

ENGLISH

sing me in

collective singing in the integration process of young migrants



**Including young people
with migrant backgrounds
in existing choir**

Free handbook

www.SingMeIn.eu

Publisher

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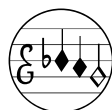
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Erasmus+

List of contributors

Many people contributed to the project, offering time and energy to proofread, translate, compile information and texts. You will find a list on the website www.SingMeln.eu

The redaction of the handbooks was supervised by:

Burak Onur Erdem, Ingvill Espedal, Côme Ferrand Cooper, Sonja Greiner, Lucille Lamaker, Gautier Lemoine, Olav Øyehaug Opsvik, Pierre-Luc Pfrimmer, Liesbeth Segers, Çağlar Tosunoğlu, Marina Velasquez and Jean Claude Wilkens.

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Welcome to “Sing Me In”!

Dear reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read this handbook. We really hope it will prove helpful for you and motivate you to set up new musical projects! This handbook is part of a series of four developed in the frame of a European project running from 2016 to 2018. In this introduction, we will shortly present what this project is about, and how it can be useful for you.

What is the project “Sing Me In: Collective singing in the integration process of young migrants” about?

Some young people are confronted with a higher risk of exclusion due to their socio-economic origin, because of the neighbourhood they live in, their migration background, etc. The “Sing Me In” project aims at providing children’s and youth choir leaders and music teachers, or anybody interested, with pedagogical approaches and tools that allow collective singing activities to play a positive role in the integration process of young people at risk of exclusion.

A number of youth organisations involved in collective singing expressed their need and the need of their own members for structured tools to address the issues at hand: youth organisations globally share the same challenges and are only partially aware of solutions developed in other European countries. The partners of the project decided to address these needs at the European level, to ensure that the whole sector and as many young people as possible can benefit from it in Europe.

Eleven musical organisations from ten countries, involved in youth work, joined forces and used their extensive networks to collect good practices in their respective professional and geographical areas. Based on that rich input from the field, and with the support of experts and practitioners, they decided to collectively develop innovative pedagogical contents.

The main outputs of the project are three handbooks and a dedicated repertoire guide, targeting children's and youth choir conductors and teachers: repertoire tips, pitfalls to avoid, examples of good practices, communication strategies, funding tips, guidelines for singer' preparation, etc. The handbooks are available in 11 languages to allow for efficient dissemination and to guarantee a maximum impact across the community of youth workers in Europe and beyond.

To ensure efficient dissemination, we organised a cycle of international and national multiplier events that are part of training events and conferences gathering our target groups across Europe. These events are an opportunity to reach out to active practitioners who will in turn use and spread the methods further.

Based on anthropological findings, the human voice was likely amongst the first instruments used by humans to produce music together, and it helped members of a group to develop their skills, share emotions, organise common life. Collective singing provided a sense of belonging. The "Sing Me In" project thus relies on a millennium-old tradition to look into the future: It offers innovative and effective tools to help young people meet without prejudices, acquire skills and enter a productive and balanced relationship with the community.

Why would collective singing be useful for integration?

Collective singing is a social act: it is about singing together. And singing together can create a strong, emotional and happy connection, even between people with very different ways of life. Based on this shared emotional experience, involving beauty, effort and fun, a new relation can start and grow. Singing in itself is of course only a tool to equalise the status of the participants: while singing, we are first and foremost singers, cooperating to create a shared musical result. It enables a new relation based on equality (we are all singers here) that can be used to overcome perceived differences and enter into a phase of dialogue and understanding. However, this tool is not unique! Collective singing is only one integration/inclusion tool amongst many other wonderful tools (other musical activities, sport, education, work experience, community work, etc.), and can be articulated with many other activities sharing the same aims.

Let us quote Anne Haugland Balsnes¹ here:

"The singing voice is a part of the body, and closely linked to breathing. Therefore, singing relaxes and exercise muscles, bones and lung capacity, and contributes to a general state of physical well-being. Furthermore, choir singing brings joy and excitability in addition to a general state of mental well-being. Singing in a choir is described as a 'kick', like 'falling in love' or a 'long lasting high'. Experiences such as these are meaningful for health and quality of life.

One of the most important things in terms of integration in a new country, is language competence. In a choir one can learn a new language in a friendly and easy environment, by communication at choir practices and through song lyrics. You do not have to speak the native language fluently to be accepted as a full choir member. A choir contributes to social networking, which is also critical for integration.

Choir singing is the simplest way of making music, since the instrument – the singing voice – is part of the body. You only need a group of people, a place to be and a conductor, to make a choir. Still, it is not given that the many advantages mentioned above will be achieved. It is crucial that both the social and the musical part of the choir is permeated by hospitality."

The project title uses the wording "collective singing in the integration process of young migrants". While we discuss each of these terms below, they in themselves clearly indicate that our primary aim is to support processes and projects that help people overcome differences. Consequently, over time, they eventually discover ways to connect on an individual level, creating new bonds, and a sense of belonging to a same group. Young migrants, just arrived or rooted in families with strong migration background, are a part of our European societies. They learn, work, play, talk and move with the rest of their generation, the adults of tomorrow. The way they relate to their environment, and the way it interacts with them, partially defines how our societies will work in the coming years. Although you most likely downloaded this handbook from the internet, we believe that digital networking and virtual

¹ Anne Haugland Balsnes studied the KIA Multicultural Gospel Choir (The KIA Choir, <http://kianorge.no/gospelkor/>) in Kristiansand, Norway, during Spring 2012. The choir is part of KIA – which stands for "Kristent interkulturelt arbeid", or "Christian Intercultural Work". The study was based on participant observation and interviews, and focused on members with backgrounds as refugees.

communities are not an answer to the challenges ahead. We need contact, exchange, dialogue and cooperation in real life.

Collective singing is a very flexible art form, merely defined by a method (singing together), and thus can adapt and adopt new musical and cultural contents. This spirit of togetherness, of peaceful encounter, is at the heart of the European ideal (as embodied by many initiatives, over and beyond the European Union institutions).

For whom is this project?

- **Final targets:** The project aims to benefit young people
 - living in different European countries and beyond
 - from the culture of the host country and from other cultural backgrounds (migrants and refugees)
 - singers and not-yet-singers
- **Direct targets:** The Handbooks are written to serve
 - professionals in the youth field: conductors of children's and youth choirs, social workers
 - (music) teachers who want to work with children/young people from different cultural backgrounds
- **Multipliers:** To spread the tools developed, we rely on a broad network of
 - organisations which reach out to professionals in the youth field
 - organisations which can present examples of good practices and/or disseminate the results of the project including the handbooks and repertoire guide.

Our contribution: Four handbooks to download

The result of our work is three handbooks and a repertoire guide that may be freely downloaded from the website www.SingMeln.eu

- “Sing Me In: Singing with groups of young refugees”
- “Sing Me In: Including young people with migrant backgrounds in existing choirs”
- “Sing Me In: Working in a school environment”
- “Sing Me In: Repertoire guide”

Each of the three handbooks is available in 11 languages: Arabic, Catalan, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Norwegian, Spanish and Turkish. If you are interested in contributing to a translation in your own language, please do not hesitate to contact us! If you want to find out if other translations have been provided in the meantime, please check the website www.SingMeln.eu.

What results do we expect?

We hope

- To see our handbooks contributing to more integration projects being launched.
- to see regular choirs welcoming more diverse participants.
- to see pupils and classes benefiting from singing activities (better academic results and classroom dynamics).
- to see all participants and organisers rewarded with fun and joy, shared laughter and music.

To achieve this, we need your help! If you like these handbooks, share them with your peers and friends. And if you don't like them, please let us know what we could improve!

