URBACT

Co-funded by the European Union

Interreg

City of Utrecht

Network final output of Plan Einstein Academy
URBACT Innovation Transfer Network 2024-2026

Plan Einstein

A Model of Social Inclusion for European Cities

Lessons from a two-year transfer journey



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Coimbra (Portugal)
Suceava (Romania)
Thessaloniki (Greece)
Warsaw (Poland)
Zagreb (Croatia)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication is the final product of a two-year exchange and learning project involving six European cities.

Funded by the European URBACT programme as an ‘Innovation Transfer Network’, the project explored how Utrecht’s innovative ‘Plan Einstein’ approach to local social cohesion could be transferred and applied in a diverse group of five European cities.

We are grateful to all of our city partners for coming on this journey with us, working to understand the Plan Einstein approach and engaging with their local stakeholders to plan its transfer and implementation in their own local contexts.

Thanks go to URBACT for providing the methodology behind our Innovation Transfer Network as well as the Cohesion Policy funding from the European Regional Development Fund to co-finance our activities.

Thanks also to URBACT Expert Ed Thorpe for his consistent support to our exchange and learning processes and for helping to create this publication - as well as to the support and inspiration provided by URBACT Ad Hoc Experts Niene Oepkes, Leendert de Bell and Agnieszka Płoska along the way.

Layout by Basten Simmelink (Studio Vloeistof)



WELCOME MESSAGE

Thank you for taking an interest in our story of how to create welcoming, socially cohesive neighbourhoods in the cities of Europe.

Our story is one of social innovation, demonstrated through practical action and tangible local change, originally developed here in Utrecht in the Netherlands. But we have been working hard to show how the model can be applied equally well in any neighbourhood in any city.

This publication aims to explain how our approach works – a set of ideas and principles implemented under the name 'Plan Einstein'. It tells the story of how a pilot project funded by the EU as an Urban Innovative Action in 2016 became city policy applied in ever-more neighbourhoods of our city.

It also showcases our work over the past two years to explore how the approach can be applied in diverse national and local contexts in neighbourhoods of our partner cities in Croatia, Greece, Poland, Portugal and Romania.

We hope that you will be inspired by the diversity of our examples to see how Plan Einstein could address social cohesion challenges in your cities and neighbourhoods. We invite you to join us in continuing to build Plan Einstein as a European movement over the years to come based on supporting the well-being of all members of our local communities, whatever their background.

Rik van der Graaf
Deputy Mayor for Asylum and Integration, City of Utrecht
Utrecht, May 2026



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WHAT IS PLAN EINSTEIN?

Fundamental principles
Plan Einstein is a neighbourhood-oriented approach to local social cohesion. It is based on some fundamental basic principles and ideas that need to be followed and respected at all times.

The first is the need to **respect individual human rights and to treat every person with dignity regardless of their background**. In particular, this principle applies whether a person has lived in the neighbourhood all their lives, or arrived today. It includes the need to respect and enable people to rebuild their own identity and self-narrative after trauma.

Plan Einstein also applies a **future-free approach** in which support and inclusion are offered independently of any assumptions about anyone's future life path. In particular, this means that people are welcomed and included whether their future will be to remain in the neighbourhood or to move on somewhere else.

It is also based on the well-supported theory that **human contact, familiarity and cooperation increase empathy and trust**, whilst separation increases stereotypes and 'otherness'. Social cohesion can be improved when all members of the community can interact meaningfully under the right conditions.

The overall philosophy of Plan Einstein can be summed up as: **"Living together, learning together, working together"**.

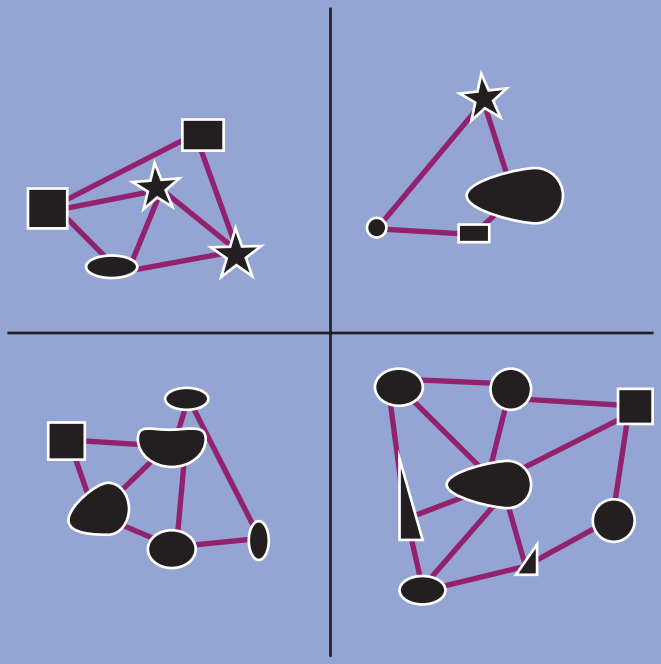


APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES

The basic principles set out on the previous page are fundamental for understanding Plan Einstein, but they can be too abstract to inform specific policies or activities on the ground. When seeking to put Plan Einstein into practice at neighbourhood level therefore, it is helpful to follow the five 'implementation guidelines' set out on the right. These are more tangible concepts that can be used to guide and inform practical activities and choices.

These five guiding principles have been developed and refined during the course of the Plan Einstein Academy project. They should be used as the basis for planning transfer to any city or neighbourhood in Europe.

As we will see, however, the application of these guidelines still enables and requires very diverse specific activities in different local contexts.



Each local implementation of Plan Einstein will be a unique constellation of actions, depending on local culture, preferences, language, policies etc.

Plan Einstein 'Implementation Guidelines'

1. **Facilitate diverse activities bringing together all-comers on an equal footing.**
2. **Take into account the shared needs of all community members 'from Day 1'.**
3. **Organise activities supporting the personal and professional development of all.**
4. **Provide attractive spaces for meaningful encounters between diverse individuals.**
5. **Mobilise a supportive ecosystem of engaged stakeholders.**

ORIGIN STORY: FROM PILOT PROJECT...

Background

Utrecht is located in the centre of mainland Netherlands. With a population of around 360,000, it is the fourth-largest city in the country. It is a biking city, with a large university and characterised in the centre by canals, wharfs, narrow streets and historic buildings.

Like many cities across Europe – Utrecht was faced with a steep rise in numbers of new arrivals in 2015 due to the fast escalation of the situation in Syria. While the city responded by setting up emergency temporary accommodation, there was also increasing awareness that existing models – which isolated new arrivals from local communities – were creating separation and often distrust between groups.

Aware that current policies risked creating long-term local problems and conscious that this wave of migration was unlikely to be the last, high-ranking city officials argued that another approach was needed.

Pilot project

In this context, city officials successfully applied for Urban Innovative Action (UIA) funding to develop an innovative approach to better respond to the needs of locals and new arrivals alike in ways that would foster understanding, respect individual human rights and support personal development of all involved.

