



## Migrants and Local communities Actively GROWing together for inclusive societies

Deliverable Title	D 3.2 Guidelines for intercultural safe spaces
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## WP3 - Task 3.2

### Deliverable 3.2

#### Guidelines for Intercultural Safe Spaces

This document, related to the WP3 of the MILAGRO project is meant to give substance and foundation to the activities carried out within the Task 3.2 (“Becoming democratic citizens and digital democratic citizens”) and at the same time offer a model to those who would like to implement similar activities. The ultimate goal is to propose some general guidelines for intercultural safe spaces, which may be useful for other facilitators and mediators.

Even though MILAGRO aims at the promotion and development of democratic and inclusive societies, targeting both the local and the migrant communities in Siena (Italy), Belgrade (Serbia) and Utrecht (the Netherlands), the present Guidelines refer to the activities carried out in the local context of Siena. They nonetheless provide general indications that allow for replication and adaptation to other cultural contexts and settings. Moreover, the learning model developed during the activities herein described might be connected with other project tasks and activities, such as the coaching-based learning environments (see Task 3.3), thus contributing to a more integrated approach.

As far as the WP3 - Task 3.2 is concerned, a series of events and meetings was conducted, where relevant topics concerning democratic competences were discussed in an environment that reflects the characteristics of a safe space.

These Guidelines will include four sections. The first one will define the concept of “intercultural safe spaces” and specify the role played by intercultural mediators in such spaces. The second will explore the theoretical background overarching the activities carried out within the MILAGRO project. The third section will describe the structure and topics of the WP3 - Task 3.2 meetings and events. Finally, the fourth one will present the method used to evaluate the competences developed by the participants during the WP3 - Task 3.2 events, as well as some of the main results collected during the evaluation.

#### 1. Intercultural safe spaces and intercultural mediators

First of all, it is necessary to define the concept of “intercultural safe spaces”. Drawing from the experience of the MILAGRO project, an intercultural safe space refers to an environment that fosters respectful, inclusive, and open communication between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is a setting where people can express themselves without fear of judgment, discrimination, or prejudice. This space encourages mutual understanding, empathy, and learning by promoting awareness of different cultural perspectives and values. The goal is to create a sense of belonging and equality, where everyone feels safe to share their ideas, experiences, and identities while respecting and appreciating cultural differences. In such a space, both social and psychological safety are prioritized, enabling individuals to engage in conversations about sensitive topics with openness and respect.

A key element in such a safe space, especially when it comes to our experiences within the project, is the constant presence of intercultural mediators. Such figures are essential in guaranteeing a safe space, since they bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, thus ensuring that communication is clear, respectful, and inclusive. In the case of the MILAGRO project, the intercultural mediators exploited their knowledge of two important languages: Pashto and Urdu. In fact, as far as the MILAGRO migrant target groups are concerned, Pashto is the dominant language and Urdu is a secondary option for some of the members of the migrant community.

The role of intercultural mediators is crucial for several reasons. First and foremost, as mentioned above, they ensure linguistic accessibility, making sure that everyone fully understands the information being shared and preventing misunderstandings that could cause discomfort, confusion, or exclusion. Secondly, intercultural mediators uphold cultural sensitivity: beyond language, they grasp the nuances, values, and potential sensitivities of the migrant communities' cultures, facilitating discussions in a way that feels respectful and appropriate. Moreover, intercultural mediators serve as pillars of trust and reassurance. People are more likely to open up and actively engage when they feel understood, and a mediator who speaks their native language fosters a sense of comfort and connection.

Another key aspect is conflict prevention. When cultural differences and miscommunications risk creating tension, mediators can step in to clarify and defuse situations before they escalate.

Finally, intercultural mediators promote empowerment and participation. When individuals feel heard in their own language, they are more inclined to take an active role in discussions and decision-making, leading to a more inclusive and equitable setting. By choosing Pashto and Urdu mediators, it was in fact possible to engage the majority of participants in their first or strongest language(s).

## 2. Theoretical background

The theoretical background that overarched this section of the MILAGRO project is represented by two major documents elaborated by the Council of Europe, namely the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)<sup>1</sup> and the ten domains of the Digital Citizenship Education (DCE)<sup>2</sup>, regarded here as the basis for the development of peaceful and inclusive democratic societies. They represent the last and most relevant theoretical support in terms of interculturality and culture of democracy at the European level, and were therefore the inspiration for many activities of the MILAGRO project.

These two theoretical frameworks (together with the DigComp, the European Digital Competence Framework, which describes and guides the development of digital competences), are closely related. Nonetheless, despite their relevant and necessary interconnections, their inner interrelations underwent some neglect<sup>3</sup>. Bearing this in mind, the MILAGRO WP3 meetings represented a first step towards the development of all these competences - democratic and digital - in a harmonised way. In fact, "it is clear that the competences needed to be digital citizens (as such in the digital/virtual environment) are inseparable from those competences necessary to be democratic citizens in the real world: this concept is also clearly stated in the DCE Handbook" (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 13). Again, for the sake of the present publication, it is necessary to emphasise the fact that democratic and digital competences go hand in hand, since nowadays people's identities in the real world are more and more interwoven with their digital identities.