Some explanations on terminology choices

The English title of the project is “Sing Me In: Collective singing in the integration process of young migrants”. Let's clarify these terms:

[...] collective singing [...]

Although most of this project's partners are involved in “choral” singing, we believe that any form of “collective singing” can be beneficial. The traditional choral setup – a conductor, scores and singers singing different voices – is not the only relevant format for this project. Our approach thus covers any shared singing activity, a cappella or with

instruments, unisono or multi-part singing, as well as any type of repertoire or style. Here, the core asset is the very intimate and connecting experience of mixing voices.

[...] integration process [...]

We were aware from the beginning that i, the term “integration” may be considered as “old-fashioned” or “wrong” or “politically incorrect”, in some countries, cultures or languages. Our aim is not to decide if migrants should be “integrated” or “included” (or any other term). Our aim is to provide ideas and tools that can be adapted to incredibly diverse contexts, where people from different backgrounds have to coexist peacefully in a geographical, political, economical and cultural space; in which collective singing can be a tool for people to meet and exchange. In short, simply make life better for all parties involved.

Be aware, it’s a two way street: the host culture needs to integrate just like the migrants’ cultures. In our diverse world, everyone needs to integrate.

[...] young [...]

The project focuses on young migrants. By “young”, we globally understand people in their formative years, including children (starting with kindergarten age), until the age where they enter adult life. Where we have a specific age-range in mind, this is indicated. Of course, this is an extremely variable notion, depending on the country, the culture, as well as socio-economic situations². You will also notice that we sometimes refer to activities and practices that mix generations, as a tool for integration, or even that we try to learn something from experiences that were developed for adults but from which we can extract useful information to share. Vice-versa many of the tips and tricks mentioned in the handbooks can also be applied when working with adults in a similar context.

[...] migrants [...]

According to the UNESCO, the term “migrant” can be understood as: “any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country”. This definition includes refugees and asylum seekers.

Our project, however, has a broader scope, potentially including young persons with a migrant background (first, second or even third generation), who may be in need of further integration (or inclusion) into the host culture. We are fully aware of the fact that there are young migrants who are already integrated and will not need support. Furthermore, many of the tips and tricks collected can also be applied to working with young non-migrants who do not have access to culture and are socially or otherwise disadvantaged.

² When no indication is given, we use the following age ranges: Children= 0 to 12, Youth/young people = 13 to 30, teenagers=13 to 18, young adults=18 to 30



Ton Willemse

Introduction to this handbook

What is the purpose of this handbook

With this handbook we would like to offer conductors and others active in the field of collective singing tips and tricks on how to integrate young migrants in their choirs, how to set up bicultural or multicultural choirs, how to face certain challenges or how to avoid common pitfalls. We can of course only offer a limited amount of tips and tricks. We suggest to also consult people working with migrants and refugees in your region and to try to connect to colleagues who may have already worked in this field for a while.

Who is this handbook for?

In this handbook we are talking about “regular” children and youth choirs, not singing activities with refugees only (covered in “Sing Me In: Singing with groups of young refugees”) or class singing in schools (covered in “Sing Me In: Working in a school environment”). The two additional handbooks are available as free downloads on www.SingMeIn.eu.

And so, this handbook is aimed at people working in the context of different types of choirs:

- Choirs founded as multicultural or bicultural choirs with the aim of bringing people from different cultures together through collective singing. This can include choirs that bring together refugees with local singers or choirs cooperating / meeting / singing together with refugee choirs.³
- Choirs in regions with a high percentage of migrants that just happen to have a certain amount of migrants (1st, 2nd or 3rd generation) among the singers. These choirs may actually not be perceived as “special” or “different” and sometimes the cultural background of the singers is not a topic, nor perceived as relevant. However, there may be choirs that are facing challenges, or choirs that would like to increase the number of migrant singers e.g

³ If you are specifically working with refugees, you will find additional useful tips in “Sing Me In: Singing with groups of young refugees”, available as free download on www.SingMeIn.eu

to mirror the percentage of migrants in the population. These choirs can profit from the tips and tricks presented in this handbook.

- Choirs with no or very few migrant singers whose aim it is to increase the number of singers with migrant backgrounds.
- School choirs that are offered as a free-time extracurricular activity, (not singing classes), since some of the topics touched here will also be relevant for this kind of choir.⁴
- Student choirs, since in some countries / cities there are big numbers of students from abroad who may not be permanent migrants but may profit from collective singing as a tool for better integration, too.
- There are also choirs only regrouping migrants from a specific country of origin. While they may seem not to directly contribute to the integration process of young migrants, as long as they are not open to singers from other cultural backgrounds, we would still like to mention them. Some of these choirs could decide to also open up to other singers (see the example of the “Hoffnungschor” in Berlin⁵), others could be a useful and interesting resource / contact for conductors looking for repertoire, pronunciation help etc. if they would like to sing music from these cultures with their choir, and there could also be cooperation projects between other choirs and these choirs. These choirs can also help with the integration process because by performing music from their country of origin they share their own culture with the people in the host country and thus contribute to a better knowledge about their culture. There are several Turkish choirs in Germany and other European countries, for example, who perform Turkish repertoire⁶.

This handbook may also prove useful for conductors of choirs with singers from socially / economically disadvantaged backgrounds or children and young people who are not fully included for other reasons.

A cooperative effort

This handbook was written in a cooperative effort with input from all partners in the “Sing Me In” project as well as ideas and input from different projects we analysed and people working in the field, and was coordinated by the European Choral Association - Europa Cantat and Moviment Coral Català.

Inspiration for this handbook:

The “Sing Me In” project was inspired, among others, by a German study⁷ which analysed the percentage of singers with migrant backgrounds in German children’s and youth choirs and which highlighted that this percentage was much lower than the percentage of migrants in the population. In parallel, awareness of the refugee situation has risen since 2015 in many European countries.

In the frame of the project “VOICE - Vision on Innovation for Choral Music in Europe”, the European Choral Association - Europa Cantat conducted a study on collective singing in Europe, published in 2015. In an online survey answered by over 4,000 choirs, one question was “what are the aims of the choir”,. f the choirs, 65% answered that “contributing to social integration (singers of different generations or different cultural backgrounds)”. was one of their aims, but almost half of these choirs said that they only partly reach this aim or that they do not reach it at all. This means that around 35% of the choirs would like to include people of different generations or from different cultural backgrounds, but do not know how to do this, i.e. how to reach the people, how to overcome potential fears and difficulties.

In 2015 the rising numbers of refugees led to a lot of initiatives in different countries, both for the creation of bilateral and multilateral choirs and for the inclusion of young migrants into existing choirs.

⁴ If you work in a school context, you may find additional tips in “Sing Me In: Working in a school environment”, available as free download on www.SingMeln.eu

⁵ A choir of Syrian refugees, saying that their aim is to foster the integration of Germans in the choir - see reference section

⁶ See reference section

⁷ See [Chormusik und Migrations-Gesellschaft](#), see reference section

Challenges

When writing such a handbook, aimed at those who want to include more children and young people with migrant background in their activities, there is always the danger of generalizing, highlighting the differences between cultures where these may not be an issue, or automatically assuming that young migrants identify with the culture of origin of their parents, which they may not.

Thus, although we list tips and tricks in the section below, we are aware of the fact that:

- Some of the issues raised are not specific to young migrants but may also occur with young non-migrants.
- Where there are no problems, no tips or tricks are needed - these handbooks are meant to help, where challenges have appeared or are expected, they are not needed where no challenges are perceived - we have thus often used the terms “may” and “can” when describing possible challenges or potential sources of conflict.
- When describing certain phenomena, e.g. cultural differences, the line is very thin between reinforcing prejudices and facing the reality of different perceptions.
- It should not be assumed that a person feels or thinks in a certain way because we believe that this is the case for her/his culture.

