



## Module 4 – Integration of refugee youth and participants with special needs

Attending a farm visit brings particular benefits for teachers, who educate pupils with difficulties in mainstream learning systems. Classes including children and youth with special needs (e.g. refugees, children with migrant background, and children with developmental disorders, learning disabilities or social problems) get intensive and new experience for the group apart from conventional patterns of learning and competing in classrooms. Visits on Bio-farms can support teachers in integrating those children and young people.

Farm officers, teachers and staff of service agencies who work with refugee children and handicapped pupils must have a basic knowledge about intercultural behaviour and communication and about different handicaps and regarding requirements and needs. The module will give practical hints and tools for farm visits with these target groups and present best practice examples how the experiences and learning opportunities for different refugee target groups and participants with handicaps can be organised to support their special needs.



### What is the goal of this module?

- Unit 1. To explain the great variety of the target groups refugee children and handicapped pupil and their special needs.
- Unit 2. To describe the different requirements and approaches for integrating these target groups by BioFarm visits.
- Unit 3. To present good practice examples to show how farm visits can be organized for the different target groups.

### After finishing this module I will have learnt....

1. Basic knowledge about intercultural behavior and different handicaps of the target groups
2. Basic knowledge about intercultural requirements and special needs which have to be taken in consideration for planning and implementing farm visits for these target groups.
3. Good practice examples of successful projects with farm visits for very different target groups.

## Unit 1 – Bio-Farm visits for better integration of disadvantaged youth



### In this unit I will:

1. learn about the benefits of **Bio-Farm visit as pedagogical method** for better integration of disadvantaged youth
2. learn **how to organize Bio-Farm visits** with handicapped youth and to respect special needs and requirements
3. be informed about **best practice example** for implementing Bio-Farm visits for better integration of disadvantaged youth

### Introduction into the topic:

The unit introduces into the concept of Bio-Farm visit as **pedagogical method for disadvantaged youth**. Afterwards it gives an overview about different handicaps of disadvantaged young people (e.g. various mental or physical handicaps) and what has to be taken into consideration when participants with handicaps visit an educational farm. Finally, the unit presents best practice examples and shows how Bio-Farm experiences and learning opportunities can be organized to support youth with handicaps according to their special needs. Especially in Austria and Germany animal therapy with farm animals is a new therapeutically branch.



## Chapter 1 – Bio-Farm visit as pedagogical method

- Lesson 1 – Bio-Farm visits offer an innovative outdoor learning space
- Lesson 2 – Identifying various mental or physical handicaps
- Lesson 3 – Special education in the education systems in Europe

### Lesson 1 – Bio-Farm visits offer an innovative outdoor learning space

Going on a visit to an organic farm offers particular benefits to those individuals who sometimes struggle in mainstream education. Groups of children and young people with special educational needs; such as those **with learning disabilities** or those at **risk of exclusion from mainstream education**, can often benefit from learning in a new environment



Educational farm visits and workshops provide an **important and innovative space** that enables informal and formal learning to take place alongside the more conventional school learning environment. The nature-related and practice-based approach creates new possibilities for teaching children by new methods with **practical and non-cognitive elements**. But maybe more important, these farm visits and workshops offer big potentials for the **integration of disadvantaged youth**.

Young people and their parents are increasingly disconnected from the farms that produce their food. A farm visit can help bridge this gap in understanding, with the knowledge gained helping to positively influence eating habits. This in turn can improve health and well-being, thus having a positive impact upon wider societal / economic sectors; potentially leading to more sustainable development within society.

Bio-Farms are ideal for teaching. They in particular offer a **comprehensive outdoor learning space**. They are a good real-world, practical and sensory model for sustainable agriculture. Also, there is a close connection to the school curricula and learning offers will fit well into the worldwide concept of „education for sustainable development“ (ESD). Teachers and educators can find in Bio-Farm life various links and experience areas, where they can **complete and deepen the knowledge acquired in the schools** for subjects like biology, geography, economics, ecology and environmental protection, sustainability.

Attending a farm visit brings particular benefits for teachers, who educate **pupils with difficulties in mainstream learning systems**. Classes including children and youth with special needs (e.g. children with developmental disorders, learning disabilities or social problems, children with migrant background) get intensive and new experience for the group apart from conventional patterns of learning and competing in classrooms. Visits on Bio-farms can support teachers in integrating those children and young people.



Visits of organic farms offer special possibilities for teachers and educators. Hands on experiences on farms do not only build up knowhow and motivation but also promote fine motor skills, creative ability, they reduce psychosomatic symptoms, boost self-confidence, farm visits develop and improve a lot of different skills.

### Lesson 2 – Identifying various mental or physical handicaps

Education of pupils with **special educational needs (SEN)** is an integral part of the European education system.

Support for these children aims at stimulating pupils' psychological and physical development and enhancing the effectiveness of learning. It is intended to correct disorders, reduce gaps in the knowledge or skills to be acquired within the framework of a curriculum, and eliminate causes and symptoms of disorders, including behavioural disorders. It is crucial to prepare children and young people for life as full members of society (within the family, local community and



labour market) by ensuring, through special methods, the most comprehensive development of pupils within their potential.



In order to ensure the effectiveness of psychological and educational support, it is necessary first to identify properly the pupil's needs and then to provide the most suitable types and methods of support which will indeed bring the expected effects.

In general, the following **pupils and students** are defined as those with **special educational needs**:

- with long-term illness,
- with physical disability,
- with specific learning difficulties (including dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and dysorthography),
- with speech impairment,
- with trauma-induced emotional and behavioral difficulties,
- who are experiencing repeated educational failures,
- who are experiencing community negligence relating to their family's welfare, quality of spare time activities and community socializing,
- who are experiencing adaptation difficulties resulting from cultural differences or a different educational background,
- who are socially maladjusted and at risk of being so.

## Lesson 3 – Special education in the education systems in Europe

All pupils who require assistance due to individually identified developmental and educational needs are eligible to receive support. **Special education** is intended for children and young people with disabilities (physically disabled, incl. aphasia, intellectually disabled, blind, visually impaired, deaf, hearing impaired, autistic, incl. Asperger syndrome, with multiple impairments), with social maladjustment or at risk of social maladjustment who require special organization of teaching and learning processes and working methods.

Special education is an **integral part of most of the education systems** in Europe. This is reflected in the legislation, which is common to both mainstream and special education. Special education may be provided in mainstream and special settings – mainstream schools, integration schools and classes or in special schools and residential special schools. It can be also provided, as in the case of all pupils/students, in the form of individualized teaching when their health prevents school attendance.

Special education applies the same teaching methods as mainstream education, although more **emphasis is placed on individual work with each pupil**. While teachers are free to choose specific methods and forms of work as well as teaching resources, they are required to apply some crucial principles of special education (e.g. the need to adjust teaching activities to abilities and needs of pupils and to existing circumstances, the need to increase the level of difficulty gradually, the need to use demonstration and example in the teaching process).

