

Innovative West Midlands cities' Migration-friendly plan kicks off

MigrationWork has started working with three West Midlands cities on a major initiative to help the region's communities get the maximum benefit from migration and improve migrants' and refugees' sense of belonging by offering services including language classes, employment support and the chance to learn new skills.

In October 2017 the EU's Urban Innovation Actions Fund awarded more than £4m to Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton for their 'MiFriendly Cities' project. The fund provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges.

This West Midlands Combined Authority-backed initiative will see the three cities working with eight other partners from the private and voluntary sectors to roll out a three-year programme of activities designed in partnership with refugees and migrants and largely delivered by them.

MigrationWork will help migrants and refugees to devise and develop grassroots initiatives in areas where they have identified greatest need: employment, housing, health care and active citizenship. Funding will be available for particularly innovative projects. We are also coordinating the project's communication activities, facilitating the exchange of learning with cities around Europe and will be involved with evaluating the work.

Other plans for the project include:

- a new hub in Coventry through which newcomers can get involved in community and social enterprise projects.
- a pop up furniture factory in Coventry and Wolverhampton to train people to upcycle 500 pieces of furniture to go into 100 home make overs for people in need;
- 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 and regular language classes delivered with the support of student volunteers from the cities' universities
- establishing social enterprises to support employment for the wider community, with a focus on migrants and refugees;
- a £70,000 social enterprise fund and £80,000 fund for grassroots projects
- 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;
- recruiting 300 refugee and migrants through a Fab Lab onto an OCN accredited course in digital manufacturing, a key skills need for local industry;
- delivering employment information drop-in sessions in the most deprived areas of each city and mentoring of refugees and migrants by employees of Interserve and other employers to help them develop employability skills;



- providing work placements for refugees and migrants with employers across the region and opportunities for further training aiming at full time employment;
- creating business roundtables and forums with representatives from employers and refugee/migrant communities to develop and promote these initiatives.

Coventry City Council is leading a consortium of 11 partners on the project, including Birmingham City Council, Wolverhampton City Council, 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.

If you would like more information or would like to get involved in the project, please email us at MiFriendlycities@coventry.gov.uk