The underlying theory of change was that by bringing people together as equals through supportive activities from day one, the project would create good relations and social cohesion in the neighbourhood, increase skills and connections and promote higher levels of mental wellbeing for refugees and neighbourhood members.

The project housed asylum seekers and refugees in the same complex as local young people in a relatively deprived neighbourhood and created welcoming spaces and diverse activities to bring people together as equals, whatever their background.

The approach was based on a partnership developed by the city authority with local NGOs, social enterprises and educational institutions.



.... TO CITY POLICY

While many local residents initially opposed the development of a new migrant reception facility in their neighbourhood, the pilot project demonstrated that the approach was a benefit to the whole local community. Local attitudes towards the centre significantly improved and, by the end of the project, many locals who were initially opposed to the original centre wanted it to remain open.

Due to the promises of local politicians, the pilot centre developed under the UIA project closed. Nevertheless, the success of the approach convinced the City of Utrecht to transfer the concept to a new location alongside the main refugee centre at Haydnlaan (in another neighbourhood of Utrecht).

However, the name of the original site at Einsteindreef had already given the overall concept a new name. The project became known as 'Plan Einstein' and the new location was called 'Plan Einstein Haydn' (see following pages for more details).

Even more positively for the long-term continuity of the concept, in 2019, **Plan Einstein was adopted as local policy for the reception and inclusion of migrants**. The vote was passed by unanimity – including parties at all ends of the political spectrum. This has meant that the reception of asylum seekers in Utrecht – even under national policy – should respect Plan Einstein principles for the benefit of new arrivals and existing neighbourhood members.

On this basis, the Municipality has continued to roll out Plan Einstein locations within the city together with local partners. Each of these have demonstrated different local applications according to the specific neighbourhood context and target groups – all while respecting the same fundamental principles.









PLAN EINSTEIN IN PRACTICE –

IMPLEMENTATION IN UTRECHT

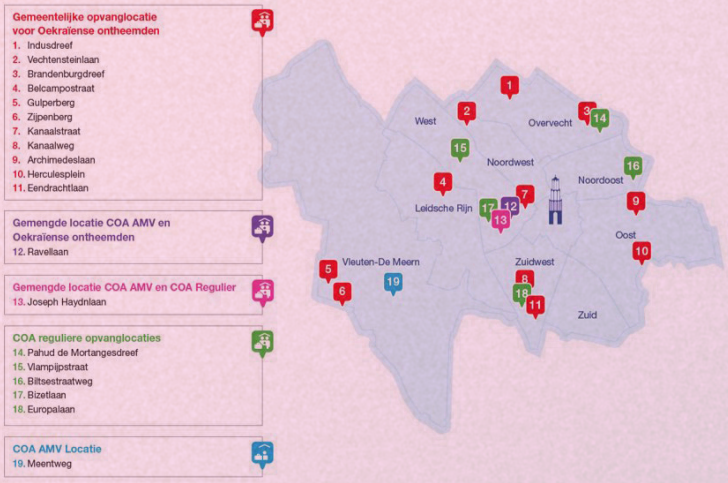
Since Plan Einstein became the official policy of the City of Utrecht in 2019, its innovative approach to asylum reception has continued to be rolled out in neighbourhoods across the city through a diverse range of spaces and activities.

The map below shows the distribution of Utrecht's reception facilities in 2025.

Regular refugee centres paid for by the national reception agency are flagged in green, while municipal facilities for refugees from Ukraine (under a separate programme) are in red.

The other colours represent centres that accommodate unaccompanied minors (alongside other groups).

In May 2026, Utrecht had 1,805 places in its reception centres.



Since 2019, Utrecht has sought increasingly to offer the Plan Einstein philosophy across this network of locations. It started by creating an open, welcoming space following Plan Einstein principles alongside the city's longest-running refugee centre at Haydnlaan (No.13) and has since created Plan Einstein locations at Pahud (No.14), Herculesplein (No.10) and Biltsestraatweg (No.16).

Since July 2025, a new agreement with the national 'Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers' (COA) sees the City of Utrecht receive €1.63 per refugee per day for all Plan Einstein locations. Supported by this agreement, Utrecht has continued to introduce Plan Einstein open, welcoming spaces into COA reception facilities at Vlampijpstraat (No. 15) and at Europalaan (p.18).

See the following pages for more information on these locations. The city also continues to expand and reinforce the Plan Einstein ecosystem of community actors offering open and inclusive activities for both social networking and personal development purposes. These take place both at the above-mentioned Plan Einstein locations as well as at partner premises, creating a network of Plan Einstein 'hubs' across the city.

I. PLAN EINSTEIN HAYDN

Utrecht's longest-standing refugee shelter was opened in 1990 in a former military hospital (located at Haydnlaan). It operated along quite traditional lines and there was very limited contact between migrants and locals in the neighbourhood over the years. At the same time, there were relatively few issues and little impetus to change things.

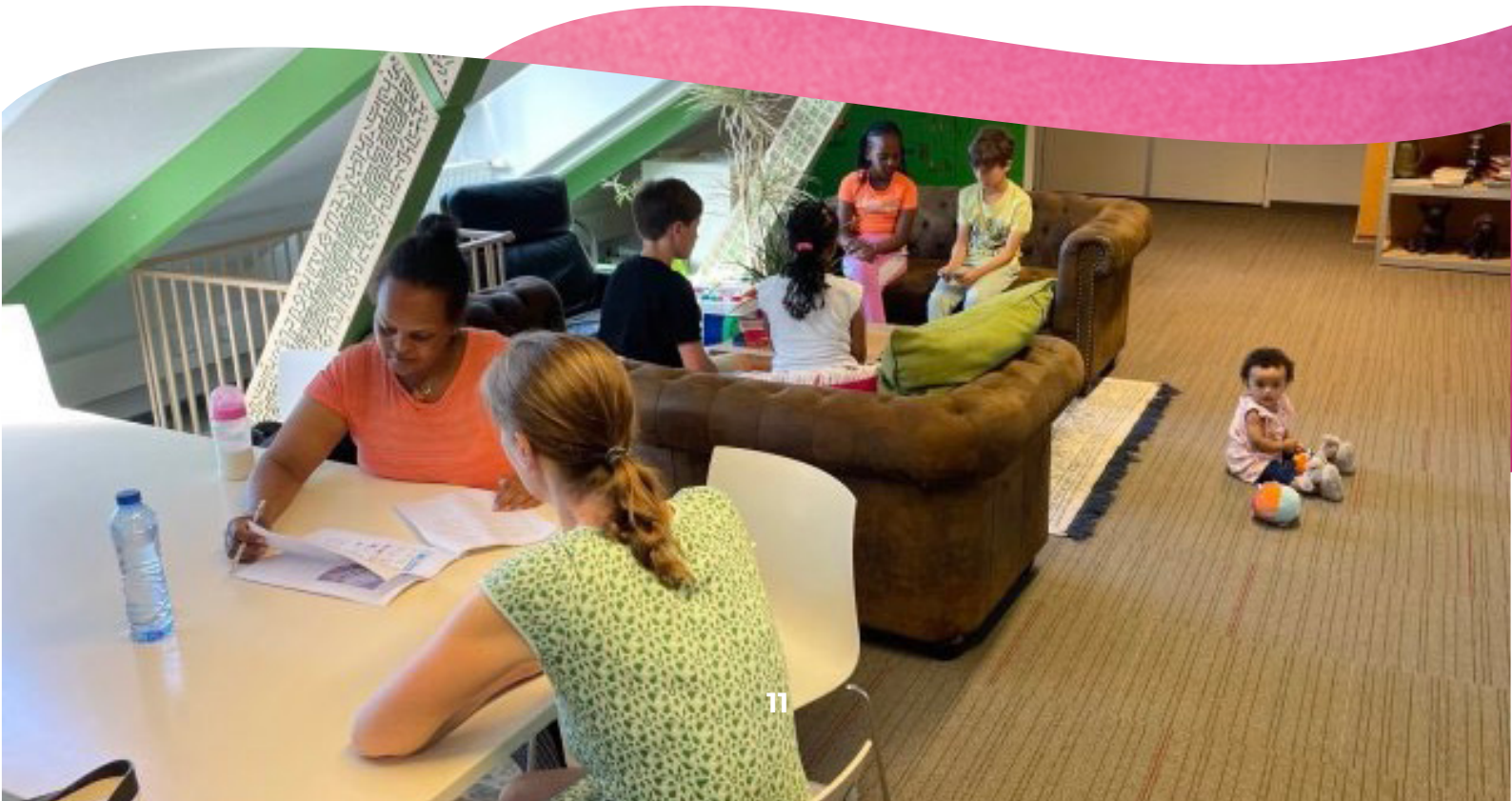
However, this changed following the successful UIA pilot project and the adoption of Plan Einstein as the official policy of the City of Utrecht in 2019. The first follow-up action was to introduce Plan Einstein principles to this shelter at Haydnlaan, which currently accommodates 562 asylum seekers.