## Chapter 2 – Special needs and requirements for farm visits with handicapped youth

- Lesson 1 – Organization of the education for pupils with special educational needs
- Lesson 2 – Needs according to different handicaps
- Lesson 3 – Conclusions and practical hints

## Lesson 1 – Organization of the education for pupils with

## special educational needs

In general, pupils with special educational needs **learn together with other pupils** either in mainstream schools/nursery schools, integration schools/nursery schools (where all classes/groups are integration classes/groups) or in integration classes in mainstream schools/nursery schools (where classes are either integration or mainstream classes).

**Special schools** (including residential schools), special education and care centers (with boarding facilities and extended rehabilitation programs) and special sections in mainstream schools are established for pupils who have a written statement recommending special education and whose parents have decided in favor of attendance of this type of school/section.

Depending on the special educational needs and type of disability, pupils with disabilities attend special nursery schools, special primary schools, special lower secondary schools, basic vocational schools and schools preparing for employment, or special general and technical upper-secondary schools.

A school with integration classes has to employ **additional “supporting” teachers** qualified in special education. “Supporting” teachers work also individually with disabled pupils, teaching them various educational techniques, e.g. the Braille alphabet or sign language.

## Lesson 2 – Needs according to different handicaps

Lesson 2 in the former chapter showed that disadvantaged young people can have **various mental or physical handicaps**. These different handicaps have to be considered when planning and preparing a visit of an organic farm.

Disadvantaged youth with physical handicaps have **very different practical needs**. An important aspect is the providing of “accessibility” and “freedom from barriers”. Examples are hard cover paths and special toilets for wheel chairs users etc.

Beside these physical requirements and needs a special focus should be laid **on behavior and communication issues**. Mental handicapped pupils and children need much more protection and maintenance when visiting and working in gardens and farm areas.

Accompanying persons have for example to be aware that mental disabled children could eat soil or plants unfit for human consumption. For these kids outdoor cooking procedures could become dangerous because they are not used to it. In general, the preparation and implementation of a Bio-Farm visit has to ensure to **avoid any potential causes and reasons for accidents** due to their handicaps.

Teachers, farm guides and farmers have to consider **special communication needs**, especially for mental disabled youth. Explanations and teaching units have to be adapted to the special needs of these target groups. Lectures have to be very simple, the teaching rhythm must fit with their reception skills and the language and contents should meet their interests and power of concentration.

## Lesson 3 – Sample Interview

**Interview with a teacher of disadvantaged pupils in Cologne, Germany: She is working with mental and physical disabled pupils since more than 20 years.**

Question: Do you carry out farm visits?

Answer: We organize class trips to farms, but just as vacation events, not special farm visits with practical work and experiences.

Question: Do you think such farm visits could be useful for a better integration of disadvantaged children?

Answer: Yes, definitely. They can help **to experience new learning opportunities and accesses**.

Question: Are there special things to consider for farm visits with disabled pupils?



Answer: Disabled pupils have very different mental or physical handicaps. It is necessary to take in account these differences for carrying out the visit on a farm. For any of the various handicaps special different conditions and measures have to be considered. Even inside a group with same handicaps **each individual must be treated with respect to the personal specification of the handicap**.

Question: Can you give us practical hints and tools which should be prepared and provided for a visit on a farm with handicapped children?

Answer: No. **For each child you have to consider specific individual aspects** and preparation issues. And that regards not only technical tools and issues but much more mental and communication factors.

*(This interview could also be provided at materials)*

## Lesson 4 – Conclusions and practical hints

### Conclusions:

- Farm visit brings **particular benefits** for teachers, who educate pupils with difficulties in mainstream learning systems
- Bio-Farms are ideal for teaching. They in particular offer a **comprehensive outdoor learning space**.
- Hands on experiences on farms do not only build up knowhow and motivation but also promote fine motor skills, creative ability, they reduce psychosomatic symptoms, boost self-confidence.
- Disadvantaged young people can have **various mental or physical handicaps**.
- Disabled pupils with physical handicaps have very different practical needs. An important aspect is the providing of **“accessibility”** and **“freedom from barriers”**.
- Beside these physical requirements and needs a special focus should be laid on **behavior and communication issues**.
- Teachers, farm guides and farmers have to consider **special communication needs**, especially for mental disabled youth.
- For each child you have to consider **specific individual aspects** and preparation issues.

## Chapter 3 – Best practice examples of experiences and learning opportunities for participants with handicaps

- Lesson 1 – “The Farm Project” of Abbey Home Farm in the United Kingdom
- Lesson 2 – Curative education school at the Schlüterhof in Germany
- Lesson 3 – Rural Project at the Stanisław Karłowski Foundation in Poland
- Lesson 4 – Putti-Hof in Austria “Green Care - Where people flourish”
- Lesson 5 – Wald am See - “Animal-Assisted Pedagogy” in Austria

## Lesson 1 – “The Farm Project” of Abbey Home Farm in the United Kingdom

The Abbey Home Farm is located in Gloucestershire, in 50 km distance of Bristol and managed by Will and Hilary Chester-Master. The 650-hectare organic farm is registered by Soil Association and hosts regular educational visits and farm walks. With their **“Farm Project”** they gained interesting experience with **visits of disadvantaged children**.



More information: <http://www.theorganicfarmshop.co.uk/farm>

The Farm Project hosts up to one week long residential visits for children and young people from all walks of life. In July 2015 The Farm Project CIC was established at Abbey Home Farm.



Hilary Chester-Master reports some lessons from her experience with these visits.



"It is important is to choose **the right size of the visiting group**! Hilary works with groups of up to 10 from disadvantaged communities for close mentoring and support, doing real practical jobs on the farm. If the group is too big an adequate care and support is not possible, and the visitors do not benefit. Furthermore, the farmer or farm guide can be overburdened to give individual counseling ".

### Feedback by Janet Ackrill, Learning & Intervention Manager, Dorcan Academy

"The year 7 and 8 SEN (pupils with special educational needs) and Pupil Premium children were primarily students with self-confidence, anxiety, and social skills difficulties. The small group of six children meant that the children opened up about their experiences in a way that they felt unable to do within a whole class, or large group environment.



We saw visible differences in the students as their time on the farm progressed. We saw **growth in confidence**, and an **improvement in social skills**. The children bonded together with both their room partners and their working groups and the farm activities allowed for invaluable opportunities for team work. They showed amazing perseverance, which was rewarded with success, and a lot of fun and laughter.

This trip gave the opportunity for positive learning in a wonderful environment which is relaxed and lead by a thoroughly dedicated team at the farm."