The difficult balance is thus to avoid certain challenges and conflicts thanks to the knowledge about differences, but without pointing them out when this may not be necessary. And to consider all singers as individuals with their multi-layered identity, not reducing them to their “otherness”. When addressing the topic of punctuality, for example, it may more often be an issue with migrants from certain cultures, but there are also non-migrants who are always late. The challenge is thus to address the issue without assuming or giving the impression that only the migrant singers may be late, but rather to formulate common aims for the group (see below).

Generally speaking, whenever certain methods or tools are used for the inclusion of minorities, these should be seen as necessary steps in a process whose ultimate aim is for inclusion to become “natural” and where no tools are needed anymore. The ultimate aim would be that children’s and youth choirs reflect the percentage of migrants in the population and that this does not need to be mentioned and no special tools are needed anymore. There will, of course, always be exceptions, for example when dealing with young refugees or young migrants who recently arrived in the country, and who may not speak the language and not know the culture of the country, yet. In order to work with these young people you will probably always need to adapt your methods in order to make sure that they really be integrated into the group.

Get inspiration from others

One aim of this book is to use examples of projects and choirs from different European countries as a source for inspiration. Positive examples where singing together helped young migrants to feel more included and to socialize with their peers can inspire others. The conductor of the KIA choir in Norway⁸ summarizes the purpose of this choir:

“To get together, where everyone has the same purpose, everyone is equal, and you meet in a warm fellowship, which singing is”.

And Anne Haugland Balsnes who studied this choir, adds:

“When a choir is made up by social and musical hospitality, it can give valuable experiences and fellowship, and contribute to empowerment and a meaningful life. A hospitable choir can promote integration, health, wellbeing and quality of life – simply a better life – for people in a new country.”⁹

⁸ See reference section

⁹ Anne Haugland Balsnes studied the KIA Multicultural Gospel Choir (The KIA Choir, <http://kianorge.no/gospelkor/>) in Kristiansand, Norway, during Spring 2012. The choir is part of KIA – which stands for “Kristent interkulturelt arbeid”, or “Christian Intercultural Work”. The study was based on participant observation and interviews, and focused on members with backgrounds as refugees.

Working in a multicultural context - is this so different?

“Culture would be the glass through which we see the world.

Working with a multicultural group is not so different from working with a non multicultural group (so without students from cultural minorities). It continues to be about working with children or adolescents who have diverse needs, potentialities, abilities and interests.

That does not mean that cultural diversity is not a relevant issue. But, in any way, it is not the only determining factor that conditions the attitude, behaviour or the way we relate to each other.

If we consider how to work with children from other cultures, emphasizing what they can do different from the rest, without taking into account the multiplicity of factors that can make them similar to their peers, we risk being generators of inequity.

As a non-verbal expression channel, music facilitates the connection between multiple realities and provides learning as a creative act for the critical understanding of the experience.”

Ester Bonal, Xanfra Project ¹⁰, Barcelona

¹⁰ See reference section



1. Challenges, tips and tricks

1.1 Language issues

The issue of language in the context of choirs can differ greatly - 2nd or 3rd generation young migrants may be fluent in the local language(s) - though sometimes their parents may have difficulties communicating in this language, newly arrived young migrants, especially young refugees may not speak the language at all, yet, or still have a poor command of the language. They may also not have learned English, French or another language which could be understood in the host country, and can find it difficult to communicate even with non-verbal means.

Language can also play a role in the choice of repertoire, especially in the context of bicultural or multicultural choirs set up for the purpose of integrating young migrants. On the one hand, choirs may choose songs in the local language(s) as a way of supporting/enhancing the language learning process - this is especially relevant in connection with migrants who have recently arrived, and with refugees¹¹. On the other hand, choirs may wish to sing songs in the cultures and languages of the singers represented in the choir.

Tips and tricks:

Here are some tips and tricks on how you can deal with language challenges, should they come up:

Understanding what you sing

- When language becomes a challenge, it can help to start **singing without words**, so that the singers can focus on the music, first, and enjoy the music before having to deal with the text. Some ideas of what you can do:
 - Start with body percussion instead of singing, which can also help get the singers going
 - Use daily movements such as yawns and stretches, which can be also be good to wake the singers up
 - Work with imitation games
 - Use the image of electricity travelling through hands and body
 - Play games with the names of the singers, in harmony, with solos and tuttis, etc.

¹¹ See "Sing Me In: Singing with groups of young refugees" and "Sing Me In: Working in a school environment", available as free download on www.SingMeIn.eu

- **Gestures** can help, especially with younger children, to reinforce the understanding of the song texts - if the song is in a local language, this will also help to reinforce the learning process of that language.
- Scores and lyrics with **illustrations** can help singers understand what they are singing, so can soundpainting.
- If conductors wish to teach the choir **songs from the cultures of origin of the migrant singers**, they can ask the singers themselves, or older family members/their parents to help with the teaching of the correct pronunciation or the production of pronunciation sound files.
- Embassies, consulates, as well as associations and cultural institutions of the corresponding countries may also be able to help in this context.
- If teaching a song from each culture represented in the choir is too difficult, consider asking the migrant singers to sing a song for their peers and tell them what the song is about. This will also contribute to learning about the others' culture, even if the singers cannot all sing the song together or may only be able to join for a refrain.
- Singing a song in a language none of the singers can understand, can be a way of not making a difference between the groups of singers - in this case everybody will have to face the same challenges in learning the new language.
- See section on Repertoire below.

Understanding what the conductor says

- If singers cannot understand the conductor's instructions, the conductor could try to work less with words and more with gestures, rehearsing without or with fewer words.
- In multicultural choirs, singers with communication difficulties could have a non-migrant singer or an immigrant who already masters the language well as "godfather" or "godmother" or older brother or sister (bilateral peer-to-peer partnerships), showing the singer where to start singing, trying to explain the instructions of the conductor and whenever possible, translating this into a language the new singer understands. This can, as a "side effect", also help create links between singers and make the new singers feel more welcome.
- There are tools that can help conductors deal with language difficulties when communicating with their peers and/or with the conductor and other adults (picture dictionaries / vocabulary lists in different languages, etc. - see reference section).

Communication with singers and parents - sensitivities

Some singers and/or parents, especially those who have already lived in the country for a while or may even have been born there, may be sensitive about the fact that they do not speak the local language well.

Be careful in such cases not to stress the fact that they may have difficulties with the language, find other ways of making sure that they can understand. Be patient and allow for some time.

Let them try to speak the local language if they want to do so, even if they make mistakes and you think it may be more efficient to communicate in another language.

1.2 Religious and cultural issues

Bringing together (young) people from different cultural backgrounds can represent a challenge - giving all people involved some background on cultural differences can help avoid conflicts. It can help to prepare both sides and to verbalize certain intercultural differences without falling into the trap of prejudices / generalisations. What may be a touchy issue for the others? - but maybe it is not... And why? What may be really important for them? Here you could address a number of issues raised under the practical tips below - different greeting rituals, notions of time and punctuality or planning ahead, different eating habits, partly influenced by religion, different ideas of what is polite or not polite, differences in non-verbal communication etc.

There are some publications in the reference section below which can help in preparing this. Alternatively conductors can contact associations active in refugee work in the respective country, since these have often developed useful material in the language of the country (see some examples mentioned below).

