

Integration is Experienced Locally



Photo: Inter-Actions

The Fête quartier en folie took place in Dudelange. This event was organized by the association Inter-Actions, the city of Dudelange and OLAI.

By Mike Gordon

Integration is a high priority issue for Luxembourg, with foreigners making up a significant part of the population: figures from last year show that 43.2% of this country's population of approximately 511,800 did not hold a Luxembourg passport and hailed from 170 different countries. In the workforce, Luxembourg nationals make up only a quarter of private sector employment.

Integration occurs primarily at the local level. Indeed, that's where most people have the greatest chance to participate in local life—be it with schools, childcare, hobbies, etc. Integration at the local level—like integration at the national level—can only succeed if it's a two-way process and if responsibilities are shared among Luxembourgers and non-Luxembourgers.

The government has recently launched a number of initiatives to encourage integration measures. In the previous issue of *Connexion*, the Welcome and Integration contract was presented. This time, we'll look at what integration can mean at the local level and what means and bodies can facilitate your participation.

WHY THE LOCAL LEVEL?

Aspects of integration are played out every day in neighborhoods, towns and regions. Municipalities play an important role, as they are usually the first point of contact for residents. The recent national strategy for integration at the local level highlights a number of orientations which integration projects should reflect. Indeed, integration at the local level can only happen if awareness has been made with regard to its transversal, sustainable and shared nature. Integration at the local level is not only a question for official bodies focusing on integration. It is a matter concerning all inhabitants of a commune since it has an effect on schools, sports associations, cultural offerings, etc. It allows us to transcend our divisions and share a common goal.

CONSULTATIVE COMMISSIONS FOR INTEGRATION: A KEY PLAYER

Towns, villages and cities are required by a recently passed law (Grand-Ducal Regulation of November 15, 2011) to set up

consultative commissions for integration (CCI) to promote better integration in all 106 communes. CCIs are intended to play an essential role between municipal authorities, local politics, national government and the municipalities' populations, highlighting needs and passing messages in both directions.

THE CALL: AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET NATIONAL SUPPORT

The Luxembourg government has launched its second call in 2012 for municipally organized integration projects eligible for its co-financing initiative. The Luxembourg Reception and Integration Agency (OLAI) issued the call on July 16, following an earlier call issued March 28.

OLAI financing can be applied to a range of projects that can be organized by CCIs—for example, producing a welcome brochure, translating certain official documents and organizing receptions for new arrivals. OLAI also supports municipalities that have chosen to undertake a concerted and multi-year effort to put in place an ensemble of actions promoting, in a sustainable manner, integration in their area.

This second call for projects addresses towns and villages that did not submit projects following the earlier initiative. The co-financing is capped at 50% of the total project, within the available funds. Municipalities can qualify for a maximum of five projects which must be carried out in 2012.

Co-financed projects must fulfill certain criteria. The office points out that “the initiative proposed for co-financing must lead to real exchanges and substantive interactions between the populations concerned.”

A VARIETY OF OTHER SUPPORT TOOLS

OLAI, along with the CLAE (Comité de liaison des associations étrangères) and CEFIS (Center d'étude et de formation interculturelles et sociales), have prepared a series of training modules for members of the consultative commission for integration, helping them to understand various aspects of immigration, citizenship, governance, integration concepts, project

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

The study of existing projects in a range of Luxembourg municipalities has allowed OLAI to identify a number of key factors that lead to the successful inception and support for local integration projects:

- The identification of specific needs for the integration of the groups in question
- Strong political will
- Involving and motivating local actors
- Technical support in carrying out approved efforts
- Starting projects that are able to fulfill realistic and achievable objectives
- Making the necessary people available to enable to the coordination of efforts on the ground
- The involvement of the populations concerned, both Luxembourgish and non-Luxembourgish
- A broad approach to integration involving the taking into account of integration questions at all levels of the municipalities' service and institutions

INTEGRATION AGREEMENTS

Some municipalities request operational support on various matters: in terms of what projects to select, how to put them into operation and how to best target the various groups concerned. This has led to the creation of integration agreements (*pactes d'intégration*), the goal of which is to help municipalities who sign to undertake "a voluntary and coordinated approach in favor of integration". Signing the integration agreement engages the triple support of the national government, municipalities and civil society, with each playing its own role. Specifically, the integration agreement involves OLAI, ASTI (Association de Soutien aux Travailleurs Immigrés) and the municipality or group of municipalities.

- OLAI co-finances the projects included in the agreement and oversees the coherence of the co-financed projects.
- ASTI, through an agreement with OLAI, oversees the integration agreement with the advice and support of local actors, in the execution of the agreement's projects, by putting local actors in contact with resource people, offering written translation services, producing articles for community newsletters and document research, and with the provision of addresses and sharing of know-how.
- The municipality (or group of municipalities) remains in charge of putting the projects into motion and are in charge of the projects' administrative and financial coordination, as well as communicating about the agreement within the municipality.



A workshop for CCI members held in Remich

Photo: Jeroen van der Hoef (originally printed in Luxemburger Wort)

development and electoral participation. These modules aim to empower the newly elected commission to set up its own projects according to the needs and demands which have been identified.

OLAI, in collaboration with the ASTI and Syvicol (Syndicat des Villes et Communes Luxembourgeoises, or the Union of Luxembourg Communes/Municipalities) have prepared a guide helping those who seek to organize projects. It is presented as a series of questions that should be answered before launching an integration project, and thus helps organizers in planning and executing concrete projects.

OLAI is currently working on a website called Integraloc that provides a portal for exchanging good practice in the field of integration at the local level. The site's goal is to bring together the various people working in the integration area at a local level. It also presents integration projects put in place and the tools and services proposed namely by associations.

In collaboration with INAP (Institut national d'administration publique) and CEFIS, OLAI has set up a training course on intercultural knowledge and skills (*formation à l'approche interculturelle*) addressing the employees of the communes and of the state who are in direct contact with the foreign population. The purpose of this training course is to provide tools allowing them to solve the types of concrete problems they are likely to encounter in their work with foreigners. This course aims in particular at developing sensitivity concerning intercultural issues and to make participants aware that it is essential for all of us to take part in the process of integration.

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