Source: <http://www.thefarm.education/case-studies>

### Feedback by Lisa Green, Clifton Green Primary School

"We visited for the second time in 12 months with 10 year 6 students. CG is in an area of high deprivation with many of children entitled to FSM. Many of our children may never get the opportunity to visit places outside of York which is why visiting The Farm Project is such an important part of our school year.

The visit is a chance for the children **to become independent** and to learn **how to work as a team**. The fact that it is a residential allows time to bond and get to know each other and to rely on each other. Educationally the farm provides the entire curriculum in a practical hand on way. The small group size really allows for each child to have a fulfilling experience. The range of activities allows the children to take ownership of the farm for a week. They take their jobs very seriously and feel a great responsibility towards the animals and each other.



The experience helped the children overcome anxieties around some of the animals. Many of the children tasted many new foods which they have not had the chance to do before. The children developed their knowledge of self-care and became more independent as the week went on."

Source: <http://www.thefarm.education/case-studies>

### Feedback by Sharon Batcock, Curriculum Leader, Gloucestershire College

"We visited the Farm Project with a varied group of students with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) from Gloucestershire College was a challenge for all involved.

The team at The Farm Project was amazing, so open to questioning and eager to make the stay the best experience for the students. It is refreshing to work with people who are able to see the benefits for the students and who do not see the SEND first and foremost. The ethos of the project is so flexible and relaxed that all of the students came away having had a good experience.

For the college the amalgamation of the skills taught throughout the year that was able to be put into practice in a



working environment was key. The additional soft skill learning that took place was second to none.

I would totally recommend The Farm Project for experiential learning and development of **independence living skills** in the sector or SEND within education and for groups of a recreational nature. Positive learning in a positive environment which is relaxed and lead by individualized learning."

Source: <http://www.thefarm.education/case-studies>

## Lesson 2 – Curative education school at the Schlüterhof in Germany

The farm **Schlüterhof** near Lüneburg hosts students with care needs, who attend the **Heilpädagogische Hofschule in Wendisch-Evern**. Here the school takes place on the farm. On the basis of Waldorf education, the farm school enables children and young people with special educational needs to learn and live through practical work with nature on a **bio-dynamic farm**.



More information: <http://www.waldorf-lueneburg.de/index.php/news.108.html>

While there are "normal" children who come to the farm in the course of school trips, there are children at the A group of nine children started in September 2007. The integrative school is a funding school of the Rudolf Steiner School Lüneburg. At present, 38 pupils are taught from the first to the seventh grade.

The farm is located in a village, where there are neither shopping nor a village cross. Andrea and Jürgen Schlüter have inherited the farm grounds. In order to set up their farm school, they invited the whole village to their home to present their idea and the project and **to inspire local residents** - with the result that the project receives broad support and is supported on all sides.

Like other examples this project is an anthroposophical initiative. The fact that bio-dynamically working farms play a pioneering role in **"social agriculture"** is not surprising. Rudolf Steiner's pedagogical and agricultural courses were held in close succession, and many biodynamic farm communities have been involved in the integration of people with disabilities for decades.

The development in Norway shows how the education of schools and farms can be developed. Linda Jolly, a horticultural teacher, has been involved in numerous projects and initiatives since the 1980s, for example the **"Living School" project**, Agricultural University of **Norway in Ås**, has published several analyses and reports about the development in Norway (see unit 2, chapter 3, lesson 55).

## Lesson 3 – Rural Project at the Stanisław Karłowski Foundation in Poland

In the diverse cultural landscape of Western Pomerania in North-West Poland, the **village project Juchowo-Radacz-Kądzelnia** was organized more than 10 years ago by the **Stanisław Karłowski Foundation**. There, a number of families from Central and Western Europe, with a great deal of pioneer spirit and competence, worked together with Polish workers to build a farm which operates according to the principles of biodynamic farming.

The village project creates new impulses for the development of agricultural regions in Central and Eastern Europe. It does so in close cooperation with biodynamic agriculture and associated aspects such as research, education and training, social therapy, and the formation of social life.

More

information: <http://www.software-ag-stiftung.de/en/themes/natural-resources/featured-projects/projects/the-jucho-wo-village-project-diverse-activities-in-agriculture>

Activities in the areas of **education and social therapy** are developed and realized in close cooperation with biodynamic





agriculture as a part of the village project. The educational initiative includes, today, a holiday school in which children and adolescents can participate in creative workshops, as well as diverse activities for school classes from Poland and Germany in the form of agricultural internships and nature experiences on the farm. The nature education programs for schools and kindergartens in the region also enjoy enormous popularity.



The most recently started project **involves social therapeutic work** undertaken in cooperation with six facilities in the region. At the moment, a total of 62 individuals from cooperating institutions take turns working on the farm, for example creating syrups and herbal elixirs; packaging herbs and other products; collecting wild herbs; assisting in the herb and fruit gardens; working in the drying plant; caring for the plants on the foundation's premises; and work in the kitchens. More workshops and residential opportunities for people with disabilities will be created locally in the medium term.

Since 2010 on the Juchowo farm within the framework of occupational therapy are conducted **actions with the disabled people** from the region with the aim to stimulate their professional and social activity. The farm offers great opportunities for integration and collaboration with people with disabilities.

The activities of the therapeutic laboratory are covered by adults with various mental disorders. During whole year these people participate in **occupational therapy workshops** in their hometowns, and in the high season, from April to October, they come in groups (10-20 persons) to the farm. These groups change every two weeks.

People with disabilities are involved in the work of the herbal garden. Their tasks include:

- cultivating herbs, medicinal plants and spices from planting to harvesting;
- collection of herbs and medicinal plants from fields and forests;
- help in the dryer by drying and sorting herbs;
- collection of raspberries;
- help in the production of juices, fruit syrups and herbal extracts.

People with disabilities have felt good in Juchowo farm; they were interested in several working places. Therefore, new forms of activity were created: caring for calves, planting hedges, helping in kitchens, harvesting of carrots, beetroots.



As a result of systematic training in the workplace, there were employed with permanent contract seven persons with intellectual disability and mental disorders. Disabled people, who are coming to us within the framework of occupational therapy, also participate in a variety of traditional ceremonies celebrated on the farm: Saint John's Eve, Harvest Festival, Advent, Christmas, Easter etc.

All people who work with the Foundation **feel valued and needed** on a daily basis on the farm. They found their place here.

## Lesson 4 – Putti-Hof in Austria “Green Care - Where people flourish”

Under the motto "living, learning and working in harmony with nature", the **Putti-Hof** in Buchkirchen near Wels (Upper Austria) offers a wide range of social-educational experiences for children, adolescents and adults with and without disabilities. For this commitment, the family business of Heike and Andreas Purtscheller was awarded as the first “**Green Care**” certified farm in Upper Austria. For “**animal-based education on the farm**” the farm received the award “ÖKL-Hoftafel”.