Another challenge is that the level of music education may differ greatly between the different cultures of origin of the migrant children. In some countries this may be less relevant because there is a disparity in the musical knowledge of the young locals., In yet other countries with a rich music education tradition, this may mean that the conductor has to adapt her/his methods and find tips and tricks to teach the same songs to two groups with a big difference in learning methods.

Tips and tricks:

In general, one good point may be to discuss rules and regulations together with and in the choir, so that the group develops an ownership for these rules: everybody agrees with them and they become “their rules” rather than the conductor’s rules. This may also help with traumatized children, since strict rules and harsh discussions may be more problematic than for others. Such a procedure can also help empower young people, not only to build the rules together, but also to learn from each other, to have a learning relation on a peer-to-peer basis, rather than top-down.

Cultural differences / different habits

- Setting up bilateral peer-to-peer partnerships (also see language section above) can also help in this context, to welcome new singers, make them understand how things function in the choir, help them learn the music etc.
- Since regular attendance can be an issue with migrant singers, talk with the singers about why this is important for themselves, not just for the group, use the tip from the introduction on building the rules together
- To overcome differences in punctuality and notions of time, one practical tip is to plan rehearsals with a soft start, i.e. announcing 19:00 as starting time, foreseeing half an hour for informal talks, food and drinks (see “welcoming mechanisms”) and starting the rehearsal at 19:30. This allows for personal exchange and talks, maybe happening less during the actual rehearsal then, and for those arriving late not to interrupt the flow of the rehearsal and not to be perceived as arriving late.

Religious differences and rules

Different religions among young singers or among those the conductor would like to attract to the choir can be a source of misunderstandings, fears, reservations towards the choir or potential conflict within the choir:

- It may mean that migrant parents don’t want to send their children to the choir.
- It may mean that migrant parents refuse to let their children travel with the choir.
- It may mean that conflicts arise among the singers or singers feel uncomfortable in the choir.

In some religions, singing may even not be allowed or the children may not know whether it is allowed.

If you feel that the religious differences may be an issue, try the following:

- Speaking to the parents of the (potential) singers to try to find out what their fears / issues are, i.e. which aspects of your choir’s work may be problematic for them: singing in the group - singing alone - mixing boys and girls when singing - boys and girls touching each other, e.g. during a choreography - singing and dancing - the choir uniform - gender issues (see below), etc.
- If the children are not sure singing is accepted in their religion - talking to parents or a local religious authority to convince the children it is ok, giving examples of singing within the religious practice (for example the calling for prayer is often also singing), showing that you know about their religion and understand – explaining to parents and their children that singing is nothing bad, no violence, etc. and asking the parents why they don't allow singing may clarify concerns.
- If the choir usually rehearses in a church, try finding a more “neutral” rehearsal space, maybe even in a cultural centre of one of the migrant groups.
- If the choir usually performs in churches, try finding non-religious concert venues, including sometimes the community centres attached to a church, which are not churches themselves.
- Checking your repertoire and deciding whether you can make any changes that would mean fewer difficulties for non-Christian singers (e.g. not singing so much religious/sacred repertoire in Easter and Christmas concerts).
- Reviewing your choir uniforms in case they may be difficult to accept for the parents of certain religions (e.g. if your girls are wearing sleeveless dresses), and if you have choir members wearing a hijab, try finding a possibility of including it in the dress code (e.g. asking them to wear a black or white hijab fitting the colour code of the

uniform), as well as checking your own clothes, making sure that you as the conductor are not wearing anything provocative or distracting for any culture.

- Being careful with the use of body percussion, respecting personal space and boundaries of appropriateness ¹².
- Offering to find a way to pick up the children at home in case they cannot / are not allowed to go to the rehearsal by themselves.
- Reassuring the parents that their children will get appropriate food (respecting their religious rules, e.g. kosher, halal, without pork meat, vegetarian) when food is offered to the choir, including during choir travels and that the consumption of alcohol will be controlled.
- Checking about religious holidays which may have an impact on the life of the choir (e.g. Jewish singers who may not be allowed to sing or travel by car or bus on Shabbat, e.g. Muslim singers who may not be allowed to travel during Ramadan or may not attend rehearsals or concerts taking place at "iftar" time, when they have dinner after sunset). Be aware of the fact that these holidays may change from year to year (such as Ramadan) and discuss the issue with the singers / their parents.

Sometimes people think religious differences can represent a challenge or prevent migrants from participating, and then it turns out that this is not the case. Looking through sample projects we found one, , that was explicitly using Christian religious music as a tool for integration: "The most beautiful Christmas Carols / Finland"¹³. In this project organised by a Christian church, migrants can learn local culture, festivities, etc, important for integration.

Differences in music education background

- Some cultures (e.g. in Turkey, Arab countries, India or Indonesia) use other scales, temperaments or rhythms. Be aware of the fact that it might be difficult for children from these cultures to sing in a different tonal system and other keys.
- In Arabic cultures the way of singing differs from the Western way. It might thus be strange for children from these cultures to shift from reciting to singing and even using head voice. (from Music on troubled soils, page 21, see reference section below)
- In some cultures (e.g. in Palestine), there is hardly any live music practice, neither in organised contexts, nor in private homes. Children from these cultures may not be used to singing at all.
- Some singers with migrant backgrounds (and some non-migrants), may not have learned to read notes / music.
- Others, if they have recently arrived to the country, may also have difficulties reading Latin letters.

To meet these challenges, you can:

- Adapt your working methods, e.g. by learning more by ear, using improvisation.
- Provide singers with tools they can use to learn with the method best for them (e.g. midi-files, sound files with one person singing "their voice").
- Ask singers with more experience to help the new singers learn the music.

1.3 Gender issues

When working with young migrants from some cultures, gender issues can represent a challenge. The young singers may have grown up with strong gender-based role models and may have to adapt to the fact that the role distribution can change from country to country and from culture to culture. , Moreover, some conductors have encountered young male migrants who are attracted by the idea of joining a choir, and this could be useful for choirs which lack male voices.

Tips and tricks

While the ultimate aim should be to make them understand these differences and help them adapt to the situation in the host country, some tricks may be helpful at the beginning of the process:

- Having a male as well as a female leader/conductor
- Mixing boys and girls, but also having separate parallel sessions sometimes, where they may feel more free

¹² from Music on troubled soils, pag. 21, see reference section

¹³ See reference section

- Being careful with songs / choreographies where boys and girls have to touch, or with dancing
- If you plan to include something like this, verbalize it and check with the singers if it would be ok for them.

1.4 Economic differences / funding opportunities for the people themselves

Integrating young migrants, and even more so young refugees, may represent financial challenges. In choirs where singers normally pay a participation fee, this may not be possible for the young migrants (as well as non-migrant singers who come from low income families). Singers from low income families may not even have the possibility to use public transport for free and may not be able to afford to travel to rehearsals or concerts, buy scores or a choir uniform.

Tips and tricks

There are different possibilities on how to solve these issues:

- In order not to scare off potential new singers, do not mention the fee in promotional materials.
- Offer members who cannot contribute financially to contribute in another way, e.g. by taking over certain responsibilities such as regularly checking the presence of members.
- Think about setting up an internal “solidarity fund”, asking families who can spare some money to pay more and thus support the participation of a singer with financial difficulties. This works even better if the system is anonymous, with only one person knowing which singers are being supported through these donations.
- Offer those who cannot pay the full fee to decide themselves how much they would be able to pay (e.g. 1 EUR/month).
- Explain to the parents of (potential) singers what the choir is using the money for (e.g. buying scores, paying the rent for the concert venue, etc.).
- Organise specific fundraising activities (selling cakes, doing a fundraising race, singing in public spaces, collecting donations in other ways).
- Contact organisations, foundations or businesses related to migrant communities. Anthony Heidweiller from the project “Vocal Statements” in the Netherlands¹⁴ approached migrants who grew up in the Netherlands, who know what it means to be a young migrant, and who are today business owners. He explains that they might feel an emotional relation to a project and thus sponsor it. For example, he got in touch with an association of Chinese shop-owners in the Netherlands and was successful immediately. They said they wanted to support the project. No paperwork was needed in comparison to requesting a government grant for instance.