It was not possible to introduce a co-housing element to the existing infrastructure, so implementation focused on delivering an attractive, open space and activities for meaningful encounters between asylum seekers and local residents in a loft space in a neighbouring building. The new location was called 'Plan Einstein Haydn'.

The space was designed to be as welcoming as possible, including being attractive and colourful, with motifs from different cultures. The creation of the space was supported by the organisation of diverse activities to turn it into an active and used community resource. Activities include IT/ computer classes, language café sessions, Dutch and English classes, mental health support sessions, and activities for mothers and children.

Implementation of Plan Einstein principles is also supported by numerous partners offering diverse inclusive activities in open and welcoming Plan Einstein 'hubs' within walking distance of Plan Einstein Haydn. This includes personal development activities such as 'Build Your Own Future' entrepreneurship courses, and targeted 'Women in Business' courses, as well as trajectories with job coaches to learn hard and soft skills to find and keep a paid job.

Diverse socio-cultural activities in hub locations include drawing classes, workshops on topics from dancing together to massage, a kids club for ages 4-12, and skateboarding activities for older children.



II. PLAN EINSTEIN PAHUD

In 2023, negotiations between the municipality and the national reception agency (COA) came to an agreement that until July 2025, the Municipality would get €800,000 a year for the programme. On this basis, a new reception facility was developed with space for 300 asylum seekers and co-housing for 30 local young people. The co-housing was co-financed by the rent paid by the youngsters every month.



While the accommodation for the local young people and the asylum seekers are in separate blocks, there are on the same site and benefit from several shared facilities. This includes a communal outdoor space, with infrastructure for sitting and for children to play.

The site includes a ground-floor, shared open and welcoming space, where allcomers are welcome to go for a tea or coffee and classrooms for the organisation of diverse activities.



A key part of the implementation of the Plan Einstein approach are personal development activities, including business and entrepreneurship courses - such as ‘Build Your Own Future’ and ‘Women in Business’ – as well as CV building courses, language courses and job coaching.

There are also a range of psychosocial support activities, such as ‘Mindfit’ meetings organised by the Refugee Council where refugees can talk in a safe environment about psychological and other issues they are facing. Activities aim to support self-narrative restoration for those affected by trauma.

As part of the range of activities organised through the shared space, there are a lot of sports activities like football, art activities like making mandalas and photography workshops, dance evenings, sewing courses and cooking together with the neighbourhood. Specific activities are organised for children, including kids’ games, creative activities and sport.

As part of the Continuity Plan, the Pahud site will be prolonged until at least 2028 with Plan Einstein activities an integral part of the new prolonged agreement with COA and the national government.

III. PLAN EINSTEIN HERCULES

Plan Einstein Hercules saw the introduction, in May 2025, of an open welcoming space and activities for meaningful encounters at ‘Herculesplein’ - in a neighbourhood where lots of Ukrainian refugees are already housed.

The centre is open to all neighbourhood members and Ukrainian refugees wherever they are living in the city. There is no co-housing element, but plenty of joint activities, both formal and informal. The space is in a relatively gentrified neighbourhood where numerous volunteers have been engaged.

The free open space and programme of activities is paid out of the budget of the Ukraine programme with support from the national government and the municipality of Utrecht who co-organise it with NGOs, including Vitalya – a self-organised association of Ukrainian refugees.

Several activities are organised to foster meaningful connections between refugees and neighbourhood members, including making music together, cooking together and Dutch language cafes. Another activity is called “meet the neighbours” to have more contacts between Ukrainian and Dutch people and aim to open up the activities increasingly to Utrecht citizens.

Other activities open to all include a chess club, acupuncture and English conversation courses, as well as play activities for children. Many Ukrainian people from the Ukrainian reception centres also follow more advanced English courses at the Plan Einstein Haydn and Pahud locations.



IV. PLAN EINSTEIN STAR LODGE

On the Biltsestraatweg is the Star Lodge - a temporary location opened in May 2021 for reception of now 335 asylum seekers, which also integrates Plan Einstein principles within the specifics of its own local reality. Because of lack of space, there is only a very small open, welcoming space for all.

