



The Urban Lab of Europe!

JOURNAL

PROJECT

MiFRIENDLY CITIES

Coventry, United Kingdom

TOPIC

Integration of migrants and refugees

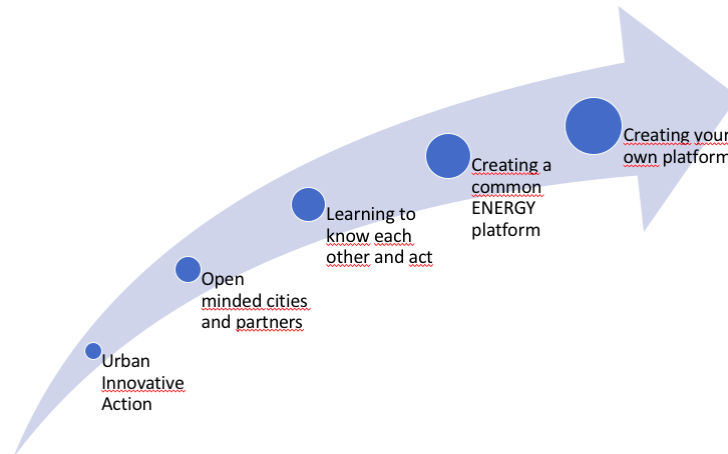
EDIT 28 JULY 2022

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WOLKOWINSKI UIA  
EXPERT

## Create your collective energy in a MiFC platform

See on UIA website



Search below for such wonders of the project, as; - how to become a common platform, with your own powers, - how to cement partnerships between all actors for future collaboration, - how other partners learn to appreciate each other, - and how the beneficiaries, the (ex)migrants and (ex)refugees, have become the protagonists of change of their own lives and the community. Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton share their experience in increasing the neighbourliness of all residents.

The **MiFRIENDLY CITIES** project has become a platform which recognises the positive contribution of refugees and migrants to the city's civic, economic and social fabric. Refugees and migrants are key actors playing an important role in deciding what makes a **"migrant friendly city"** and driving the change on job creation, social entrepreneurship & innovation, active citizenship and communication. Through the creation of a **Business Leaders' Forum**, a toolkit for employers and intensive training in advanced digital manufacturing, the project has created the conditions for new job opportunities for migrants and refugees and better match their skills with employers. At the same time, it has enhanced participation and active citizenship by providing a financial scheme, mentoring and support for up to 50 **social enterprises and social innovation projects**. Strong attention was given to communication and evaluation of the approaches tested, showing on the basis of evidence what works. Over 100 refugees and migrants have been trained as **Citizen Journalists** to engage with the mainstream media, create their own stories and media channels while 80 were mentored and supported to become **Citizen Social Scientists** in charge of the project's qualitative evaluation and have been employed by third parties.



Mike Hardy

*This type of project - says professor [Mike Hardy](#) - changes the way we look at ourselves, our humanity. The barriers we are confronted with are not housing or jobs, but culture.*

*Mifriendly were friendly – says a participant – let’s have another MiFC as it’s easier funding. A new MiFC. The world would become friendlier.*

## 1. The partners of MiFriendly Cities

- Coventry City Council
- Wolverhampton City Council
- Birmingham City Council
- Coventry University
- Interserve - multinational company
- Migrant Voice (MV)- local migration network
- Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC)
- The Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC)
- Coventry University Social Enterprises (CUSE)
- Central England Law Centre (CELC)- NGO
- Migration Work (MW)- NGO

## 2. Executive summary: From top down to bottom up

The **MiFriendly Cities** project stopped in 2021 (May). However, the **platform of energy** now called MiFriendly Cities (MiFC) is strong, is being exported to other cities and continues its life in Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton.

MiFriendly Cities was able to facilitate some really innovative developments, setting a blueprint for how best to support and improve the experiences of migrants not only in the city but across the region by giving them a sense of belonging and encouraging them on their journey to integration...- says councillor David Welsh<sup>[1]</sup> - MiFriendly Cities recognised that refugees and migrants bring with them a diverse range of skills, qualifications and professional experience bringing enormous value to our region, our economy and our society.

The strength of the project can now be seen, in the different publications, which are mentioned in the following chapters, and in the recognition MiFC has obtained nationally and internationally in many areas.

By giving the ex-migrants and ex-refugees adequate space to be creative, MiFC has gained new protagonists for the local communities, absolutely convinced that all persons living in these cities are assets with a high added value for the community.