In many cases, funding for the integration of young migrants may be available, as was the case starting in 2015 in many European countries. This kind of funding is often short-term. It is thus worthwhile to check the current local, regional and national funding possibilities. Some general publications which can help are listed in the reference section below.

A note on sustainability

In 2015, thanks to the funding opportunities that were popping up, a number of integration projects, also in the field of singing, were set up. For many projects the funding ran out after one or two years, leaving the project organisers at a loss on how to continue doing their valuable work. If you are receiving short-term funding, start thinking about strategies before your funding runs out on how to solve the upcoming financial challenges, e.g. through fundraising activities (see above).

1.5 Recruitment strategies

When presenting the “Sing Me In” project in different contexts, one of the questions that came up several times was: How can I attract new singers with migrant backgrounds into my choir? My choir rehearses in a part of the city in which many migrant families live, but I do not seem to be able to reach them.

¹⁴ See reference section

Both the AMJ study as well as the Singing Europe study mentioned in the introduction to this handbook point to the fact that conductors often wish to include migrants into their choirs but do not manage to do so.

Thus, the issue of recruitment seemed to be one of the important aspects conductors would need this handbook to address. The difficulties often start with the fact that the word “choir” or the notion of “choral singing” is not widely spread among the people of some cultures. Therefore, simply hanging up a poster somewhere to advertise for the choir may not be successful. Once you will have attracted singers to your choir, you will also need to make sure that the singers want to come back- see section on “welcoming mechanisms” below.

Tips and tricks

When trying to recruit new singers, one issue is thus communication and presentation of the choir: to whom do you want to communicate, and how?

- Consequently, you have to think carefully about **who** you want to communicate with and adapt your language accordingly.
 - In order to **reach migrant families**:
 - Go to speak at places where migrants go
 - Use social media groups
 - Sing in public spaces (reach out to new singers and potential partners)
 - When **addressing children/young people**:
 - Explain to them what your rehearsals are like and think what can attract them in addition to the singing itself, e.g. offering something to eat and drink before or after the rehearsal or during the break, telling them they can play with others during breaks etc.
 - Find a very enthusiastic child to convince others; children listen to each other
 - Try to meet whole families, not only the potential singers (see below, addressing parents)
 - When **addressing parents**:
 - It's important to convince families that their children should sing in a choir.
 - Invite families / guardians to rehearsals, let them join in singing and activities. (Some projects also have “parent-children” rehearsals or even a “parent-children-choir” in addition to their regular choir. Create special roles for parents and thus involve them more in the choir, thus giving them a sense of ownership and shared responsibility).
 - Sometimes is more effective to first convince a child, create a kind of passion inside them (see above) so that the child can in turn convince the parents.
 - Talk with parents in non-stress circumstances (don't catch them in stressful situations, try to find a good moment when they can be more relaxed).
 - Present the choir to parents as a social gathering where children can learn social skills (cooperation, participation, working together, making friends) rather than presenting it just as a musical experience.
 - When **addressing community leaders or social workers**:
 - Ask them for tips on whom to approach to reach communities (see below)
 - Ask them how to best communicate about what you are planning to do
 - Ask them for tips on how to avoid cultural misunderstandings
- Think about, and check with somebody from the community you want to address **how they can best be reached**:
 - Through posters or flyers? Distributed, displayed where?
 - Through distributing merchandising products? (T-shirts, sweaters, others)
 - Through digital means / social media; are there specific pages or groups you could use?
 - Through personal contacts, going to speak to parents, social workers, etc.?
- In your communication, do not just use the word “choir” but talk about “singing”, “making music together”, having fun with your peers, etc.
- Publish your recruitment documents in several languages (find help for translations from the migrant communities in your cities or refugee organisations, volunteers, etc.).

- Try to find a time for your rehearsal which will be easily acceptable and which will not disrupt family routine (one possibility could be to rehearse in the local school just after the end of lessons), check what may be the best day for rehearsals (e.g. Friday to Sunday may be problematic for some religions).
- Consider adding some aspects of why singing together with others may be good for the children/young people (Also see section about the benefits of singing below and corresponding documents mentioned in the reference section).

One crucial aspect is where you can go, whom you can ask for help, how you can actually have access to the cultural groups that are your target. One of the sample projects we analysed (a project called HOPE¹⁵ set up in Norway whose aim is including migrants through singing) stressed that they were highly successful because a lot of local institutions were involved. Thus, if you want to reach the right people:

- Search for culture institutions and associations, music schools (there are for example Turkish music schools in Germany), dance groups, mosques or other religious meeting points attended by migrants. The parents of the children and young people you want to reach are there.
- Contact schools and youth centres. Children and young people with migrant backgrounds are there, together with others, and can be reached directly (though you may have to try to also get in touch with their parents).
- Consider getting the help of somebody with a migrant background or engaging somebody with a migrant background in your team. They may find it easier to address the parents and their children and can also help with language issues.
- If you already have some children or young people with migrant backgrounds in your choir, consider asking them to support you in your recruitment efforts.

Using music instead of words may be your strongest way of attracting new singers to your choir.

- Ask if you can give a concert or a short performance with your choir at the local schools or youth centres with high percentages of migrant children, e.g. when they have a school celebration.
- Contact other institutions mentioned under the previous paragraph and ask if you could perform at an event they are planning.
- Some cities organise “multicultural events”; ask to give a short performance there.
- Plan your performance in a way that it will be attractive, fun, colourful and avoid anything that may represent an issue for other cultures in this performance (see above).
- Be creative and inventive: why not combine singing with a meal?

Promotional material to raise awareness on the benefits of singing

It may be useful for conductors, or for anybody wishing to set up a choir or using collective singing as a tool for the integration of young migrants, to gather arguments on why singing is the perfect tool. These arguments may be useful when applying for funding, addressing parents of potential children or communicating about the choir in the media.

Several of the projects we analysed thus gave reasons for the use of singing¹⁶.

There is a vast amount of research available on the benefits of singing for an individual and society: direct physical health benefits, positive influence on a person’s well-being, correlation between singing and academic results, enhanced skills leading to improved social behaviour and understanding for others. The European Choral Association - Europa Cantat has started collecting such research and making it available on its website: www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org

¹⁵ See reference section

¹⁶ See introduction to the “Sing Me In” Project at the beginning of this handbook

1.6 Welcoming mechanism

One crucial aspect to include new singers (not only singers with migrant backgrounds) is to make sure they feel welcome. Ensure that they feel at ease, make sure that others look after them, and that there are “welcoming mechanisms”. Some tips and tricks have already been provided above, in the introduction and the point about cultural differences. Here are some more:

Tips and tricks

- As with some other aspects mentioned in this chapter, **preparing both sides** is important: explain to the singers of your choir why you want to recruit and add new singers, what your aim is, and how the singers can prepare for this new situation.
- When adding singers to an existing choir, it is especially important to discuss together with the singers who are already in the choir, what may have to be changed to make the new singers welcome, and how to look after them so that they will want to come back.
- Setting up **bilateral partnerships** can also be helpful here. Get a singer or several singers to volunteer to look after the newcomers. All parties will feel special and empowered to make sure things go well.
- Try to avoid strong reactions on some **cultural differences** that may occur at the beginning (such as punctuality, regular attendance). Find flexible ways of dealing with them until the group has formed and has discussed its own rules.
- **Share food and drink**; this tip was mentioned in many projects as a good welcoming mechanism, either at the beginning of each rehearsal, or after rehearsals, or at regular intervals and/or at special occasions (birthdays, other celebrations). If each singer brings something typical from their culture this can also help increase the interest and curiosity in and understanding of the other culture. Examples are the projects *Zing Nederlands met me* (Sing Dutch with me) in The Netherlands and *Afghan Youth - Voices of Peace* in Austria¹⁷. Some children even seem to say that what first attracted them to the choir was that they were getting food and drinks during the break.
- Make the singers feel welcome through **little gestures**. In the KIA choir in Norway¹⁸ everyone is greeted with a handshake or a hug, and “Welcome, so nice to see you, hope to see you again next week!”. Some of the singers receive extra follow-up, like a text message with a reminder of the practice, or maybe a ride from where they live.
- Start your rehearsals with some participants singing for the others whatever song they like.
- Hang up posters with the most important words in the local language(s) as well as the languages of the migrant singers include how to say hello, goodbye, thank you, how are you, what’s your name, I love you, etc. Encourage non-migrant singers to make friends with the new singers, involve them in social activities outside the choir, invite them to their homes, etc.
- Give little tasks or responsibilities to individual singers to make them feel important
- Show the singers that partaking in a choir is fun! If they enjoy the experience they will come back.
- Organise some social activities for the choir to offer more time and space for personal talks (ice-skating, a barbecue in a park, a football game, etc.)

1.7 Legal issues

Especially when travelling, conductors and managers of choirs have to be aware of the fact that they may encounter legal issues which they wouldn’t have with a choir that only gathers singers from the nationality of the host country. Children and young people with migrant backgrounds may need a visa to travel to certain countries, where local singers don’t need visa, young refugees may not even be allowed to leave their town of residency.

When working with refugees, be careful with online communication, posting pictures and videos or publishing names. They may need a “safe space” in which they do not need to fear that their face and name will appear somewhere on the internet.

¹⁷ See reference section

¹⁸ See reference section

Tips and tricks

The children may have different nationalities and some may be refugees, the conductor therefore needs to pay careful attention to their situations.

- What is the legal status of each child? Are some still in the process of applying for asylum, have some been accepted as refugees? What is the status concerning their residence? Do they own an ID or a passport? Do they have a double nationality? Do they need a visa for the country the choir wants to travel to?
- Use the choir as a social support system: Are there others in the choir for instance parents of other singers who can help the migrant singers and/or their families to deal with legal and bureaucratic issues, as well as with the translation of legal documents?
- Do any of the parents or children object to their pictures being taken and disseminated on social media? (should be checked with all children and young people, but with refugees the issue may be even more serious, as they may have important reasons for not wishing to be recognized on pictures).

Should a singer not be able to join a tour for legal (or economic) reasons, give them some extra attention in the choir, give them a special task or treat, and make sure to help them feel included especially after the other singers come back from an excursion or a tour.

Conductors should also look into the special circumstances of working with young people who are still minors (this is not specific to young migrants).

- They may need their parents' authorization to leave the rehearsal room, participate in excursions and other extraordinary activities.
- The conductor may need to ask other adults to accompany the choir on excursions or travels due to the legally required minor to adult "ratio" in the respective country.
- In some countries, adults working with children may have to provide legal proof of non-involvement in sexual crimes.



Marina Velásquez

2. Repertoire and role of the conductor

2.1 Repertoire choices

When it comes to repertoire, choirs which include young migrants have a variety of options. We have found the following approaches in the projects we analysed:

- **No differences** in the use of repertoire compared to other choirs.
- The **use of “neutral” repertoire**, not specifically belonging to any of the cultures represented in the choir,, e.g. singing American Pop or African music. In the German publication “[Chormusik und Migrationsgesellschaft](#)” (see reference section below) Dorothee Barth writes in the article “Singen, Chorkultur, Migrationsgesellschaft und die allgemeinbildende Schule”:

“Choral music can constitute a relevant contribution for a successful migration society: Indeed, people sing all over the world, and choral music from Africa, Latin America or Gospel music from the USA are especially popular with young people. This could also allow for common musical grounds to be found with migrants. In this sense, “Music of the World” could also be a key to choral work outside schools. A key, within music and musical activity, to discover common aspects and to create connections beyond migration backgrounds and immigration stories.”¹⁹

- The use of **repertoire from the host country** can contribute to enhancing language learning (see for example the project Barn Synger – Bydel Gamle Oslo, Norway, an integration project focusing on migrant children. They use traditional Norwegian children’s repertoire and typical birthday songs. Another example is the project Barn Synger – Bydel Årstad, Norway ²⁰ as well as several other projects. See point 2.2 below.

¹⁹ “Darüber hinaus kann die Chormusik aber noch einen spezifischen – gesellschaftlich relevanten – Beitrag für eine gelingende Migrationsgesellschaft leisten: Denn tatsächlich wird auf der ganzen Welt gesungen; und gerade Chormusik aus Afrika, Lateinamerika oder Gospelmusik aus den USA ist bei den hiesigen Jugendlichen ausgesprochen beliebt. Auch können hier schnell gemeinsame musikalische Schnittstellen mit Migrant/innen gefunden werden. Insofern könnte die »Musik der Welt« auch ein Schlüssel für die außerschulische Chorarbeit sein. Ein Schlüssel, im Medium der Musik und der musikalischen Tätigkeit, Gemeinsamkeiten zu entdecken und Verbindung zu schaffen jenseits aller Migrationshintergründe und Einwanderungsgeschichten”

²⁰ See reference section

- Sing **repertoire of the cultures represented in the choir**. This is often the case in bi-cultural choirs (for example the Adiyaman Refugee Children's Choir in Turkey. They sing songs in Arabic and Turkish), but can also be the aim of choirs bringing together many different cultures. The specific aim of some choirs is to sing in all the languages of the cultures represented in the choir, some have even included this in their statutes (e.g. MultiKultiChor Bonn, see reference section below).

Tips and tricks

For "neutral" repertoire

- Even though pop songs are often used, bear in mind that not everybody knows them. There is no "global repertoire"; there are no songs everybody knows. Even the song Happy Birthday is not known by everybody. And although American pop music may be widely familiar to most everybody across Western-Europe, it may be completely unfamiliar to first generation young migrants from certain countries. Those young migrants who have lived in Western-Europe for several years, as well as 2nd and 3rd generation migrants may, of course, know this music and may have acquired the same music taste and know the same songs as young non-migrants.
- In this context, the 'problem' most often is that these songs seem to "work well". However, using what Anthony Heidweiller from "Vocal Statements" in The Netherlands ²¹ calls "cosmopolitan" songs may help you to avoid falling into this trap. He believes in using "cosmopolitan" songs with a text that matters to young people. He says they must feel a certain "urgency" about wanting to sing this song because the message of the song is compelling to them. According to him, it is also important that the conductor himself/herself be convinced of a song and have a personal emotional relation to it, that they are not just doing it because somebody else told them it would work well. Using "cosmopolitan" repertoire, with songs from different cultures around the world also help avoid "cultural colonialism" (which can be the danger if you mostly use Western European repertoire). Thus, using songs from the cultures present in the choir can be a solution - see below - the risk of course being that if some cultures are more strongly represented than others, the others may then feel excluded.

