**€4m funding win for West Midlands cities’ migration-friendly plan**

Three West Midlands cities have won over four million euros to help the region's communities get the maximum benefit from migration and improve migrants’ and refugees’ sense of belonging.

The West Midlands Combined Authority-backed ‘MiFriendly Cities’ project has been awarded funding totalling €4,280,640 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and will see Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton roll out a three-year programme of activities designed to help refugees and migrants feel that their contribution to society and the economy is valued.

Flagship proposals for the project, which forms part of the EU’s Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) initiative, include a new hub in Coventry through which newcomers to the region can get involved in community and social enterprise projects.

Urban Innovative Actions is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges.

Other planned activities as part of the MiFriendly Cities project include:

* weekly mobile employment information drop-in sessions for locals and migrant communities, held in the most deprived areas of each city;
* regular language classes delivered with the support of student volunteers from the cities’ universities;
* the training up of 60 health champions in migrant communities, to help point fellow migrants and refugees to important health services they often struggle to reach;
* the establishment of a ‘fair recruitment’ agency to support employment for the wider community, with a focus on migrants and refugees;
* using the region’s fabrication – or ‘fab’ – labs to provide qualifications to migrants and refugees to enable them to deliver training and home makeovers for locals;
* a £70,000 social enterprise fund to support 16 migrant and refugee start-ups with investment and mentorship;
* specific work to promote rights awareness and undertake legal health checks among migrants and refugees, with a focus on paths to citizenship for children and young people;
* training over 100 refugees and migrants as citizen journalists and citizen scientists to engage with the media, share their stories, and help evaluate the MiFriendly Cities initiative.
* learning from and sharing learning with other European cities

Coventry City Council will lead a consortium of 11 partners on the project, including the three city councils, Coventry University (and its community interest company CU Social Enterprise), Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC), Central England Law Centre (CELC), The Refugee and Migrant Centre Black Country and Birmingham (RMC), MigrationWork, Migrant Voice and Interserve.

As well as introducing new initiatives, the project intends to bring further coordination and a boost to existing migration networks in the three cities, supporting the work of the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) and the region’s two refugee and migrant centres who between them support over 300 people each day.

The West Midlands is the most diverse region in the UK outside Greater London – and the second most diverse in the European Union – with over 100 languages spoken daily within its borders.

Cllr Abdul Khan, Deputy Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities, said:

“Coventry has a long and proud history of opening it arms and welcoming people who choose to make the city their home. I’m delighted with this award and I’m excited about the projects it will help deliver not just in Coventry but across the West Midlands. The MiFriendly Cities project recognises the valuable contribution refugees and migrants make to our communities and how we can all benefit from their integration.”

Coventry University vice-chancellor, John Latham, said:

“It’s testament to the rich diversity and pioneering work of the West Midlands region that our leading cities are attracting this level of funding from Europe to act as models of good practice in helping migration benefit everyone. I’m quite sure I speak for all involved when I say we’re proud to be reaching out a welcoming hand to migrants and refugees, and to be creating an example for other areas of the country, and the continent, to follow.”

Nazek Ramadan, director of Migrant Voice, said:

“After a parliamentary report last month explained how the tone of some of the media debate on migration is damaging integration, it’s more important than ever that we pursue creative ways to challenge division and bring people together. When migrants are listened to and our contribution valued the whole community benefits.

We are thrilled about this funding, which will enable us and our partners to make a real difference to marginalised people and to the future of integration in the West Midlands.”

Sue Lukes, MigrationWork Chair, said:

“De-industrialising cities across Europe are grappling with a range of challenges, including migration. This project offers cities in the West Midlands a fantastic opportunity to learn from each other, as well as other European cities, about how best to tap into the creativity and innovation of their migrant citizens.”

Toni Soni, Centre Director, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre said:

“This project will provide opportunities for all communities to engage in improving social cohesion and integration, and helping to build a more united and prosperous future for the region. We are delighted to be part of it!”