This final Journal No 6 aims to show other cities, that the collective energy of a **MiFC platform** is worth working towards and the legacy of the Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton version is worth having a look at in order to create your own. Achieving high quality neighbourliness, requires **mobilising evidence** <-> which will **mobilise participation**.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Councillor David Welsh, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Coventry City Council

## 3. The general progress of the project

*“It started top down and became bottom up”* said one of the Coventry staff members. Indeed, MiFriendly Cities (MiFC) started as a large-scale project with 3 city authorities (Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton) as well as 9 NGO’s. Over three years of hard work MiFC now constitutes the bedrock for many initiatives and collaborations, relying upon the ex-beneficiaries – the ex-migrants and ex-refugees and ex-asylum seekers, who have become the legacy of the project as civic protagonists ([ZOOM-IN 3](#)) and on the XXI century heroes of the project ([Journal 5](#)).

### a. what has happened with the project since it’s end date

[Coventry CC](#), responsible for the management of the whole Urban Innovative Action ([UIA](#)) project has published [‘A Guide to developing a MiFriendly City’](#), which encourages other cities to follow in the footsteps of the project, by bringing together persons from the outside and the already existing residents, by strengthening communities,

welcoming migrants and leading on innovation.

At the [World Technology Universities](#) congress on the 19th October 2021 [Sinead Quillon](#) presented and launched the guide book for developing a Migration Friendly City. The guide can be a stand-alone document, but it is also surrounded by many other supports, allowing a city which decides to work on the subject of co-living, to see how to work with the private sector with the help of an [Employers' Guide](#) or on employability through the [Career Guidance](#) and many others ([here](#)). To understand the initial stages or origins of the whole process refer to the [MiFriendly Cities Interactive Guide](#) which can later be analysed through the Guide to Developing a MiFriendly City to see how things developed.

A birds eye view of many of the stages of the project can be found on the [UJA web page](#), written by Peter Wolkowski, who had the honour of trying to keep up with the innovations and developments of the project (6 Journals and 3 ZOOM-IN's) over a total of 4 years.

A year after the closing of the project, which of course lived through the COVID 19 crisis and the results of Brexit, the protagonists are dealing with a continuous flow of refugees and migrants from the coast of the UK, but also Ukrainians, fleeing their country due to the military invasion and war provoked by Russia. Having learnt that co-living processes take time, passion and willpower, many of the project activities are being taken forward, developed and worked through more profoundly:

**Citizen Social Scientists** – professor [Mike Hardy](#), the creator of the [Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations](#) at Coventry University realised that the university was not sufficiently linked to the city and it's challenges. When he was asked to do something about it in 2011 he created the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations building on the need to get involved in the life of this very multicultural city, basing the process on the participation of the population in the activities of the city and of the inhabitants in the life of the university. What better way to really get to know, in a mutual way, the life and challenges existing in the city?

MiFriendly Cities was the occasion for Coventry University to develop this vision even further, by training over 80 Citizen Social Scientists to:

- 1) undertake research related to MiFC (resulting in 60 Citizen Social Scientist (CSS) projects reaching 2,000 individuals),
- 2) evaluate the progress of MiFC,
- 3) be a resource within the region for other agencies.

More concretely, 9 MiFC Citizen Social Scientists conducted research on the social economy and informed The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) emerging [mental health](#) commission. One participant has started a PhD programme and another is informing members of Parliament about the experiences of asylum-seeking mothers. Four Citizen Social Scientists have secured paid research work, following successful interviews at the University of Manchester. They will now support an International project to train 14-18-year-olds in interview training in Melbourne and Manchester.

In addition, Coventry University developed participatory design approaches and the Citizen Social Science Train the Trainer programme for 10 hubs in 10 countries as part of the [tinnogo.eu](#) project

**Fab Lab** – a spin off from the Centre for Peace, Trust and Social Relations centred on training migrants and refugees in new technologies. It was the social added value of the Fab Lab, as a meeting place, a networking place and where to pop in and drink a coffee, which allowed the real win-win situation for participants. It became a semi-finalist in the MacJannet Prize for Global Citizenship and as part of MiFriendly Cities was nominated in the top 10 for human rights in the [European Innovation In Politics Award](#) in 2020.

**Employees rights – skills audit** - the employment of persons from outside of the UK put off many employers. The research done in MiFC allowed many of them to understand and appreciate the most recently arrived persons, who can often have 'hidden' competences, due to their life experiences. This has been taken into account in the skills audit which is proposed in the [Career Guidance](#) report.