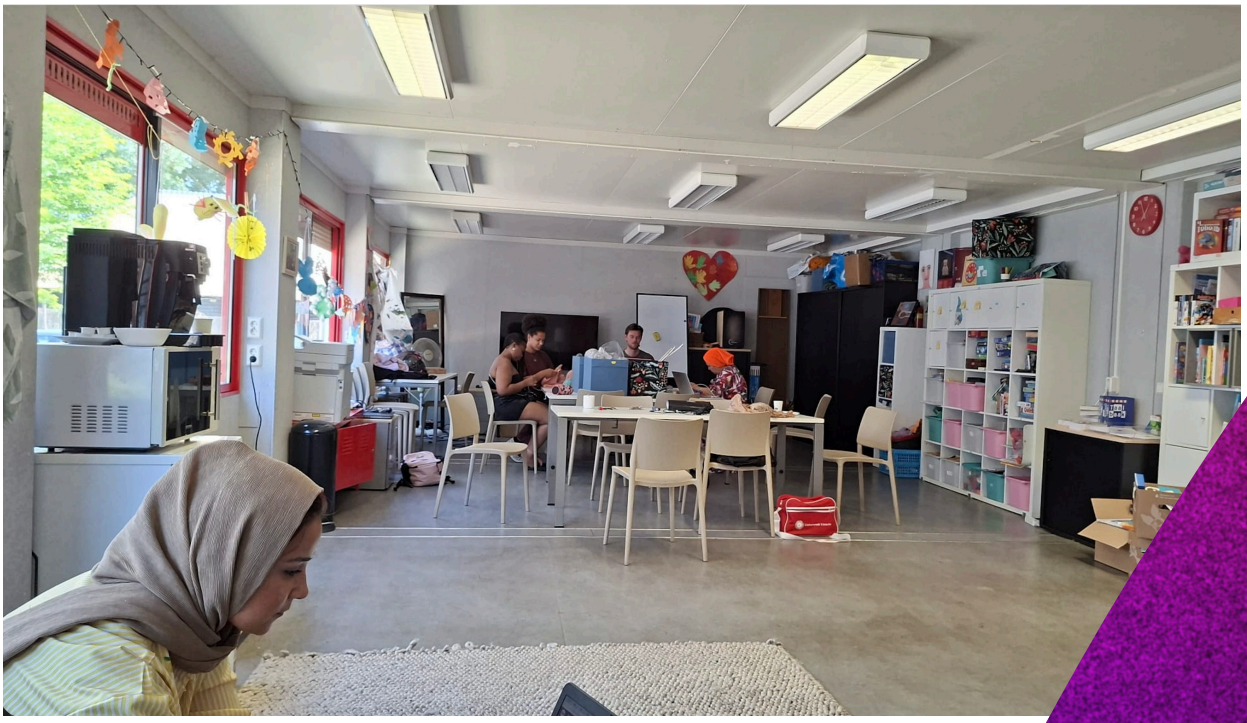
Nevertheless, there are diverse activities organised in the space to bring people together, including circus classes with clowns and playing volleyball together.

Several activities are specifically targeted at women and children. There are various kids club activities including gaming and children's movies. There are also activities designed to create safe spaces for women, including sewing activities and a women's café.

Also, in this neighbourhood, many of the activities organised to implement Plan Einstein principles take place in other buildings. For example, there is a community gardening activity available nearby organised by the association 'Buitenkamer' (Outsideroom).

There are also activities such as 'cooking in the neighbourhood' where refugees cook with local people in the neighbourhood and teach each other different recipes from their own cultures. The local tennis club opens its doors to inclusive 'kings games' for children on the occasion of the annual celebration of the birthday of the Dutch king in April.

Residents of Plan Einstein Star Lodge are also able to access English courses at Plan Einstein Pahud – demonstrating an aspect of the ecosystem approach to implementing Plan Einstein in Utrecht.



V. PLAN EINSTEIN VLAMPIJPSTRAAT

Plan Einstein Vlampijp is a new temporary location which opened for three years in May 2025 for 220 asylum seekers. To enable implementation of the Plan Einstein philosophy, there is a small free open space where many activities take place.

There are psychosocial support activities offered by the Refugee Council, including guiding people to different activities and courses. There are Dutch language cafes and diverse socio-cultural activities including sports, arts, dance evenings, and creative workshops such as sewing. Specific activities are organised for children, including a special day of activities for the celebrations on the day before Kings Day and safe activities organised for women only.

For English courses, residents of the centre go to courses organised at the Plan Einstein Haydn and Pahud locations as part of the ecosystem approach. There are also local gardening activities based on cultivating diverse plants.



VI. PLAN EINSTEIN EUROPALAAN

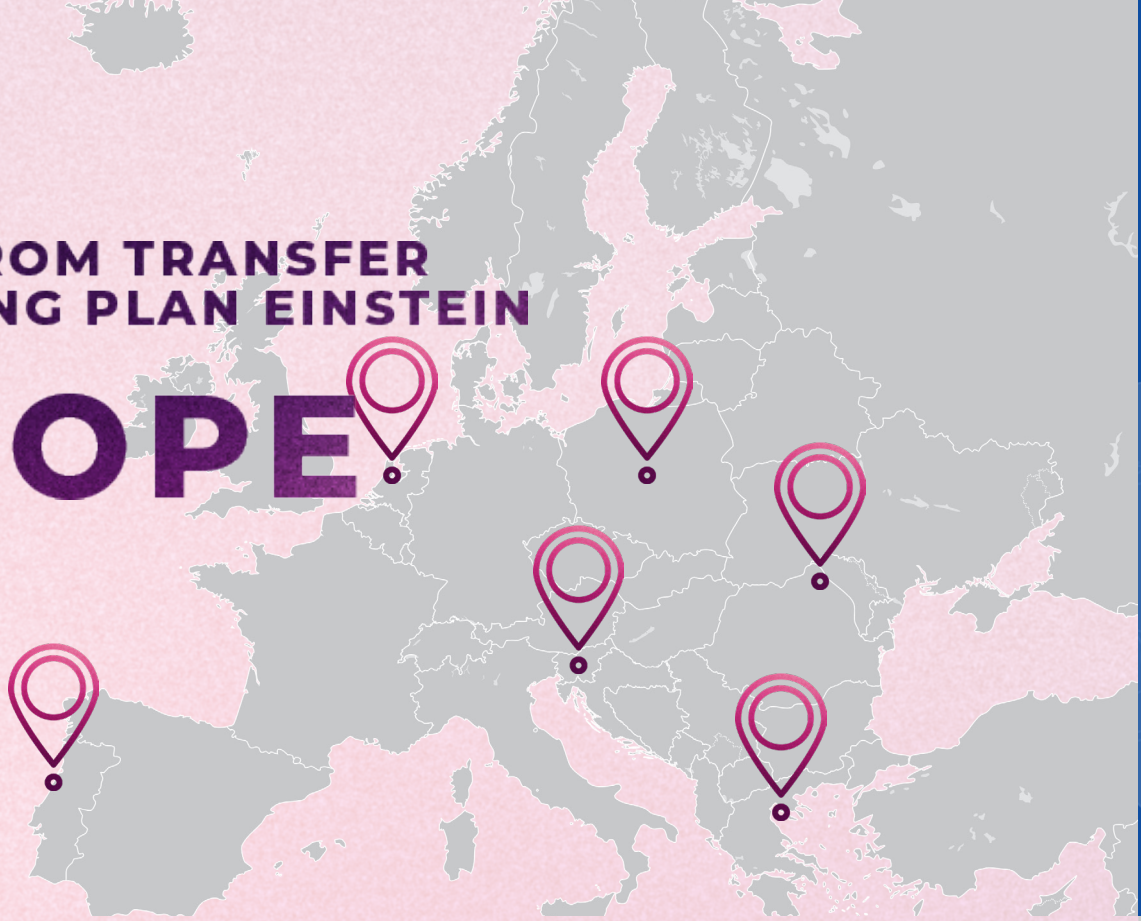
This location was first opened in 2025 only for women and children with capacity for 130 people. By summer its capacity had increased to 200 people and this will be increased to 330 people by autumn 2026 following further refurbishment of the building.