More information: <http://www.zebrua.at>

In September 2011, the family founded the private childcare “**Nature children in the garden at Putti-Hof**”. In this care, life in the annual cycle with nature, for example, the planting, grooming, harvesting and processing of vegetables or by the correct handling of animals in the context of the “Animal-Assisted Pedagogy”, is passed on to the younger generation. The peasant woman Heike Purtscheller is a pedagogue, has passed the ÖKL certification for the “Animal-





Assisted Pedagogy", a Waldorf education course and the LFI certificate course "Schule am Bauernhof". The farm cooperates with teachers of Caritas St. Elisabeth.

For people with disabilities, there is the opportunity to participate in skill-based activities based on a colorful daily structure. Depending on their interests, they can help, for example, in the repair shop, in the garden or in the barn, and develop a healthy sense of self-worth. This is where **"Animal-Assisted Pedagogy"** flows in.



For example, traumatized adolescents can often **rebuild trust in people** through contact with animals. Furthermore, adolescents with dual diagnoses (for example mental and cognitive impairment) are prepared for everyday work by work in the field of agriculture. For adolescents in difficult situations, there is a time-sensitive training course with a sensitive emergency pedagogy. Seminars and workshops for people with and without disabilities take place on a variety of topics, such as dairy farming or teambuilding.

With the project **"Green Care - Where people flourish"**, agricultural and forestry enterprises become partners in the social, health, education and economic systems. In cooperation with social welfare organizations and institutions, the farm becomes a place of work, education, health and life and offers a variety of services and services for young and older people, persons with disabilities, physical and mental stress. The focus is on the interaction between human, animal and nature. The association Green Care Austria form together with nine chambers of agriculture a competence center.



Source: <http://www.zebrua.at/>

#### Activities of Putti-Hof:

- Child care 3-13 years
- Learning support for children from 6 years;
- Farm subscription for children 3-13 years;
- "School on the farm" for kindergartens, schools and as a training for pedagogues on topics in the annual cycle;
- Animal-based education on the farm in individual and group settings; Day structure for people with disabilities for workshops with skill-oriented activity;
- Work training and preparation for young people with mental and / or cognitive impairment in agriculture;
- Emergency pedagogy for young people;
- Seminars and workshops for people with and without disabilities on various topics;
- Agricultural internship for pupils, students and interested people;

## Lesson 5 – Wald am See - "Animal-Assisted Pedagogy" in Austria

The **organic farm "Wald am See"** is located in Kitzbühel directly on the Schwarzsee (a designated nature reserve) and covers 17 ha, of which about 12 ha are grassland and 5 ha forest. The farm is nestled in the fields and the forest overlooking the lake. A side street leads to the courtyard and to the houses behind.

This Tyrolean organic farm is run as a branch office of a special education school. Since the school year 2014/15, the Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture has been carrying out the school experiment "Animal-Assisted Pedagogy" for the General Special School in St. Johann i. Tyrol approved.



More information: <http://www.waldamsee.at/>

With the certification for the **"Animal-Assisted Therapy, Pedagogy and Social Work on the Farm"** (ÖKL) "Wald am See" is the first certified farm in Tyrol.

The offers as a Green Care diversification project ranges from "Animal-assisted education" and competence development, school on the farm, workshops, project days, farm holidays ... to meet animals, experience with nature and



agriculture, as well as educational and recreational purposes.



Source: <http://www.waldamsee.at>

After the successful project "Every Monday a farm day", since the school year 2014/15 the pupils of the general special school in St. Johann i. T. 2 school days a week at the farm "Wald am See" instead of at school. Following on from the "animal-assisted units" with llamas, donkeys, sheep, ponies, etc., and the resulting increased attention, increased concentration and improved perception, reading, writing, arithmetic and more are also being used in the newly adapted premises learned, practiced and consolidated.

Exercises of daily life and everyday practical skills find space and time on these days. The habitat around the yard, the use of the trained and certified animals and the nature with its different cycles become the subject of the lesson and the classroom.

"Animal-assisted education" refers to the targeted use of farm animals for educational, therapeutic or social purposes. The farm offers a **holistic experience** which, in addition to intensive animal contact, also includes basic agricultural activities and processes in educational / therapeutic processes.



Source: <http://www.waldamsee.at>

## Unit 2 – Farm visits for a better integration of refugees



### In this unit I will:

1. learn how Bio-Farm visits can support the integration of refugee youth,
2. receive some practical suggestions for implementing Bio-Farm visits,
3. get to know best practice examples for implementing Bio-Farm visits.

### Introduction into the topic:

Farm guides and teachers who work with refugee groups must have a basic knowledge about the situation and **different cultural backgrounds and needs of refugees**. The unit gives overviews about definition of status of refugees, pedagogical benefits of Bio-Farm visits and practical hints for preparation and implementation of these activities. Ethnic, cultural and country-specific caused behaviors that might be in conflict with farm visit conditions should be known and considered. Furthermore, the unit presents divers best practice examples of Bio-Farm activities in several countries and the feedback of involved teachers and farmers.

## Chapter 1 – Education is the key to integrating refugees in Europe

- Lesson 1 – The "refugee crisis"
- Lesson 2 – Farm Visits as a chance for easier access and integration

### Lesson 1 – The "refugee crisis"

In 2015 Europe experienced the "refugee crisis" with hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing war and persecution in Syria and the wider Middle East and Africa. Transit and destination countries have experienced great challenges in managing the refugee flow, amongst others to register and shelter them. However, this also raises questions of how to



manage the situation beyond providing the basic need of food and shelter



**Source and more information:**

Bodewig, Christian (2015). Education is the key to integrating refugees in Europe. Located

at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2015/11/23/education-is-the-key-to-integrating-refugees-in-europe>

## What is the definition of refugee?

According to the **Convention relating to the Status of Refugees**, held by world governments in Geneva in 1951, a refugee is someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." This definition includes people who have experienced persecution because of political beliefs or religious activities or because they are members of a particular ethnic group.

The **1951 Refugee Convention** and its **1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees** established the legal standards for refugee protection, and **143 states** have signed both. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), established in 1951, is the branch of the United Nations charged with the international protection of refugees.



More information: <http://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

The large share of refugees under the age of 18 United Nations records show that more than half of all Syrian refugees are under the age of 18. Such a large share of children and youth is a major opportunity: if host countries ensure quick access to quality education and training opportunities, they can equip this young, but disadvantaged, generation of refugees with the tools to succeed.

So how do we make education a success for refugee students in EU countries? Initially, **refugee children and youth need targeted support** as they enter the school system, such as through intensive language and general induction programs to allow them to participate in mainstream classes as soon as possible.