For repertoire representing the cultures in the choir:

- The most frequent question we came across during the needs analysis for this project was: Where can you find repertoire from the cultures of origin that can easily be sung with a choir? Some conductors, such as Michael Betzner-Brand from Berlin (Hoffnungschor²²) try to arrange songs with melodies the singers know, but not all conductors have the skills to arrange all songs themselves.
- The **"Sing Me In: Repertoire Guide" may be useful in this case and is available as a free download** on www.SingMeln.eu. There you will find some sample scores, tips on where to find music from different countries and a reference to the Musica Database where conductors can search for scores suitable for their specific choir settings.
- It can be difficult in bicultural or multicultural choirs to teach all the songs from all languages to the full choir. Some projects thus suggest to let singers sing songs for each other in their own language instead. For instance, the Norwegian project "Marching band, choir and concerts Nesna"²³ brings together local ensembles with immigrants. They use Norwegian repertoire and Arabic repertoire and let the children sing for each other. Another example comes from the Belgian project "Crossing Music"²⁴: Collect songs (easy ones, children's songs, folk songs) from migrants by asking schools and organisations to help with simple smartphone recordings, then ask a composer to make arrangements of those songs for the settings you need. This way you also already have a pronunciation file available.
- There are a number of possibilities to find songs from specific cultures, e.g. contacting choirs of migrants. Some "migrant choirs" do not necessarily aim at bringing together local singers with migrant singers, but they may be a useful resource for songs, pronunciation files; etc. including the project Nesrin Karabağ Turkish Art Music Choir, as well as a number of choirs gathering Turkish singers in Germany and the UK²⁵. Contacting embassies, consulates or migrant culture associations may also provide interesting sources.

²¹ See reference section

²² See reference section

²³ See reference section

²⁴ See reference section

²⁵ See reference section

- Like the project HOPE in Norway²⁶, involve local music “stars” or personalities. They worked, for example, with Music Freetown Musician Abazar Hamid.
- Try combining traditional singing and dancing. The project Fargespill from Norway²⁷, for example, focuses on what happens when differences meet through traditional music and dance.
- Getting everyone to sing in all the languages in the choir may be difficult. Anthony Heidweiller from Vocal Statements in the Netherlands²⁸ suggests singing with parents and children, asking them what they would like to sing. In between their choices, they always sing a kind of “choir motto song” together in Dutch as a bridge between the different songs.

In some cases, religious repertoire may be an issue.

Here are a few ways how conductors can deal with this:

- Avoid religious repertoire altogether.
- Sing religious repertoire in connection with major holidays in the host country, explaining why these traditions are important for a part of the choir and their friends and family (a number of projects indicated that singing religious repertoire was not an issue, and that they sing Christmas concerts etc.). This will also depend on the countries of origin of the migrant singers and to what extent they are religious.
- Sing repertoire from different religions - see the example of the Antakya Civilizations Choir / Turkey²⁹. This choir brings together people from three monotheistic religions showing tolerance as way of life. The choir was candidate to the Nobel Prize of Peace in 2012.

Singing is fun!

- The most important is to choose repertoire which will make the children and young people enjoy what they sing.
- Consider involving the singers in the choice of repertoire.
- Check the “Sing Me In: Repertoire Guide” for further tips and resources (in English only)

2.2 Repertoire as a language-learning tool

As mentioned above, many projects with young migrants, especially projects aimed at young refugees, use collective singing as a tool to support the process of learning the local language(s). In some countries refugees are first gathered in specific classes with intensive language courses in order to prepare them, before they are included into the regular classes. Therefore some books have been developed or are being developed specifically for language learning through singing. In Germany the Chorverband Nordrhein-Westfalen supports a project that’s putting together a songbook called “Lieder zum ankommen” (Arrival Songs). The book will offer about 75 to 80 songs, with didactic information on how to introduce the songs, how to explain the contents, how to deal with certain cultural issues, etc. Even though the book is being developed for a school environment, it is also aimed at people who work with refugees or in other multicultural settings.

Tips and tricks

The description of this project can be translated into tips:

- Melodies and texts have to be easy.
- The vocabulary of the songs has to fit the needs of the young migrants.
- Grammar and syntax used in the songs should also be “correct”.
- This songbook is structured according to “word fields” (clothes, colours, free-time activities etc.) and singing is always combined with movement.

In general, children’s songs and singing games can be useful, especially if the migrant singers are still rather young or there are many migrants in the group.

²⁶ See reference section

²⁷ See reference section

²⁸ See reference section

²⁹ See reference section

2.3 The role of the conductor

Anthony Heidweiller from “Vocal Statements” in the Netherlands ³⁰ gave us some tips on what they usually look for in the teachers and conductors they invite to join their projects. They may also be useful for conductors who want to set up multicultural choirs or who have bigger groups of migrants in their choirs:

- Music skills may not always be the most important skills. It is also important for the conductor to have an emotional relation to the project, to have a personal story as to why they would like to work with young migrants and why they want to sing with them.
- It is important that they work with joy!
- Last but not least, finding teachers, conductors, assistants or instrumentalists who have a migrant background themselves to work with the young singers can help because the singers will identify with them and therefore may more easily build trust. They will feel like “he/she is one of us, knows how we feel”. An added benefit would be an increase in the number of people with migrant backgrounds among conductors of choirs (the AMJ study quoted in the introduction, “Chormusik und Migrations-Gesellschaft”, also showed that there is a lot of room for improvement here ³¹).

We have also come across some other remarks on conductors, noting in particular that conductors must have an interest in working with young migrants, and that they must embody tolerance.

³⁰ See reference section

³¹ See [Chormusik und Migrations-Gesellschaft](#), see reference section



3. Final word – The story of Louis

“Louis survived the genocide in Rwanda, but lost his entire family. He fled and made it to Norway. Life was tough, and he felt alone. After a while he joined a multicultural choir. The choir changed everything, he says. Having choir practice to look forward to made life more meaningful. He was asked to teach the other singers a song from his homeland which became popular in the choir, and he was also given soloist parts. He started to see himself as something more than a refugee – a choir singer and soloist – someone who could contribute. To sing with his choir friends gave him courage. The choir became his new family. It helped him integrate in a new country and to achieve a better life.

What does Louis’ story tell us (...)?

Choir singing is about collaboration, community and togetherness. Friendships are developed and networks created. The choir can become a social hub that counteracts isolation and loneliness (...). It can become a place where one belongs and are expected – simply a new family. (...) In a choir everyone contributes to creating a collective sound. One learns new songs and develop skills. Choir singing gives experience of mastery, which furthermore contributes to increased self confidence and the sense of being someone of importance and a resource for others. (...)

The choir Louis is part of contains both native Norwegians and people from many different countries. Everyone is greeted with a handshake or a hug, and “Welcome, so nice to see you, hope to see you again next week!”. Some of the singers receive extra follow-up, like a text message with a reminder of the practice, or maybe a ride from where they live.

The breaks are important for socializing. In addition, there are often gatherings outside of practice, like supper or football matches. The choir practices are relaxed. They do not always start on time, and people do not always leave the room when the time is up. There are no forms of registration or a members list, which means members come and go. The instructors make an effort to speak a ‘simple’ form of Norwegian to help new members understand the information that is given.

Anyone can join the choir. Their philosophy is that “anyone can sing” – it is just a matter of time and practice. It is more important to sing with ‘power’ than singing ‘beautifully’. Mistakes are allowed, and there is a lot of laughter. The choir sings easy three part-arrangements. They never use sheet music, but sound-files are shared online for practice at home. Because of the ever changing member base, some more regular members are required in each voice group.

The conductor of Louis’ choir sums up its purpose: “To get together, where everyone has the same purpose, everyone is equal, and you meet in a warm fellowship, which singing is”. When a choir is made up by social and musical hospitality, it can give valuable experiences and fellowship, and contribute to empowerment and a meaningful life. A hospitable choir can promote integration, health, wellbeing and quality of life – simply a better life – for people in a new country.”³²

Anne Haugland Balsnes, Norway³³

³² Translation by Olav Øyehaug Opsvik (Norwegian federation for children and youth choirs, Ung i Kor).