There are spaces for people to meet. Nevertheless, as part of this refurbishment, a key aim is also to develop a more open, welcoming space for meaningful encounters.

To begin with, shared activities have focused on sports, culture and art, such as making mandalas, painting with watercolours, dance evenings, sewing activities for women, special kids' games on the day before Kings Day and other children's activities. There are also more informal opportunities to meet and make connections, including drinking coffee together and exchanging in the form of language cafes.



LESSONS FROM TRANSFER INTRODUCING PLAN EINSTEIN ACROSS EUROPE



The URBACT Innovation Transfer Network 'Plan Einstein Academy' has worked to explore and plan the transfer of Utrecht's Plan Einstein model to five partner cities across Europe.

The network partnership is characterised by its diversity – including in terms of city size, geographic location, migrant profiles, local experiences of migrant reception and local policies towards social inclusion and social cohesion.

The five transfer stories are both inspiring and highly revealing of the different ways in which Plan Einstein can be transferred to diverse local contexts. Key aspects of these diverse approaches are:

- **Zagreb (Croatia)** shows an approach focused clearly on one target 'pilot' neighbourhood of the city. It has worked to bring together local actors already engaged in the community to plan enhanced approaches to implementing inclusive spaces and activities.
- **Thessaloniki (Greece)** also focuses its approach on one target neighbourhood. But, it has used small-scale actions as the key tool for mobilising the local community and showing the potential of ongoing co-creation of actions through a Living Lab-type approach.
- **Warsaw (Poland)** has built a partnership of five organisations that already offer inclusion-focused educational and community-building activities in order to create a more complete and cohesive offer. These are now presented jointly via a shared platform.
- **Coimbra (Portugal)** has developed a broader approach that aims to enable and empower local communities across the region to implement Plan Einstein. It has focused on creating an enabling policy environment and collating and sharing inspiring practices.
- **Suceava (Romania)** has focused more explicitly on the aim of creating physical spaces in the city for meaningful encounters between diverse city residents. It plans then to populate these spaces with inclusive socio-cultural and personal development activities.

In the following pages, we present the transfer story of each partner city in more detail. Each story includes their overall approach to implementing Plan Einstein in their local context and key elements from their transfer journey, including lessons learned along the way and illustrative examples of actions in practice.

1. PLAN EINSTEIN IN ZAGREB (CROATIA)

Zagreb is the capital city of Croatia, situated close to the northern border with Slovenia. It has a population of around 770,000 and is known as the cultural, scientific, economic, political and administrative centre of the country.

Zagreb has been a stopover for many migrants seeking to flee conflict in the Middle East towards destinations in Western Europe. At the same time, the increasing arrival of foreign workers from countries such as Ukraine, Bosnia, Nepal and the Philippines – often working in low-wage sectors such as delivery riders or construction – has created new challenges for the city.



OVERALL APPROACH TO TRANSFER

The City of Zagreb is implementing Plan Einstein in a pilot neighbourhood of the city called Travno. The neighbourhood has around 10,000 residents living in one of the most densely populated parts of the city.

The neighbourhood is also the location of the Porin migrant reception facility managed by the national Ministry of the Interior. With capacity to house more than 600 people, it is the largest reception facility for asylum seekers in Croatia, located on the outskirts of the residential part of the neighbourhood.

The City aims to use Travno as a test case for implementing an ecosystem approach to delivering Plan Einstein-type activities bringing newcomers and neighbourhood members together as equals.

Activities are being developed in partnership with local community actors including cultural centres and libraries. They aim to be open and inclusive to all local residents, whether Croatian nationals, residents of the migration facility or any other newcomers living in the community.

The city has already embedded Plan Einstein into its five-year integration programme and its first annual action plan. The hope is that activities in Travno will act as an inspiration to the subsequent transfer of Plan Einstein to other neighbourhoods across the city, building on the unique capacities of local actors in different areas and supported where possible by the City authorities.

BUILDING A NEW LOCAL PARTNERSHIP

To implement Plan Einstein-type activities in Travno through a more cohesive overall approach, the City of Zagreb has facilitated the creation of a local 'neighbourhood' partnership involving municipal authorities, local associations and local institutions.

At the heart of the partnership are the Cultural Centre Travno and the Dugave library – both now establishing themselves as Plan Einstein spaces for meaningful encounters. The city has played an initial coordinating role, but is aiming to increasingly empower autonomous collaboration between local actors.

Key transfer lesson

At first, we tried to build a partnership to plan the transfer of Plan Einstein across the whole city. As our understanding of the approach improved, it became clearer that it would be more beneficial to focus down on the needs of specific local communities where inclusion takes place in practice.

Željka Sartori, City of Zagreb

Days of the Neighbourhood Travno

During the project, local partners came together to organise two-days of inclusive community events in the heart of the targeted neighbourhood of Travno as a testing action.

Participants were able to take part in musical workshops, artistic workshops, jewellery making, social games and much more – organised by local associations and volunteers. The City of Zagreb also hosted an information booth of the city's Welcome Centre where all interested people could get information about activities and services in Zagreb focused on building a cohesive and inclusive society.

The event was able to engage all kinds of stakeholders relevant to the neighbourhood – NGOs, kindergarten, school, locals and foreigners alike. Based on this successful action, further inclusive actions are now planned in the neighbourhood to celebrate World Refugee Day and International Migrants Day.



Key transfer lesson

We discovered that local actors were already organising several Plan Einstein-type activities within the community. But we also realised that to truly transfer Utrecht's practice we needed to take things to the next level, offering a much richer and more coordinated set of activities and services.

Jurica Gregurić, City of Zagreb

OVERVIEW OF PLANNED ACTIONS

The local partnership is turning existing community spaces at the Travno Cultural Centre, Dugave library and Social Centre Trnje into Plan Einstein open welcoming spaces for meaningful encounters.

It is also filling these spaces with activities to bring all and any local residents together on an equal footing. This includes courses in entrepreneurship, English and digital skills to support personal development of all. It also includes socio-cultural activities such as an 'Eat with your neighbours' initiative, fashion shows involving diverse designers and models, and free projection of Croatian moves with English subtitles.

Finally, the city plans to support improved visibility and awareness of Plan Einstein-type activities through a range of communications tools, as well as continuing to support coordination of local stakeholders.



Choir to Go

'Choir to Go' is a multi-cultural and inter-generational activity hosted in Travno cultural centre.

Open to all, it brings local residents together to sing – including both traditional Croatian and foreign songs.

A testing action carried out during the URBACT project saw around 30 participants come together for a 3-hour signing workshop. The plan is to hold the activity at least four times a year.

2. PLAN EINSTEIN IN THESSALONIKI (GREECE)

Thessaloniki is the second-largest city in Greece, located at the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea near Greece's northern border with North Macedonia.