Some of the refugees – especially the children and young people - might come with **war trauma**, suggesting that schools need to offer psychological support. But beyond that, refugees will benefit from measures that make education systems more inclusive. The "Learning place Bio-Farm" has a big potential to offer them new perspectives outside mainstream school system and their living in refugee camps.



More information and video: <http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>

## Lesson 2 – Farm Visits as a chance for easier access and integration

A special focus of Bio-Farm visits is on the positive impact on the integration of refugee kids and youth. In the Study "How do Children and Youth learn through Farm-School Cooperation?" Linda Jolly and Erling Krogh from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences analyzes the benefits of farm visits in Norway, where several farm and school projects are working with visits of refugees.

Their experiences show a lot of **benefits for the integration of refugee youth**. On farms where the farmers open their farm and become engaged in working with children and youngsters, refugee children can find an opportunity to rediscover some familiar elements from their mother country and perhaps demonstrate their skills and knowledge.





More Information: “How do Children and Youth learn through Farm-school Cooperation?” Linda Jolly, Erling Krogh, Norwegian University of Life Sciences

<http://www.skilleyholm.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/101334.pdf>

The work tasks on the farm provide an **opportunity to be seen in another way**, to make contact in spite of language barriers, but also to achieve language skills. Just as the practical work inspires youngsters to write and tell about what they have done on the farm in their mother tongue, the refugee children also want to communicate in the language of the country they have come to. Learning words through sensory experience and achieving visible results is an important stimulus for language training.

Some of the young refugees, especially those who come alone without their families, have never been to school. Not only the language, but the whole idea of learning sitting still on a school bench, is foreign for them. There are examples of projects with farm work where the chance to contribute in a meaningful and visible way serves as **a bridge to a new country and a new way of life**.



The fact that the farm might provide a sense of recognizability from the home country might also stir up difficult emotions of longing. Furthermore, it might be difficult to communicate due to language barriers and difference in cultural backgrounds, which might lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, it is important that the staff is capable of handling such issues and it is often a good solution to cooperate with relevant NGO's or others who have experience with the target group.

The organic farm sector offers a lot of **low skill working opportunities**. This growing economic branch that needs motivated young people - drivers for the box delivery services, salesman, cooks, bakers etc. are needed to run the farm. Farm visits that show the different working opportunities on the farm can be the first incentive for youth refugees to think about organic farms as a working place.

## Chapter 2 – Practical Considerations

- Lesson 1 – The status of refugee children and its impacts
- Lesson 2 – Cooperation with refugee initiatives
- Lesson 3 – Conclusions and practical hints

### Lesson 1 – The status of refugee children and its impacts

Target group of refugee and asylum-seeking children in Europe actually **consists of several sub-groups**, including:

- asylum seekers,
- recognized refugees,
- beneficiaries of subsidiary protection,
- persons with “tolerated stay”
- persons with a right of continued abode after several years of “tolerated stay”
- persons with other forms of regular stay (e.g. residence permit)
- persons with “irregular stay”.

These different statuses **imply very desperate life conditions and situations** of refugees and cause very different perspectives, expectation and motivations of the target groups for integration purposes. Persons with “irregular stay” live in a great uncertainty and may not be so motivated for long-term activities like recognized refugees.

Another aspect is the need of differentiation between refugee target groups according to war trauma and flight experiences. Refugees from conflict zones often continue to experience trauma from persecution, imprisonment, torture and resettlement as well as lack of food, water, and shelter for a long time. Thus, it is important to understand the **challenges of refugee families and persons engaged in integration activities**.



Psychological distress from war is harmful to refugee children and adults regardless of racial or cultural background. Refugees may experience a sense of helplessness and despair. The most common mental health issue for refugees is **post-traumatic stress disorder** and related symptoms of depression, anxiety, inattention, sleeping difficulties, nightmares, and survival guilt.

The many needy refugees who have had a traumatic, month - long escape, who were detained for months or even years in Libyan prisons on the way to secure Europe, not only need the usual assistance, but targeted medical / psychological care. (Bio-) Farm visits and activities can support such care measures.

A further differentiation consideration has to be taken in account according to local, regional and national origins as well as to **cultural and ethnic backgrounds** of refugee children and families.



[https://www.unicef.org/eca/Infograph Child Relocation and Asylum 02 11 16 \(002\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eca/Infograph%20Child%20Relocation%20and%20Asylum%2002%2011%2016%20(002).pdf)

Farm guides, farmers, teachers and NGO staff involved in Bio-Farm visits should be informed about aware of the **diverse background and experiences of refugees**, their actual living condition, and life situation to find the adequate ways of accessing to the target groups and of creating appropriate activities and support.

Bio-Farm visits are only helpful for the integration and support of these target groups if these different conditions and aspects are known and considered. Facing all these challenges and necessary differentiations the communication and cooperation between staff, youth and parents is a fundamental need for the preparation and implementation of Bio-Farm visits and activities.

## Lesson 2 – Cooperation with refugee initiatives

With the growing number of refugees, particularly in 2015, many initiatives for support and assistance have been founded and established in EU countries, especially in Germany and other countries most affected.

Many people established with these initiatives a “welcome culture” with a broad spectrum of activates, for example:

- voluntary assistance and support of refugees in many matters
- welcome, first appointments in the clothing store or similar issues
- accompaniment at authorities and bureaucratically topics
- language courses
- service by a tearoom,
- trips,
- city tours, museum visits, a neighborhood party

In Germany activities especially for children and young refugees are supported by the government with a special program “Welcome to friends – alliances for young refugees” (“Bundesprogramm „Willkommen bei Freunden – Bündnisse für junge Flüchtlinge“).

Six regional service offices help cities and counties to welcome refugee children and youngsters to daycare and school and to accompany them on their transition to work. They not only provide advice and qualifications to administration and community staff, but also assist in the establishment of local alliances of local authorities, associations, and education and refugee institutions.



More information: <https://www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de>

Also on local and regional level a lot of alliances between NGOs and initiatives were established. Several internet portals present these initiatives and their work and help interested people to find them in their region.

In Cologne, Germany, for example nearly **300 initiatives** working on refugee assistance and integration, are coordinated by the German-wide online tool “**Refugees Welcome Map**”.



Source: <http://refugeeswelcomemap.de/koeln>

For the preparation and implementation of Bio-Farm visits **cooperation with local or regional refugee initiatives** can be very helpful. They can ease the access to an appropriate target group, can give information about the background, living condition and expectation of them, and can motivate young refugees to participate at activities on a (Bio-)Farm. Additionally, they can help to solve bureaucratically challenges and possibly contribute with financial funding.