Ake Achi

However, the gaps in the British legal system, especially between immigration laws and workplace legislation leave a lot of questions unanswered. One of the ex-refugees **Ake Achi** (see a more detailed description [here](#)), created [Migrants At Work Ltd](#) with some grass roots funding from the MiFC project. He has become a central person in the defence of workers' rights and migrant workers exploitation, ***basing the work on the empowerment of ex-migrants and ex-refugees to take their place fully in their local communities***. Migrants At Work is the winner of the [Human Trafficking Foundation's Anti-Slavery day Awards](#) in the category "Empowering survivor voices".

He continues his collaboration with Sinead Ouilon and Katharine Jones from Coventry University, and now trains people in this complex legal area all over the country. He also collaborates at the European level with the European Commission delegation in the UK as part of a European Rights working group with representatives from 27 EU countries. This represents a platform to raise concerns about the impact of immigration and employment law and the political context on EU and EEA families.

**Health and volunteering** – the project partners trained members of the migrant and refugee communities to signpost their communities in the crucial area of health and become Health Champions. The training was delivered by Coventry University, permanently in as close a relationship as possible with the inhabitants of the city. The volunteering experience helped the Coventry Health Champions (CHC's) gain a qualification, work experience and to make connections with new people and organisations (many were asylum seekers, not yet eligible to work). Resource has since been allocated to employ a coordinator, who was a former CHC.

**The CHC's role around COVID-19 and dispelling myths has been so so important and they are a workforce we couldn't have managed without in such difficult times** (Liz Gaulton, Director Public Health and Wellbeing Coventry City Council).

**Social Innovation Network (NOMI)** – 15 social innovation projects proposed by migrants and/or refugees, received micro-finance as a result of a call. It became rapidly apparent, that older and more experienced structures could support newer ones by sharing their experiences. The network worked well during the project's life and at the moment is looking for a second stage of development, needing some more intensive coordination and resources.

**The culture of language** – learning a new language is always a challenge, especially when it is needed every day. ESOL classes already existed, but MiFC invented a '[Share my language](#)' process, (described in [Journal 4](#)) through which adults and children could learn other's languages, English included in a more informal and cultural way: telling stories, cooking, painting, drawing etc. This gave many of the participants greater confidence and informal competences needed to go for a job interview or in finding employment.

**Legal rights for minors** - Support for undocumented children: the Central England Law Centre ([CELC](#)) worked with local authorities to embed a process for supporting the immigration status of undocumented children (many are entitled to citizenship), as part of their 'Children's Services' remit. CELC are now developing a practice guide for social workers in the 3 local authorities which will provide frontline workers with the skills and knowledge to address these issues. To accompany this shift in policy, **Coventry City Council will pilot the first citizenship ceremonies for young people in the country**. This demonstrates a commitment by key actors in the region to make MiFC a reality for young migrants and their families.

**Others** – the furniture factories in Wolverhampton and Coventry are working independently at present. They give

persons who work there a first professional experience, while at the same time filling a hole in the solidarity between citizens, by refurbishing used furniture for make-overs for families which manage to obtain lodgings.

On the other hand, sustainable fashion production, cat-walk show allow women to use their own capacities and creativity, combining fashion with new technologies.

**“Galvanised”** – the three local authorities, Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton are now working together on different projects, even though they have no common boundaries. They have added other local authorities in projects, where, as their representatives say themselves, they need each other even more. They have learned a lot through MiFC and what is maybe more important, continue to learn, notwithstanding that they have different approaches. The MiFC heritage, through the research evidence brought forward has allowed The [West Midlands Combined Authority](#) (WMCA) to budget 11 million pounds as a [resilience fund](#). The £11million would be used to support the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations to support the most vulnerable in communities. The collaboration in the West Midlands has strongly reinforced the position of this area in the national debates and discussions, which has produced the turnaround of the British government concerning the financing of local communities and the role of the local authorities.

## b. what is the project’s plan for long term sustainability

The WMCA 11-million-pound resilience fund is a good start, and will be reinforced with the 20-million-pound South Migration Hub. The evaluation done on the MiFriendly Cities project gives confidence as to how the partners support vulnerable groups, approach the carbon footprint challenge etc. Things can now be done on the **basis of evidence** of what was successful, or not...as the MiFriendly Cities experience has shown, through research and evaluation.