Accessible by train, road and water, many asylum seekers have seen it as a transit city, but there are several thousand migrants living in Thessaloniki at any given time, including a substantial proportion waiting for asylum applications to be processed.

There are also increasing numbers of long-term economic migrants from countries such as Albania and Bulgaria and further afield.



OVERALL APPROACH TO TRANSFER

Thessaloniki is looking to implement Plan Einstein in the specific targeted neighbourhood of Giannitson. This neighbourhood has been selected because it reflects both the challenges and opportunities of inclusion work in Thessaloniki. The area is neither socially isolated nor fully integrated; instead, it represents a transitional urban space where different communities already coexist through schools, commerce, housing, and daily routines.

Notably, it is characterised by: a dense residential fabric with many lower-income households; a high concentration of small businesses and informal economic activity; a multicultural school serving students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds; and the visible presence of migrant and refugee residents accessing services, education, employment and housing in the area.

Since 2016, the neighbourhood has been the location of a centre functioning as an information and support hub for refugees and migrants in Northern Greece. Mirroring the journey of Utrecht's original innovation, this centre has recently been renamed from the Blue Refugee Centre to the Thessaloniki Solidarity Centre.

Thessaloniki's plan for implementing Plan Einstein in this neighbourhood is to adopt a place-based approach that strengthens existing neighbourhood dynamics and reinforces shared spaces already used by diverse groups. This allows interventions to be embedded in everyday life and encourages interaction between newcomers and long-term residents on equal terms.

TRANSFER JOURNEY

The process of planning the transfer of Plan Einstein to Thessaloniki has been strongly shaped by important lessons from the testing of small-scale actions and evolutions in the local stakeholder partnership. These key aspects of the URBACT methodology supported a process which started with almost overwhelming city-wide challenges but resulted in a clear path to tangible change within the targeted neighbourhood.

Notably, initial discussions in Thessaloniki were highly influenced by a relative crisis in the migrant reception sector. Many NGOs were being forced to pull out of Thessaloniki or significantly scale back their activities due to cuts in their funding as our project got underway.

Whilst many local stakeholders are still hoping to address the urgent shortages in housing and other migrant support services in the city (see next page), momentum for Plan Einstein transfer has started to build for more local community-focused activities in the Giannitson neighbourhood.

Key transfer lesson

When we created our URBACT Local Group (ULG) we were initially focused on the many NGOs working on migrant integration in Thessaloniki. But the challenges were almost too great. Our plan of action is now more firmly rooted in diverse community actors, such as a local school, which are already embedded in our targeted local community.

Maria Karanikola,
Project Coordinator

Community gardening as a catalyst

The ULG used the possibility of organising small-scale testing actions in the project to bring people together in concrete community-based activities and to build momentum for further actions and ambitions.

Specifically, they started by working with a local school in the targeted neighbourhood – itself represented by its socioeconomically and culturally diverse school community – to organise a community garden.

The activity served to bring allcomers from the neighbourhood together in a collective action serving the needs of the community and building meaningful encounters between people of different backgrounds and different generations.



AMBITIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE LIVING LAB

The ambition is now to create an informal neighbourhood coordination structure functioning as a local Living Lab in the neighbourhood of Giannitson. Through this, representatives of the municipality, the school, the Blue Solidarity Centre, relevant NGOs and other community representatives (including parents and residents) will continue to co-create, test and refine solutions to the challenges they face.

The Living Lab will be intentionally 'lightweight', avoiding complex governance structures that are difficult to sustain. The key will be that implementation will rely on shared ownership with roles distributed according to institutional capacity and proximity to the neighbourhood. For example, the municipality can help coordinate and provide small-scale support, while the school hosts activities, NGOs organise activities and local residents take part in co-creation and implementation of actions.

Key transfer lesson

Implementing Plan Einstein is not done by flicking a switch or making a big one-off investment. The idea for the Living Lab came as a way to engage the community in a process of incremental change in the neighbourhood. This is not a two-year project that is ending, it is a local process of change that is just beginning.

Evanthia Tatsidou, ULG Coordinator

INSPIRING ACTION

Backgrammon tournament

An open and inclusive 'Neighbourhood Backgammon & Traditional Games Gathering' was a testing action used to bring together residents from different generations and cultural backgrounds through play-based interaction.

Elderly residents who regularly engage in backgammon in local cafés were invited to meet with students and young people from nearby schools in a relaxed and informal community setting.

Alongside, the event included a small exhibition and demonstration of traditional board games from different cultures highlighting the shared historical and intercultural dimensions of play.



3. PLAN EINSTEIN IN WARSAW (POLAND)

Warsaw is the capital and largest city of Poland situated in the east-central part of the country along the Vistula River with a population of around 1.9 million.

Warsaw has emerged as a significant centre for migration and refugees in recent years. A first important wave came from Belarus after its disputed presidential election of August 2020. Since the start of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, approximately 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees have sought asylum in Poland, with Warsaw hosting a substantial proportion due to its status.



OVERALL APPROACH TO TRANSFER

Warsaw has adopted an approach based on the creation of a partnership of five Plan Einstein locations in the city. The five locations form a collaborative network of open, welcoming spaces and activities to facilitate meaningful encounters and foster social cohesion in Warsaw.

This approach was designed in an attempt to take advantage and build on existing resources and community actors already present in the space of promoting local social cohesion – whilst moving towards an offer that is more impactful through being more joined up and cohesive.

The five locations represent different types of community space located not too far from each other in the city including: a Multicultural Centre funded by the municipality and run by an NGO; the Intercultural Centre for Social Development run by the local authority; two Neighbourhood Activity Places (MALs), established under the Warsaw2030 Strategy; and the 'Community Cup' community café run by a refugee as a mission driven social enterprise.

The approach has been captured in the creation of a map of Welcoming Plan Einstein Spaces in Warsaw and the creation of a shared platform for the promotion of events and activities at all five locations.

Each space will work to become more open and welcoming, at the same time as improving the coordination of their activities and offer to everyone living in the local community.

TRANSFER JOURNEY

Warsaw was another city that started its journey confronted by an extremely challenging situation. The Warsaw Family Support Centre already coordinated twice yearly networking sessions of organisations active in the sector of migrant support and human rights. These actors provided the core of the URBACT Local Group, but many were facing the closure of services they offered in the face of funding cuts. The era of emergency support provided to the large number of refugees from the invasion of Ukraine was coming to an end.

The needs were seen as great and urgent and many local stakeholders were looking explicitly for funding support. They were rather frustrated by the process focusing on exchange and planning.

However, progress started to become more tangible when attention shifted to collaboration with a more diverse range of actors already active in their communities.

Key transfer lesson

We had to accept that Plan Einstein is not a silver bullet that could address all the (financial) challenges facing NGOs and other actors in the field of migrant reception and human rights. It still has real value as a neighbourhood-based approach to inclusion and social cohesion.