³³ Anne Haugland Balsnes (b. 1969) is professor of music and manager of research at University of Agder and Ansgar University College at Kristiansand, Norway. She is also a practicing conductor and singer. Balsnes studied KIA Multicultural Gospel Choir (see reference section) in Kristiansand, Norway, during Spring 2012. The choir is part of KIA – which stands for “Kristent interkulturelt arbeid”, or “Christian Intercultural Work”. The study was based on participant observation and interviews, and focused on members with backgrounds as refugees. Two of the choir’s directors and five singers from different countries were interviewed. One of them was Louis, whose story is told here.



Marina Velasquez

4. Annex - References

The project “Sing Me In” was inspired by a study of the German Youth Choir association Arbeitskreis Musik in der Jugend (AMJ) that has assessed the percentage of migrants in German children’s and youth choirs: [Chormusik und Migrations-Gesellschaft](#)³⁴.

During the project we learned that the Estonian Ministry of Culture did a similar study on the choirs participating in the Estonian Song Celebration 2017. They discovered that there were 35 choirs with Russian-speaking singers, which represents only 4% of the total of choirs, while 30% of the population of Estonia is Russian-speaking. The Ministry has thus decided that there is a need for action to increase the involvement of Russian-speaking choirs and singers.

During the “Sing Me In” project we collected information on a number of examples where collective singing was / is used as a tool for the integration of (young) migrants. We learned many of the tips and tricks mentioned above from these examples, which were a mix of successful projects and which can serve as examples of good practice. Others faced challenges we could learn from and some were considered as failed.

For this handbook we explicitly looked at choirs outside schools and outside refugee accommodations; i.e. existing choirs integrating migrants, as well as bicultural or multicultural choirs created for the purpose of bringing migrants and non-migrants together. Not all these examples are specifically about children and young people, since a part of the tips, tricks and challenges are the same whether you work with a children’s choir, a youth choir or an adult choir. We believe that they can serve as examples and can be a useful source of inspiration for all choirs.

³⁴ <http://www.amj-musik.de/cum>

Projects mentioned in this handbook, in alphabetical order:

Afghan Youth- Voices of Peace

Austria, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mn6rJLmGcl>

Interesting example of a bicultural choir - Afghan and Austrian singers in Austria conducted by a musician from Taiwan.

Antakya Civilizations Choir

Turkey, This choir brings together people from three monotheistic religions showing tolerance as way of live. The choir has been candidate to Nobel Prize of Peace in 2012.

Barn Synger – Bydel Gamle Oslo and Barn Synger – Bydel Årstad

Norway, Integration projects of ungikor (<http://ungikor.no/>) aimed migrant children. They use traditional Norwegian children's repertoire and typical birthday songs, useful for integration. They have also encountered a number of challenges mentioned in this handbook (convincing muslim parents that music activities are ok for their children, challenges of low-income families, sustainable funding)

Crossing Music

Belgium, <http://www.focuswvtv.be/nieuws/muziekproject-crossing-music-uit-oostende-wint-koningin-mathildeprijs-2017>

In this project the organisers collected easy songs from migrants with the help of schools and organisations.

Fargespill

Norway, <http://fargespill.no/in-english>

A choir that focuses on what happens when differences meet through traditional music and dance

Hoffnungschor

Germany, <https://www.facebook.com/Hoffnungschor>

Interesting example of a choir with migrants, conducted by a Syrian which decided one day to "integrate" German singers and became a bicultural choir. So this choirs shows a reversed perspective: a "normal" choir of refugees and migrants, welcoming local singers.

HOPE - Multicultural choir Harstad

Norway - part of <http://www.krafttakforsang.no/>

A choir for local refugees, migrants and local singers. An important meeting ground for integration, language learning and cultural exchange. We mentioned the project above because it was highly successful in connecting to many local groups and institutions involved.

Kamarikuoro Galerie

Finland – <https://www.facebook.com/Chamber-Choir-Gallerie-177094942442126>

A choir with members of different nationalities, example of a "normal" choir in a place where is a multicultural neighborhood, not looking for integration specifically

KIA choir

Norway - <http://kianorge.no/gospelkor/>

We quoted the choir above a couple of times because they gave an explanation of why they use singing for the purpose of including migrants.

Marching band, choir and concerts Nesna

Norway, www.korpsnett.no. Example of a project where rather than singing songs in different languages together, the children sang for each other (Norwegian children sang Norwegian songs for the Arabic children and vice versa).

<https://www.facebook.com/Chamber-Choir-Gallerie>

Mosaik

Norway, <https://www.volda.kommune.no/kulturskulen>

The Mosaik project is a good example of local forces joining together to contribute to integration and cultural exchange between refugees, immigrants and native Norwegians.

MultiKultiChor Bonn

www.multikultichor.de, is a multicultural choir created with the support of the city of Bonn and with the aim of integrating migrants by bringing them together with German and letting them sing together. It is an adult choir but serves as example that bringing together different cultures in a choir and singing repertoire from the countries of origin of all singers can even be part of the statutes of a choir.

Music on Troubled Soils

<https://www.emc-imc.org/events/past-emc-events/music-on-troubled-soils/>

Turkish choirs abroad

- Nesrin Karabağ Korosu / Germany www.facebook.com/Türk-Sanat-Müziği-Korosu-Nesrin-Karabağ-268783046513516/
- London Turkish Music Choir / UK www.facebook.com/LondraTSMKorosu/
- Köln Turkish Music Choir / Germany - <http://tuerkischerchor.de/tr/>
- Leverkusen Turkish Music Society / Germany <http://www.tsm-lev.de/>

all examples of choirs which are not multicultural or bicultural in themselves but rather gather migrant singers. Their role for the inclusion of migrants may be less obvious than for the other choirs mentioned, but as mentioned above, they can play a role in increasing understanding for their culture in the host country and can be helpful for choirs wishing to learn music from Turkey.

Polyphonica

Greece, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NdyMe64pr0

Successful example of a multicultural children's choir

SCIC Choirs

Catalonia (Spain) - Catalonia has welcomed one million migrant people on a total of 7 million of inhabitants during the last decades. The member choirs of the Catalan Children Choir Federation ([SCIC](#)) integrated this new population as singers, as did the public education system. The federation also commissioned new repertoire such as a cantata on the topic of the inclusion, for one children voice and woodwind quartet (fl-ob-cl-fg), called La Ciutat i la lluna ([The city and the moon](#)), written by Poire Vallvé after Rafel Simó's lyrics and tale.

The most beautiful Christmas Carols

Finland - <http://www.sastamalansurakunta.fi/>

This project included singing international and local Christmas carols in different languages with the aim of immigrants learning something about the local culture and traditions. There were immigrants attending for whom it was not an issue that the repertoire was religious, but there were not that many, so for others it may have represented a barrier that the event was organised in a Christian church.

Vocal Statements

The Netherlands, <http://www.operamakers.nl>, also have the project "Kinderen Ouders Zingen op school" and work with parents and children.

Xamfra music school, Barcelona

<http://xamfra.net/>

Zing Nederlands met me (Sing Dutch with me)

The Netherlands- <https://www.facebook.com/ZingNederlandsMetMe>

This is an example of a choir where singing is used for language learning. It is also one of the projects that mentions that serving food can help people feel welcome. Video: <http://www.nhnieuws.nl/nieuws/188612/paradiso-organiseert-bijzondere-taalcursus-voor-vluchtelingen>