The long-term sustainability of all actions is upheld by the most important take away of MiFC which is **the empowered voice of the migrants and refugees** themselves. This was worked through by [Migrant Voice](#), specialised in preparing persons to speak for themselves and to be able to tell their stories in ways comfortable for them. To this approach needs to be added the ethos of Coventry and the other cities concerning newcomers. **THEY** are persons who most often want to work, to contribute to the local communities and in return their role is seen as positive and they are warmly welcomed. This is in direct opposition to the national British policies, which attempt to dissuade people from getting to the UK.

Professor Mike Hardy, now also Chairman of International Leadership Association, claims that the whole MiFriendly Cities process has been a huge success because **“it is known and recognised by everyone in the street”**.

The title of the project itself is very fortunate, he says, as it indicates clearly what cities want to be and is recognisable. He shows, that the project has done what many leaders in the world try to do, which is to make sense of the mess we are in whilst enabling others to make positive change. **Mobilise evidence <-> mobilise participation**: that’s exactly what MiFriendly Cities has done and proposes other cities to do.

## 4. Generated knowledge: a. Lessons learned

From the **leadership** point of view such a wide and ambitious project constitutes an opportunity to try out interesting and innovative things, whose success or failure can determine the next set of decisions to be made. In management, being able to convince on the basis of proof in action is fundamental.

When **good connections are established between a local authority and the NGO’s and SE’s** working in its area, it gives a feeling of real progress in terms of cohesion and allows the showcasing of concrete actions.

Embedding well tested services within the **local authority** is also much easier, especially when work with children and families has shown the needs for rights to exist.

The MiFC platform produced a truly **participative approach for co-implementation** especially in the area of employment and partnership with businesses and in the relation of migrants and refugees with the project partners.

Participation is not possible without giving migrants the voice.

The skills gap and the honesty of employers were not understood at the moment of writing the project, but they became the fundamentals of new levels of collaboration. The concept of a platform, magnetising all around it is very important. MiFC allowed the ambitions of the project partners to become reality, it transcended traditional departmental barriers, provoking positive collaboration and did exactly the same in the relations between the three cities.

**Communicating with target beneficiaries and users** was in permanent progress throughout and this

momentum is maintained with new migrants, Afghans, Ukrainians and others. MiFC chose to make the beneficiaries and users of the project its main protagonists: they learned to speak for themselves, they signposted health questions within and outside given communities, they studied different aspects of migration and became social innovators.

Throughout the project, its management and actions were very dense and involving for all those concerned. Only at the end, when the lessons learned started to appear, did upscaling become a reality, in the sense that the learnings from the project, allow case proven progress whilst influencing the next waves of decision making. This can also positively influence other cities, which are ready to develop their own **MiFC platform**.

**Monitoring and evaluation** is obligatory in all EU projects. This is a really exciting tool in the hands of such a "platform", as it allows participants, beneficiaries, partners and local authorities, to understand and appreciate what is being done and the enormous work which has already been done. This does not come about on its own, it needs experts, who are ready to open up to participative ways of establishing a common theory of change, and to bring into the limelight of evaluation and monitoring, what is really unknown, but also what is measurable quantitatively and from a qualitative point of view.

## 5. Generated knowledge: b. Recommendations to other cities which wish to implement innovative projects

Attitude and energy are the most important ingredients in innovative projects. In the case of those concerning migrants, the challenge is how to create mutual acceptance and neighbourly conditions of life. This can either be seen as a difficulty, or alternatively as a strong ingredient of improving collective living, by approaching the whole question from the point of view of the added values of these social assets.

Below is a list of recommendations, some of which are more general and some refer in particular to the challenge of living together:

1. **Asset based approach** – both migrants and residents are assets: use them as creative building blocks.
2. **Teams and networks** work very differently. Utilise the assets of your city; an intimate knowledge of the city, its partners, the way things work...
3. Make sure you have the **infrastructure** in place. (eg. track record of migrant partnerships).
4. Keeping people thinking and moving. The strongest cohesion force is the developed **momentum**.
5. **Leadership** buy in at different levels is vital. Individuals may not agree but collectively they have to see a common overarching goal in the actions they put into place.
6. Urban strategies need to focus on **small is beautiful** -> recognising the champions. A lot of small catalyst spending is very useful especially for initiatives without a formal structure. Pots of money for small projects. Discover local ways of achieving this, on the basis of mutual confidence...
7. **Allow everyone in**. The open doors policy is vital for the sake of coherence.
8. **Deep dive work** with a specific group can be transferred to work with other groups, if well adapted: eg. from asylum seekers to women and to the circular economy.
9. A common "**platform**" or "**vehicle**" such as MiFC is necessary to produce change: eg allow and stimulate collaborations between departments, with NGO's or Social Enterprises.

