrated at all territorial scales.



Management and Governance

The implementation model of the **IntegrHA-bitat** Centers must necessarily be applied maintaining certain flexibility and contemplating a scaled and scalable approach in order to adapt to specific contexts and take advantage of opportunities related

to existing public and private initiatives, as well as from the international cooperation.

Therefore, the **IntegrHA-bitat** Center should consider:

- Adapting itself to local participation and governance mechanisms
- Consider variable and mixed management elements (Public - Private / Community)
- Integrate into or complement existing spaces/ centers (adding modules, functions, services, etc.)

SOME INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANT INTEGRATION CENTERS¹¹

- Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs): https://www.ilo.org/asia/areas/WCMS_234459/lang--en/index.htm
- Migrant education-information centres: <https://migrationsmartpractices.ifrc.org/smart-practice/migrant-education-information-centres-tajikistan/>
- OM Information Centers for Immigrants in Sofia and Burgas: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/intpract/iom-information-centers-for-immigrants-in-sofia-and-burgas>
- Mobile information centers and safe houses: <https://rosanjose.iom.int/site/es/noticia/la-oim-inaugura-un-centro-de-i-formacion-sobre-migracion-y-lanza-una-aplicacion-movil-para>
- Reception Centers (Belgium, Finland): <https://redcross.eu/projects/specialised-care-at-belgian-receptions-for-asylum-seekers>
- Reception Centers for asylum applicants- Centri di accoglienza per richiedenti asilo (CARA): <http://www.osservatoriomigranti.org/?cara>
- More than shelters: <https://www.hello-europe.eu/foc-more-than-shelters>
- Community centres for migrants: <https://migrationsmartpractices.ifrc.org/smart-practice/community-centres-for-migrants-turkey/>
- Piloting of integration information and counseling centres in Estonia: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/intpract/piloting-of-integration-information-and-counselling-centres-in-estonia>
- ZIRF Information Centre for voluntary return: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/50aa5a129.pdf>
- Safe Houses: <https://www.acnur.org/noticias/noticia/2018/3/5b0be7c012/espacios-seguros-en-guatemala-ofrecen-un-refugio-a-las-personas-en-movimiento.html>
- Attention and Guidance Points (PAOS) in Colombia: <https://help.unhcr.org/colombia/donde-encontrar-ayuda/oficinas-del-acnur/>
- One-Stop Youth Centres: https://un-habitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/07/un-habitat_one_stop_youth_resource_centre_model.pdf

¹¹ Source: Felipe Vera, Verónica Adler, Paola Ortiz Baez (2020); Inmigrando: construir ciudades plurales, BID.





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