Wioleta Kalińska,
Project Coordinator

FINDING STRENGTH IN THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

By bringing together and fostering collaboration between five community actors already present in the territory of Warsaw, the aim is to create something greater than the sum of its parts. It includes both actors more traditionally aimed exclusively at migrants as well as those aimed at a broad local community under the shared vision of offering socially inclusive activities and spaces for all.

Together, the partners embody Plan Einstein's ecosystem approach: no single actor can meet the diversity and scale of local needs, but collectively they can ensure that all-comers can access activities and information in safe, welcoming, and socially inclusive environments.

Inclusion-focused educational and community-building activities across all five locations are promoted through a single QR code shared in all locations.



OVERALL OVERVIEW OF PLANNED ACTIONS

Future plans include an audit and targeted improvements of the five locations to enhance their qualities as open, welcoming spaces for all-comers.

A series of activities aimed at promoting personal and professional development of everyone present in the community will include language classes, entrepreneurship courses, English classes, language tandems and practical career workshops.

Specific actions will also focus on improving the visibility and awareness of Plan Einstein activities across the five locations including through improved communication, promotion and campaigns. Networking and governance activities between the five hosting organisations also seeks to improve coordination and maximise impact.

Introducing Plan Einstein into Neighbourhood Associations

The 'Warsaw 2030' local development strategy provided for the creation of Neighbourhood Activity Places – known as MALs in Polish – across the city. As part of their job description, MALs are designed to "foster the establishment of interpersonal contacts, neighbour integration and cooperation, and the inclusion of newcomers to the local community". This provided clear links already with the Plan Einstein philosophy and a basis on which to build further activities.

As one of the testing actions undertaken during the lifetime of the project, two such MALs - MAL Kotłownia and MAL Wolska Mozaika – organised workshops and community meetings aiming to bring together and explore the creation of activities and approaches to foster meaningful encounters between all-comers in the local area.

These tests (see photo) showed that although the spaces are attractive and suitable for inclusive activities, there was a need for stronger neighbourhood-level promotion, multilingual communication, involvement of community ambassadors and closer coordination with NGOs and resident leaders with the aim to achieve greater participation.



4. PLAN EINSTEIN IN COIMBRA (PORTUGAL)

The project partner is the Intermunicipal Community of Coimbra Region – located in the Central Region of Portugal. It is made up of 19 municipalities representing diverse coastal, rural and urban areas.

There is a diverse migrant population across the region, including refugees and asylum seekers. However, most migrants come through voluntary migration in search of work and/or better living conditions.



OVERALL APPROACH TO TRANSFER

The Intermunicipal Community (CIM) of Coimbra Region has sought to identify and disseminate good practice Plan Einstein-style approaches and activities across all municipalities of the Coimbra region.

The focus has not been on fully developing an ecosystem approach and associated activities in one neighbourhood. Rather, the approach has been to support and empower all neighbourhoods in the region to develop their own neighbourhood-based approaches to fostering social cohesion along the principles set out by Plan Einstein.

There has been less focus compared to the other partner cities on creating open and welcoming physical spaces for meaningful encounters in different neighbourhoods. The approach has rather focused on identifying activities – typically around food, culture and the arts – to bring people living in an area together regardless of their background or personal history.

To support this, the team have been working to incorporate Plan Einstein principles into the new Migrant Integration Plans being developed at municipal and intermunicipal level across Coimbra. Supported by an AMIF project, these plans aim to provide a key lever to align existing actions, strengthen coordination across municipalities and embed community-based approaches into formal policy frameworks.

TRANSFER JOURNEY

The absence of migrant reception centres in the region of Coimbra required a different approach to applying the principles of Plan Einstein to that of Utrecht – and also other partners with a greater number of refugees and asylum seekers.

The fact of being an intermunicipal authority, rather than representing one city or municipality also impacted on the process with a desire to take an approach benefitting the whole region.

The team hesitated for a while about whether to develop a plan to implement Plan Einstein in one specific neighbourhood or municipality as an inspirational pilot example. However, it decided in the end to take a broader perspective, operating at regional level to inspire, facilitate and empower local stakeholders to develop Plan Einstein activities in their context.



Key transfer lesson

Thinking about the transfer of Plan Einstein helped us ensure that, while we were developing the new Migrant Integration Plans, we already put in place measures to enable and support the kinds of open, inclusive activities that Plan Einstein promotes. This can provide a longer-lasting impact than any one-off intervention.

Paula Silvestre,
Project Coordinator

INSPIRING ACTION

Intercultural community orchestra

A new activity inspired by the transnational exchanges of the URBACT network was the creation of an intercultural community orchestra made up of musicians of diverse cultures and backgrounds living in the region of Coimbra.

Coordinated by an experienced conductor of community orchestras, musicians were identified and rehearsals arranged over several months, before a celebratory concert in central Coimbra. The activity creates meaningful encounters between the musicians themselves. It also enables a celebration of multicultural diversity in Coimbra and awareness raising on the topic of inclusive and welcoming societies around the occasion of the public concert.

The action was made possible through national funding promoting inclusion through culture – highlighting how Plan Einstein approaches can be implemented through different policy and funding frameworks.

CREATING AN ENABLING POLICY CONTEXT

Already during the lifetime of the project, Coimbra was able to integrate support for the implementation of Plan Einstein into new local plans for the Integration of Migrants – one at intermunicipal level and 19 municipal plans. These plans provide an enabling policy and funding environment for the development of Plan Einstein-type activities across the region.

The plans also provide a clear framework for strengthening coordination between diverse stakeholders and across municipalities. This aims to better align actions to deliver more comprehensive and integrated community-based approaches in line with the principles of Plan Einstein.

This progress was made possible because – coinciding with Plan Einstein Academy – CIM Coimbra was also successful with an application under a national call of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)

Key transfer lesson

We have been working on social issues in the region of Coimbra for many years. But through the project we discovered numerous activities already taking place in our communities that we did not know about, but which fit the principles of Plan Einstein perfectly. This has given us possibilities to build on what already exists and further inspire our local stakeholder with existing practices from the region

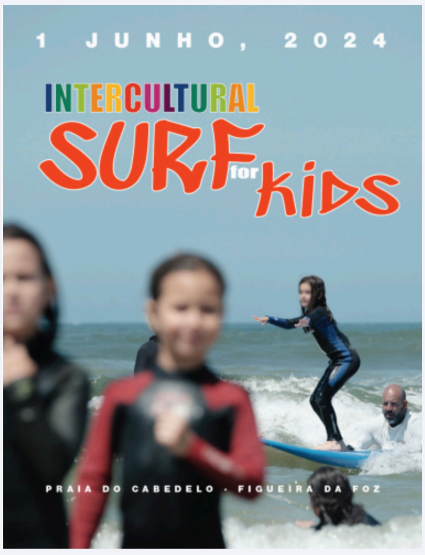
Silvia Carvalho,
Project Assistant

Intercultural Surf Festival for Kids

INSPIRING ACTION

Each year in June, a local surf school in the coastal municipality of Figueira da Foz organises an intercultural surf festival for kids.