## 6. Conclusion: a. the expert's final reflexion and "evaluation" of the project

MiFriendly Cities is no longer a project, but a way of doing things. As underlines Prof. Hardy, the good fortune of the project was its name, which has become a popularly accepted synonym for a welcoming city, gaining from the venue of newcomers, who enrich it and densify the social and cultural contents of everyday qualitative life.

However, what is even more exciting is that the project has tested and proved many of the elements contained in the Commission's [Common Provision Regulation](#) (CPR), where the fifth stage (PO5) is clearly horizontal:

A Europe closer to citizens, by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

At the same time MiFriendly Cities project life coincided with the work done by the German presidency and many EU partners on the [Leipzig 2.0 charter](#) concerning urban policies, which is based on the principle that they should:

[...] stimulate innovative and participatory approaches in urban development, promote socio-economic and territorial cohesion, and support polycentric settlement structures.

**Leipzig**  
**2.0 Leipzig 2.0 Descriptions**  
**Principles**

**MiFC evidence-based experiences**[\[1\]](#)

Place  
- Focusing urban strategies and funding instruments on the local situation, given potentials, in order to foster endogenous urban transformation and reduce socioeconomic inequalities

Asset based project – all migrants and refugees as an added value to the territory.

Newcomers evolving from beneficiaries to protagonists of change and self-emancipation – health champions, citizen social scientists, social innovators, etc.

Employers – guiding them to more openness towards newcomers and their competences.

Job seekers – facilitating multiple approaches to the job market.

Integrated  
Coordinating all areas of urban policy in a spatial sectorial and temporal manner

The on-going process of coordination, snowballed into better collaboration between the 3 non-neighbouring local authorities, building strong links between the participating NGO's.

Each LA worked in its own way, but the exchanges and transfers of experiences were of a very high added value.

The distances, mobility costs and family life of migrants and refugees taken into consideration for trainings, meetings etc.

Participatory democracy, involving all urban actors to strengthen local participation and that impact their daily lives. Including new forms of co-creation and co-design practices that can help cities create innovative solutions in managing conflicts, share responsibilities, find on innovative solutions

Health Champions – signposting communities towards appropriate services.

Citizen Social Scientists – finding out what different community's needs really are.

Share My Language – co-creation of social capital, and language exchange.

Social Innovator – a stepping stone to becoming active protagonists of and for your community.

MiFC – how to become and ex-migrant, ex-refugee, ex asylum seeker.

Multi-level governance Tackling challenges jointly across all levels of urban and spatial policy

The COVID crisis and the ingenuity of the protagonists served the integration of many departments and structures developing common holistic and proactive ways of collaborating.

[1] Only some examples are cited here, further information in all the materials previously mentioned.

## 7. Conclusion: b. what has been the main legacy of the project both in terms of knowledge generated and the solution implemented

1. **The added value of migrants:** established as “assets” from the beginning of the project, MiFC has shown, that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are the best protagonists of what is called integration, and what can in other terms be described as the potential of living together in good neighbourliness.

2. **Migrants are pioneers of change** and have shifted public attitude towards migration, which may influence policy approaches to integration...overarching aims of powering the success of the West Midlands and enabling cultural and social change.

3. **The dignity of speaking for yourself:** all too often misconceptions and wrongly interpreted facts create tension in the debate about migrants. Training migrants to tell their story, to present themselves, as to how to write and be a civic journalist: all these elements constitute the benchmarks of “giving them their voice”.

4. The “**platform**” or “**vehicle**” that MiFC has created cannot be imitated. It constitutes the originality of each city that will try and create one. However, without such a momentum and common energy enormous efforts may not be efficient nor visible.

5. **Strong diversity of the partnership:** *“a MiFC needs participants and partners to co-design, co-develop and co-respond to action areas. Undoubtedly the biggest strength of the approach, outside of the Migrant-led ethos, is the energy, commitment, strength and positive impact that a varied partnership with tentacles out to wider networks can have”*[1]

6. **Evidence based:** MiFC proved itself, by concrete actions. They were positively evaluated, through a common theory of change and were made visible by a very efficient communication policy. This gives all MiFC inspired decisions much more confidence, as more of what was successful will function.

[1] Guide to Developing a MiFriendly City, p.9



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Integration of migrants and refugees

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