



General project information

Project name	Capacity Mentoring Programme
Organisation name	Capacity
Year of project foundation	2015
Short project description (in one sentence)	Supporting refugees and migrants to reach their full potential
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Visuals of the project

Do you have project logo? If yes, please, upload it here.



Can you share some project photo with us?



Social issue that is addressed by the project

What is the background of the social issue? What are the causes of it?

In Switzerland, many people with refugee and migrant backgrounds are under- or -unemployed – i.e. their skills, knowledge and qualifications are often poorly recognised in the Swiss labour market. There are also issues with language and cultural integration. The causes are complex: Switzerland is a small country with 4 national languages and strong traditional gender, culture and social practices. The education and work training journey is also unique within Europe (a strong emphasis on apprenticeship over higher education qualifications as a route into white-collar jobs, for example). Thus, newcomers to Switzerland face a series of cultural, educational and practical hurdles in finding work.

Capacity's mentoring programme addresses these by offering people with refugee and migrant backgrounds the opportunity to explore entrepreneurship as a route into financial independence. Participants are supported to build their own business or social/cultural project with workshops, co-working sessions and 1-to-1 mentoring. The programme encourages personal development of the participants, and supports a 2-way integration process by demonstrating to locals about the potential of the participants, and helping the participants to understand their new country and see what they can offer in return.

Is the social issue somehow specific for your country/region or can we expect that similar issue could be solved in the Czech Republic as well?

The issue faced by migrants and refugees in Switzerland is not unique: driven by the recent 'migration crisis' but based on decades of human movements across national borders, most European countries are currently holding discussions about how best to integrate migrants and refugees into their economy and culture without losing the host culture and without creating enclaves of foreigners. The Capacity approach, of encouraging people to focus on skills, on equality and on potential, has been shown in Zurich to break down assumptions about refugees and migrants, permitting a more positive and constructive dialogue to start between hosts and newcomers. It also actively contradicts existing paradigms around 'refugees as helpless' and instead focuses attention on the human resources that refugees and migrants bring with them that can contribute to the host country.

Description of the project target group

Can you describe project target group? What is its size, is the target group somehow specific for the country/region?

To date, the Capacity mentoring programme has run twice: in 2016 and 2017. In total, around 30 participants have taken part, drawn from both refugee and migrant communities. Participants are about 50:50 women:men, and come from over 15 countries.

The key criteria for participation in our programme are:

- 1) A strong grasp of either English or German, and if they are English speaking then a basic grasp of German (and an expectation that they will be learning German) – German is the local language in the Zurich area. All our workshops are bilingual.
- 2) Legal permission to work in Switzerland – we do not accept newly-arrived refugees who are not yet allowed to work, nor do we accept anyone denied permission to work. The legal permit situation in Switzerland is very complex and not transferrable to other countries. In order for participants to set up their own business or social/cultural initiative in Switzerland, they do need to be legally resident and able to work here.
- 3) They must bring a business or project idea with them – this idea may and likely will change during the programme, but they have to want to set something up from their own initiative
- 4) It is desirable that the participants have some sort of higher education – either a degree or at least high-school

What is the current impact of the social innovation? How big part of the target group do you operate with?

On the 30 participants who have experienced the programme so far, the personal and economic impacts are variable but interesting: the majority found that engaging with local Swiss business people as mentors and trainers was hugely rewarding, and helped them overcome their assumptions about the Swiss (often based on negative experiences during their migration process). Likewise, the trainers and mentors also stated that they learnt a lot from participating – a good 2-way learning experience.

Personally, the participants seem to have gained in confidence about their skills, knowledge and experiences – and understood better how to present these to employers (if they chose to try to find work rather than pursue their idea), and more generally had a better understanding of their own value (for example, no longer introducing themselves as 'I'm X, I'm a refugee' but instead as 'I'm X, I want to be a business owner').

Practically, the programme is a 6-month programme, so most participants do not manage to completely set up their business or project and make it self-sustaining in that time frame. Some participants have already made some first sales within the programme time-frame, others have emerged with a clear business plan and action plan, and yet others have emerged with a strong CV and cover letter, and advice from their mentor on applying for jobs. Our programme does not prevent people deciding against entrepreneurship, but instead works with them to identify suitable job openings and collate their resume.

In terms of overall impact on the migrant and refugee population in the Zurich area: it is very small, as the number of non-Swiss in the region is high.

In which territory do you address the social issue?

Zurich canton, Switzerland

Description of the social innovation

What are the key features of your innovation?

- 1) Focus on personal and professional development
- 2) Demonstrating the potential of our participants to the host population
- 3) Bringing host and migrant communities together in an eye-to-eye context (business development) to avoid stereotypes of 'poor little refugees needing help'

What are the main benefits of your innovation for the target group? What are the innovative aspects of your solution?

- 1) Support with realising a desire to become financially independent
- 2) Support with realising a dream to sell products/services or provide social/cultural services for their community/that they designed

Who are your competitors? How do you differ?

Capacity is a strongly collaborative, community-driven organisation, so we seek to build partnerships and relationships with projects offering similar services and programmes.

We work with Crescenda and SINGA Switzerland – who both offer similar sorts of training around entrepreneurship for migrants, but either do so in Basel canton (Crescenda) or who offer a much more full-time, tech-oriented programme (SINGA). With both of these organisations, Capacity exchanges learnings, and might recommend a participant to try one of the other courses if it suits them better or offers an obvious follow-on course.

How do you achieve financial sustainability? Which financial model do you use?

To date, we have received project-funding from partners within government, business and entrepreneurship sectors. Going into 2018 we are looking to develop more sustainable financing sources.

Who are your key partners?

Impact Hub Zurich, regional government partners, UBS Switzerland

Do you think that your project/innovative solution is transferable?

If not, why? If yes, are you interested in project scaling outside your country? Have you ever been in touch with any country because of project scaling outside your country?

Yes: with caveats. It is transferrable, in that we know of other entrepreneurship programmes for refugees and migrants in other countries, so the concept clearly transfers. However, the social and cultural context, the skills required and the economic environment in which the programme would take place (and the participants would be operating in) is obviously likely to be very different, and would need careful local development and adaptation.

Experience with starting up the project

What is your good practice in starting up your project? What would you do in the same way?

There has been a lot of learning on the road to successfully starting the programme, and during its second iteration. We would look to bring these learnings to any new programme that we develop.

What would you beware? Have you had any failure in project starting up?

Be very clear on the aims and outcomes from the start – this helps to ensure that you are working with the right partners, and in the right way.

Capacity has not had any serious failures to date.

Short project history

Can you provide short project history (milestones - year and what happened)?

2015

February: initial team meet

April: Won the Impact Hub Social Impact Start Award

July: Capacity charity is formally set up

June-September: prototyping and research phase

2016

January: funding for first programme received (national government, regional government, Impact Hub Zurich)

April: programme recruitment

May-December: Programme

2017

January: funding received for 2nd programme (Impact Hub Zurich, UBS, regional government)

February-May: recruitment

April: Prema Gyan Medal awarded by the Good Festival

May-November: programme