The government of North Rhine-Westphalia f.e. offers an online platform, which **organizes the cooperation between initiatives** and provides access to such institutions for new projects:



<https://www.ich-helfe.nrw>

## Lesson 3 – Conclusions and practical hints

Visiting the countryside **offers an inside into the European culture**, food practices and languages. Therefore, Bio-Farm visits address refugees in all ages, including children, families and adults. There are a lot of incentives to learn new vocabulary that is connected with the countryside, agriculture and food commodities, and the farm offers pedagogical benefits that support the building of social relations, learning and self-confidence.

Many of the successful initiatives on (Bio-)Farms working with refugees have a **close cooperation between NGO's**, such as the Red Cross, governmental organizations and the farm itself. Due to the difficult situation of the target group the best projects draw on experiences of all parts.

Furthermore, there are several good examples of longer projects that offer sequel events/visits and a chance to work or volunteer **over a longer course of time**. This has shown to be most effective in reaching the pedagogical benefits described earlier.

Some lessons from farmers' experience with visits:

- Refugees are hard to reach and best done through **support networks or groups**.
- Refugees have **practical and emotional connections with farms** which are positive connection, but can stir up unhappy and strong emotions of loss.
- The farm is best used as a **platform for refugee groups** to use rather than completely farm led
- It is important is to choose the **right size of the visiting group!**

## Chapter 3 – Best practice examples of farm visits for refugees

- Lesson 1 – “The Farm Project” of Abbey Home Farm (UK)
- Lesson 2 – Experiences from Norway
- Lesson 3 – Riding therapy of Center “Ankyra” in Tyrol, Austria
- Lesson 4 – Riding therapy of „Reittherapiezentrum Kassiopeia” in Germany
- Lesson 5 – S.E.E.S – farm-based education at Avnstrup asylum center (DK)

### Lesson 1 – “The Farm Project” of Abbey Home Farm (UK)

The Abbey Home Farm is located in Gloucestershire, in 50 km distance of Bristol and managed by Will and Hilary Chester-Master. The 650-hectare organic farm is registered by Soil Association and hosts regular educational visits and farm walks. With their **“Farm Project”** they gained interesting experience with **visits of refugee groups**.



More information: <http://www.theorganicfarmshop.co.uk/farm>

They worked together with the organization 'Victims of Torture' to host a group of refugees from London. They brought 5 refugees with director and musician to create a performance of their stories. They have also hosted groups from a refugee center in the local town of Swindon where young men came out to the farm on day visits. Another group has been to the farm for a respite stay or holiday. These refugees are mainly from Africa and the Middle East.



Hilary Chester-Master reported some lessons from her experience with this visit:

- Refugees are hard to reach and best done through **support networks or groups**.
- Refugees have **practical and emotional connections with farms** which are positive connection, but can stir up unhappy and strong emotions of loss.
- The farm is best used as a **platform for refugee groups** to use rather than completely farm led.



Refugees can be dealing with lots of issues that come to the surface and can place quite **a lot of emotional demands on the farm host**. The benefits of a safe space and a therapeutic opportunity to chat and on issues around farming are very good.



It is important to choose the **right size of the visiting group**! Hilary had one organization who said they would send 17 young refugee men to stay which would not have been appropriate for the farm to deal with.

If the group is too big an adequate care and support is not possible, and the visitors do not benefit. Furthermore, the farmer or farm guide can be overburdened to give individual counseling and for close mentoring and support.



## Lesson 2 – Experiences from Norway

Norway has taken in many minors from different countries who have sought asylum alone, without accompanying adults. To accommodate these young people, centers developed in different parts of the country. In the following two examples, you will be introduced to two projects where community supported farms have cooperated with the local asylum centers about integration and education of refugees.

The first example is from 'Nerol Community Supported Farm', which is idyllically placed in the midst of Hol, a mountain area in the county of Buskerud. Here a local farmer, Marit Torsrud Nerol, runs a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project in which she integrated the project "A Garden for Everyone" for young refugees. The second example is the **Dun Farm in Namsos**, 200 kilometers north of Trondheim.



The descriptions of the cases build on interviews with Marit Torsrud Nerol, owner of the Nerol Community Supported Farm' and Sissel Thorsen, journalist and farmer, as well as translation of the article 'Share Farm + Refugees = True!' by Marte Guttelsrød

More information: <http://growlabmarket.tictail.com/product/hauste-volume-2>

### A Garden for Everyone! (NO)

The August sun warms as they work, nine young refugees (6 boys and 3 girls) together with the members of the **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**. Anne Marit Nerol, one of the members of the CSA at the farm, is singing a song by the Norwegian poet Inger Hagerup about a little parsley plant all dressed up, but with nowhere to go, as Abdullah harvest parsley.





Abdullah is a 16-year-old refugee from Afghanistan. He has never tasted parsley before and is even less familiar with Inger Hagerup's poem, but the joy of participating on a farm that grows vegetables as a community is obvious. He is happy about the variety of vegetables and herbs found on this three-acre large field, and eagerly explains that his favorites so far are potatoes, field-grown cucumbers, and cilantro.



The refugees have signed a contract that they will meet up at two work shifts each week that add up to 40 hours in the course of the growing season. Here they get **to take part in everything** from the preparation of the soil with compost, sowing, planting and weeding, and finally in the last weeks, taking in the harvest, all woven together with knowledge about nutrition. Furthermore, they participate in cooking meals together with the Norwegian participants.



"Being able to participate in the harvest at the end of the volunteer work has definitely been **motivating for our young members**. Their eyes shine with pride when they are allowed to harvest vegetables and herbs, and to take them home to the refugee center to cook from what they themselves have harvested," says Marit Torsrud Nerol, the farmer at the CSA and initiator of the project with the refugees.

"I've read that being in direct contact with the soil is good for the body and the soul," Marit says, as she tends to the cabbage. These young refugees have been through a lot of tough experiences and often struggle with difficult thoughts. Then I think it is good for them to get outside and grow food together."

Mari Sondrol Valseth works at the refugee center where the youth live, and stops by the farm to say hello. It is obvious that the young people have become very fond of her; they flock around her when she arrives, and one of the boys gives her a little shoulder massage as we speak. "I notice that getting out and having the opportunity to work in the field is really good for these young people.



Many of them have been through a lot, and in light of this, **sitting passively at the refugee center is not a good idea**. They are happy and excited when they return from their volunteer work, and they are very proud when they get to take home vegetables and herbs," says Mari.

Many of the youth tell us how much **they would like to continue at school**, but once they turn 16 there is no school offer for them yet. This means a lot of free time, and time to think. On a CSA farm, there is always something to do, fresh air and someone to talk to. After weeding along the row of parsley and fertilizing the cabbage with composted sheep manure from the farm, it is time for harvesting.