This major event brings together hundreds of volunteers to create a celebration of local culture with local families and newcomers alike. As well as the surfing lessons, there is local food, music and art activities all bringing people together for meaningful shared experiences regardless of their personal background.



The example cannot be directly applied to a neighbourhood without access to a beach – but provides an important example of how activities can and should be adapted to specific aspects of local culture.

INSPIRING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

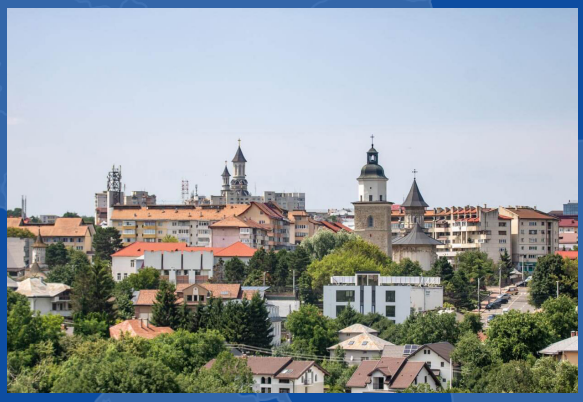
The transfer plan of Coimbra does not attempt to capture all the potentially relevant activities taking place across the 19 municipalities. Rather it seeks to identify illustrative or noteworthy actions under a number of headings that can provide inspiration for further action.

Actions range from collective walks involving locals and newcomers to multicultural forest fire response teams, and from intercultural lunches between foreign and Portuguese neighbours to an inclusive surf festival (see above).

5. PLAN EINSTEIN IN SUCEAVA (ROMANIA)

Suceava is a city of 84,322 people, located in the northeast of Romania. Just 43 km from the nearest border crossing, the city became one of the most important arrival points for Ukrainians fleeing the war after 2022.

Although the urgency of the initial wave of refugees has passed, the experience highlighted the need to develop the city's approach to receiving migrants and to create a welcoming culture to receive the many foreign workers that are increasingly needed for key sectors of the local economy.



OVERALL APPROACH TO TRANSFER

The team in Suceava was particularly motivated by the idea of creating one or more new physical space for meaningful encounters between diverse residents of the city – this being identified as something that is currently lacking.

A central element of their transfer plan is thus to identify and rehabilitate an empty city centre location under the control of the local authority to create such an open, welcoming space. They also aim to create a second Plan Einstein location by adapting an existing community centre in a neighbourhood outside of the centre.

The team then plans to organise diverse personal development and socio-cultural activities in these spaces aimed at all-comers from the local areas. They are also exploring ideas around how to incorporate Plan Einstein into mainstream cultural activities, such as encouraging more inclusive approaches within local sports clubs and the incorporation of more inclusive programming in local museums and the theatre.

A crucial aspect underpinning all of these dimensions has been the establishment of the URBACT Local Group supported by the signing of a formal joint agreement. The group involves representatives of local administrative institutions, sectoral agencies, representatives of key migrant communities, and NGOs working on topics of migrant inclusion. It aims to provide the basis for ongoing activities and implementation long after the project end.

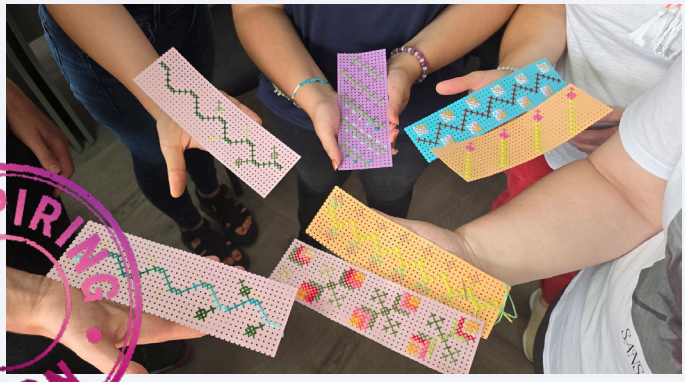
Connecting over world heritage

A sewing workshop was organised specifically to bring together ladies from Ukraine and Romania to exchange sewing techniques and ideas focused on the traditional Romanian blouse which is recognised on UNESCO's 'Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'.

The activity was hosted by one of the NGOs represented in the ULG, which had an appropriate space to offer for such an activity led by volunteers.

As well as enabling meaningful encounters and new social connections through shared cultural identity, the activity offered a safe space for women who were also able to talk and share about other aspects of their lives and challenges they might be facing.





INSPIRING ACTION

CREATING SPACES FOR MEANINGFUL ENCOUNTERS

As well as looking at empty city centre locations to rehabilitate into an open, welcoming space, Suceava has identified the 'Arta' multifunctional centre in the Itcani neighbourhood of the city – outside of the city centre – as a second location that could be relatively easily adapted into a Plan Einstein location.

The centre opened in summer 2023 after significant investment and benefits from modern facilities, but is still rather under-utilised. It offers the potential for becoming a space that better serves the needs of diverse members of the local community.

More than investment in physical modifications, the primary focus is on rethinking how the available spaces can be used and engaging stakeholders in turning the facility into something more open, welcoming and full of life.



FINAL REFLECTIONS

What have we learned about Plan Einstein?

- ✓ Plan Einstein is more than a migrant inclusion project, it is an innovative model of community-based social cohesion that can benefit all residents in any local area.
- ✓ Plan Einstein is best conceived as a neighbourhood-based approach to support social cohesion through meaningful encounters between all people living locally and opportunities for the personal development of all.
- ✓ Plan Einstein can contain a co-housing component, but it is not an absolute requirement.
- ✓ Plan Einstein requires engaging as broad a range of local stakeholders as possible in an ecosystem. As well as socially minded NGOs, it is helpful to engage libraries, schools, sports clubs, cultural associations and other bodies already active in the local community to see how their activities can be opened up.

What have we learned about transferring Plan Einstein?

- ✓ Plan Einstein is relevant for cities of any size and level of economic development. Adaptability to specific local contexts is built into the fundamental principles of the approach.
- ✓ Plan Einstein is flexible enough to be applied in the context of a refugee reception centre just as well as in neighbourhoods where the only newcomers are there for economic or lifestyle reasons.
- ✓ Implementing Plan Einstein can be about creating totally new activities and opening up totally new spaces. However, it can also be about rethinking existing activities and spaces to make them more open and inclusive.
- ✓ It is usually possible to find Plan Einstein-type activities already taking place within a city or neighbourhood. However, implementing Plan Einstein is about turning what are often isolated, ad hoc activities into something more integrated, coherent and impactful.
- ✓ Cities can also usefully think about how they can create an enabling environment for local Plan Einstein approaches – e.g. ensuring that policy and funding support inclusive activities rather than forcing projects to focus on individual 'target groups' separately.

Find out more

Visit the Plan Einstein Academy project webpage to find local and network level outputs, including the Network Journal, network articles and more.

Join the conversation and follow the latest news and updates by following Plan Einstein Academy on LinkedIn.

Visit the homepage of Plan Einstein in Utrecht for the latest news and development in our original innovative practice city.

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