Radishes, potatoes, parsley, dill turnips and cucumbers are ready for harvesting. Akmal tastes the dill; it is an herb he recognizes from Afghanistan. He nods appreciatively and smiles. "Sometimes they talk about their own food traditions while we work together, and they've found many vegetables and herbs that they recognize. Perhaps it feels a little comforting to find familiar smells and tastes, even though they are far from home," tells Marit. "They are also used to working and cooperating, so their contribution means a lot for us in our CSA," she continues.

The climax of the day's work is the potato harvesting. The youth flock around Marit and Anne Marit and wait in excitement for their turn to lift up a potato plant and look for all the potatoes that the mother-potato has "raised".

"Ha ha, mother-potato!" Akmal exclaims. "This must be the father-potato then" and pulls up another plant. "Today there are only two plants per person", says Marit. "If we take up more, there won't be enough for the other members," she explains.



Language shifts between English, Norwegian and their native languages. **In the field there is both language training, encounters between people and sharing of different cultures**. When more and more of the local community have the chance to get to know the refugees and hear their stories as they work together, it becomes less frightening to have a refugee center in town.

Anne Marit and Marit do not doubt that the young refugees represent a tremendous resource for the CSA. "The young refugees contribute with work, humor and interesting reflections. They are eager to learn, and want to contribute," they



conclude.

The goal of the project is **to create a safe and meaningful activity** where the young people experience hope for the future, can use their resources, develop their skills, talents and social competency and gain confidence through mastery of tasks. It should strengthen their identity and contribute to their independence so that they can manage their own lives. There should also be possibilities for them to suggest changes and improvements and learn skills that they can take with them anywhere.

All of the nine-young people had a need for contact with adults and many still have contact after the year's project ended. This project has shown that community supported Bio-Farms are very valuable arenas for the needs of refugee youth. The youth are happy with the work, and value the informal situation for contact with the local residents and for learning about language and customs in the country.

## Dun community supported agriculture (NO)

Placed in the municipality of Namsos, 200 kilometers north of Trondheim, lies the **Dun Farm**, which is a **community supported agriculture**. In 2016 and 2017 the farm has been collaborating with the Red Cross, The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity and Namsos Asylum center in integrating asylum seekers as members of the cooperative. In all, more than 30 asylum seekers, including both adults and children, have been part of the project.



At the farm, the asylum seekers work together with local inhabitants. The experience is that the field constitutes an equal meeting space and is thereby a good space for integration. **Skills needed in the field are independent of cultural and/or national background**, and thereby allows refugees and locals to learn from each other. Having breaks together in field furthermore supports good conversations, as does working side-by-side while planting and weeding.

The crops are shared among all participants, and provide a good contribution to the household. The crops also serve as a good topic for conversation and exchange of experience, as the participants share ideas for recipes, conservation methods and tips for handling and preparing the different vegetables.

In addition, wild flowers and herbs were harvested, and some of the refugees would share their knowledge about how to prepare healing tea from the wild herbs growing around the fields.



For many of the refugees, the prospects of achieving formal education are difficult; however, many are used to physical work and might even have farm experience from their home country. By participating at the farm, **they have a chance to use their competences** and contribute with important knowledge and skills. **This builds self-esteem and a feeling of coping.**

In 2017, the asylum center has been closed and the farm therefore hopes to involve settled refugees in 2018. Furthermore, they hope to be able to start up a project about work ability testing, language training, and entrepreneurship.

The idea is to divide the different work tasks at the farm into different modules, such as tending of different animals, planting vegetables, mechanical weeding in organic farms, packing and labelling of vegetables, using different machinery etc. By formalizing the learning goals of each module, the participants are given documentation of their new competencies, while also trying out whether a job in farming might be a possibility.

At the same time, **participants with a dream of starting their own company** can have relevant feedback and discussions with professionals, as well as a network and possible business partners.

## Lesson 2 – Experiences from Norway II

### Dun community supported agriculture (NO)

Placed in the municipality of Namsos, 200 kilometers north of Trondheim, lies the **Dun Farm**, which is a **community supported agriculture**. In 2016 and 2017 the farm has been collaborating with the Red Cross, The Norwegian



Directorate of Integration and Diversity and Namsos Asylum center in integrating asylum seekers as members of the cooperative. In all, more than 30 asylum seekers, including both adults and children, have been part of the project.



At the farm, the asylum seekers work together with local inhabitants. The experience is that the field constitutes an equal meeting space and is thereby a good space for integration. **Skills needed in the field are independent of cultural and/or national background**, and thereby allows refugees and locals to learn from each other. Having breaks together in field furthermore supports good conversations, as does working side-by-side while planting and weeding.

The crops are shared among all participants, and provide a good contribution to the household. The crops also serve as a good topic for conversation and exchange of experience, as the participants share ideas for recipes, conservation methods and tips for handling and preparing the different vegetables.

In addition, wild flowers and herbs were harvested, and some of the refugees would share their knowledge about how to prepare healing tea from the wild herbs growing around the fields.



For many of the refugees, the prospects of achieving formal education are difficult; however, many are used to physical work and might even have farm experience from their home country. By participating at the farm, **they have a chance to use their competences** and contribute with important knowledge and skills. **This builds self-esteem and a feeling of coping.**

In 2017, the asylum center has been closed and the farm therefore hopes to involve settled refugees in 2018. Furthermore, they hope to be able to start up a project about work ability testing, language training, and entrepreneurship.

The idea is to divide the different work tasks at the farm into different modules, such as tending of different animals, planting vegetables, mechanical weeding in organic farms, packing and labelling of vegetables, using different machinery etc. By formalizing the learning goals of each module, the participants are given documentation of their new competencies, while also trying out whether a job in farming might be a possibility.

At the same time, **participants with a dream of starting their own company** can have relevant feedback and discussions with professionals, as well as a network and possible business partners.

## Lesson 3 – Riding therapy of Center “Ankyra” in Tyrol, Austria

Psychotherapist Claudia Baldeo has been working with refugee children at **Ankyra, Center for Intercultural Psychotherapy in Tyrol** since 2009. Her experience is that animal therapies like the **Riding therapy**, helps refugees to win back their basic confidence in the world and society. To express traumatic experiences in words is for adults sometimes hard enough. For children this is sometimes quite impossible.



Photo: Iris Ullmann, Article Mascha Dabić, 07. July 2011, in „Der Standard“ (s.u.)

More information: <https://diakonie.at/einrichtung/ankyra-zentrum-fuer-interkulturelle-psychotherapie-tirol>

Therefore, therapy forms with animals are especially good for refugee children, even if they are well integrated. Aside from the School day, these children have experienced another reality of flight and violence, which they cannot share with their school colleagues.

Equestrian therapy makes it possible for the refugee children to stay in spaces which otherwise tend to be closed and are shielded. **"It is also good for the Tyrolean to join refugees"**, Baldeo is convinced. "Children are good ambassadors because they are better at overcoming barriers", she adds.

The children should relax with the horses, enjoy their leisure time, and have a good experience, which also afterwards,



stays as a pleasurable memory. Also, language difficulties can be forgotten for a while in communication with horses.

Baldeo describes the effect of working with horses: "Horses are strong communicators and react sensitively to body language. Feeling being carried the children re-enter the world, and that is **important for the development of trust**. In the therapy nothing is demanded by the children, they only get offered a protective frame."



Photo: Iris Ullmann, Article Mascha Dabić, 07. July 2011, in der Standard (AT)

The horses, which are used in riding therapy, must have a benign and calm nature, be reliable, stress-resistant and appealing to children. As sensitive creatures they are perfectly capable to distinguish between horseback riding and riding therapy.

Baldeo: "Horses instinctively act more cautiously in contact with children and take a protective attitude. In addition, horses realize the neediness of people. In the case of refugee children, horses therefore take **"a double protection"**.

Source: Mascha Dabić, 07. July 2011, der Standard.at

<http://derstandard.at/1308680603315/Hippotherapie-fuer-Fluechtlingskinder-In-die-Welt-hineingewogen>

## Lesson 4 – Riding therapy of „Reittherapiezentrum Kassiopeia" in Germany

The German organization **Caritas** starts in cooperation with the center for riding therapy **"Kassiopeia"** in Ludwigsburg to offer regular riding therapy for six refugee children in the basic school age for one year from September 2017.



Photo: Caritas Ludwigsburg-Waiblingen

**The experience from past projects shows that** animals also reach much traumatized children who can no longer be approached by other methods. In riding therapy, children learn to be responsible with animals and also with themselves. Besides cleaning, riding and relaxation exercises, the children also learned to assess their limits.

Many children, who were sad and closed at the beginning of the hour, flourished during therapy. These are experiences that they (unconsciously) transfer to other areas of life and do them good and strengthen them. A statement from the therapist about a child we were worried about for some time was: "Jamal has grown on horseback." And by the way - all children have **significantly improved their linguistic abilities** during the rehabilitation therapy.

The involvement and self-abandonment on a horse are **valuable experiences for traumatized children**. They deal with initially very frightening situations and step by step overcome this fear. This increases their self-confidence. This is crucial for dealing with traumatization.

More information:

<http://www.caritas-ludwigsburg-waiblingen-enz.de/aktuelles/projekte/reittherapie-fuer-traumatisierte-fluechtlingskinder-8439b7db-7951-4925-a9a9-3204e2f30c51>

## Lesson 5 – S.E.E.S – farm-based education at Avnstrup asylum center (DK)

**S.E.E.S (= Social, Economic, Ecological, Sustainability)** is a prototype of a farm-based educational initiative for



asylum seekers at **Avnstrup asylum center**. It is cooperation between Chora Connection, the Red Cross and Gaia Education, that educates adult asylum seekers in sustainability and organic food production through gardening and farm visits amongst others. The project thereby aims at connecting the emergent need for refugee education and green transition.



Photo and more information: <https://gaiaeducation.org/project-based-learning/denmark-2017>

The project has been running in 2016 and 2017 and has educated 39 asylum seekers with different nationalities. The project is located at Avnstrup asylum center in the municipality of Lejre, 60 km outside of Copenhagen. The project is a prototype supported by the Danish Immigration Service.

The following case description is based on **interviews with the founders**, Karen Blincoe and Emil Blauert, and on the project's website: <http://choraconnection.dk/prototype/sees/?lang=en>

## Teaching methods

According to the project founders, the project wishes to address some of the overall problems related to the disintegration between body and mind, food production and humans, as well as disintegration of the outside and inside of the asylum centers.



all photos: Chora Connection

The project therefore aims **to connect brain, heart and body through hands-on education** in sustainable development, using the surrounding society as its 'classroom'.

Through a six-week course, the participants are taught about **organic food systems, sustainability and entrepreneurship** through the combination of theoretical and practical teaching and relating this to the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.



As part of the course, the participants establish and/or maintain a garden, based on the principles of permaculture and visit organic farmers. While new knowledge is an important aim, the teachers are equally focused on identifying and supporting participant's own awareness of their strengths, and to build trust and confidence in themselves.

Many participants found the outdoor activities very valuable. Besides achieving new knowledge, the garden work also enhanced well-being and a feeling of togetherness and belonging. Working in the garden together supports the building of friendships across different cultures. It also provided recognizability and a way of escaping the challenges and worries of their current situations as asylum seekers.

"As a child I grew up on the countryside, so I am used to being around cows, sheep and so on. Being around the animals calms me, just like the flowers and plants. **Being in the nature gives you energy**" (Participant, [choraconnection.dk/prototype/sees/](http://choraconnection.dk/prototype/sees/)).



Since the climate in Denmark only allows a relatively short growing season, they are currently considering establishing growing-containers that will allow cultivation all year. Experiments with cultivation of mushrooms have been successful in other projects and these experiences can be drawn upon.

## Collaboration with farmers

The participants also **visited local organic farmers as part of the teaching**. These meetings both served as inspiration and ways of bridging the theoretical teaching with practice. Through these visits, the participants are also introduced to the history of Denmark as a farming nation and some of the current challenges in the Danish farming sector.



The meetings also motivated the participants to start dreaming and look more optimistically at the future. Being able to learn something new and start looking ahead was an important relief for many participants after years of life as fugitives.

**Many expressed a wish to work in organic farming** in their future and felt very motivated to make a difference whether in Denmark or another future country.

To the farmers the project offered **important learning about how to open up their enterprise**, how to communicate about it and provided thoughts about how to integrate or cooperate with people with profiles that are not traditionally part of the farm.

The collaboration with the asylum center can thereby push reflections about how to modernize the business organization and become an interesting workplace for new professions or backgrounds.

According to the project founders, the project thereby connects the emergent need for refugee education and green transition and supports a perspective on refugees as resources rather than a burden.



At the end of the course, the participants are handed a **diploma to document their new skills and competences**.

More information: <http://choraconnection.dk/prototype/sees/?lang=en>

## Advices for developing similar projects

Emil Blauert, co-founder of the project, explains that the best way to get started is to involve people who are close to practice and **develop a small-scale project** that can develop and grow as you go along. To start large-scale, national projects can be a slow and resource demanding process and therefore it is often better to develop local solutions – at least to begin with.

For this project, they identified relevant collaborators by making a brainstorming of the competences they needed and afterwards found people who could match these. They invited these possible collaborators to a workshop in which they developed and visualized the idea together. The visualization was important since it made the project concrete and practical, and thereby supported engagement and belief in the project.

Another important experience is **to emphasize the motivation of the project** – to be explicit about one's passion and thereby engage people and maintain the excitement.