Figures 1 and 2 offer a visual description of the above mentioned theoretical frameworks.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture>

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/internet/7643-digital-citizenship-education-project-dce-10-domains.html>

<sup>3</sup> These two documents have been formerly analysed and compared in the article, "Digital citizenship education in foreign language learning: missing interrelations between the RFCDC and DCE frameworks and drafting assessment descriptors" by F. Biagi, L. Bracci and I. S. Thaler (2022), which also guided the present reflection. The article is available at: [www.icc-languages.eu/ICCjournal](http://www.icc-languages.eu/ICCjournal)

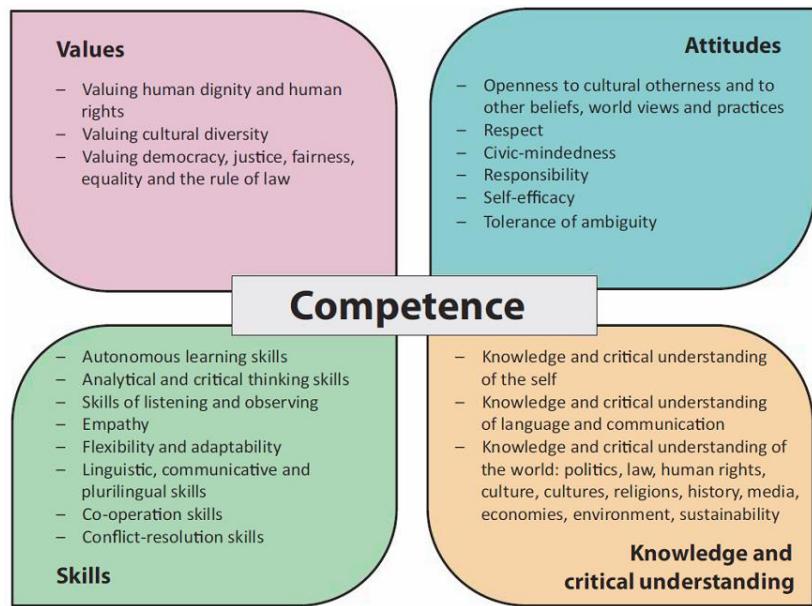


Figure 1 - The RFCDC butterfly

10 Domains of Digital Citizenship Education	
Being Online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access and Inclusion</li> <li>2. Learning and Creativity</li> <li>3. Media and Information Literacy</li> </ol>
Wellbeing Online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Ethics and Empathy</li> <li>5. Health and wellbeing</li> <li>6. E-presence and Communication</li> </ol>
Rights Online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Active participation</li> <li>8. Rights and responsibility</li> <li>9. Privacy and Security</li> <li>10. Consumer awareness</li> </ol>

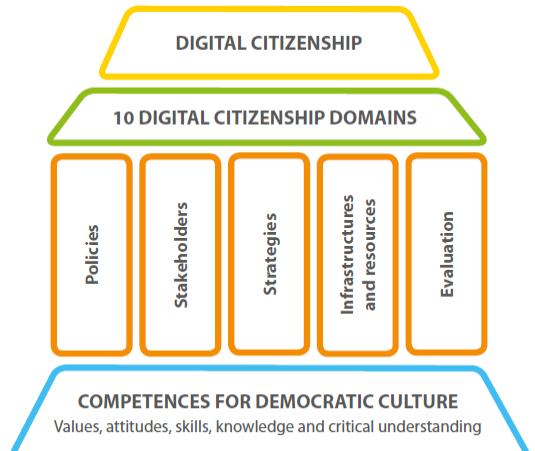


Figure 2 - DCE 10 Domains and Digital Citizenship temple structure

The working group who structured and organised WP3 - Task 3.2 meetings and events selected specific competences from these European frameworks for each of the scheduled events, thus relating the project activities to a solid theoretical foundation, with the aim of fostering democratic competences among participants.

### 3. Structures and topics of the meetings

In Siena, the MILAGRO WP3 - Task 3.2 meetings and events happened twice a month on average, and were structured in different ways. Some of them were more in the form of lectures and aimed at giving historical information and theoretical background, others were framed in a more dialogic form, some others were recreational events (mostly dinners). Nevertheless, all the meetings revolved around topics

that were crucial to the process of intercultural dialogue and inclusion and left space for open discussion, questions and comments.

The following table shows the complete series of meetings with relative topics:

<i>Meeting n°</i>	<i>Topics</i>
1	Local Commission granting international protection
2	“Pranzo dei Poveri” - Lunch for the poor
3	Steps of the asylum seeker
4	Building intercultural and community bonds through food exchange - Recreational event with dinner
5	Local traditions and community relations: Siena’s contradas
6	Right to health care
7	Online risks
8	“Aggiungi un posto a tavola” - Event Lunch
9	Drugs and alcohol consumption from an intercultural perspective: comparing Italy, Pakistan and Afghanistan
10	Laws concerning drugs and alcohol consumption
11	Gender equality and equal opportunities in education for girls
12	Equal opportunities in education for girls - Event dinner for fundraising in collaboration with Malala Fund
13	Building democracy and community networks
14	Marriage, polygamy, and women’s role
15	Democratic competences
16	Peoples of the world - Telling stories

Table 1 - Event List and Topics

For each of the scheduled meetings, topics were chosen after a critical reflection upon the needs of the target groups envisioned by the project and on the competences indicated in the *RFCDC* as well as in the *Handbook of Digital Citizenship Education*. In particular, each meeting (and relative topic) was associated with a cluster of competences. The following table shows the most important competences selected for each of the meetings and/or events held:

Topic	Competence cluster
1. Local Commission granting international protection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing the rule of law</li> <li>2. Self-efficacy</li> <li>3. Co-operation and conflict-resolution skills</li> <li>4. Knowledge and critical understanding of the Self and of the world (Law)</li> </ol>
2. Pranzo dei poveri	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Openness to cultural otherness and other beliefs, worldviews, and practices</li> <li>2. Tolerance of ambiguity</li> <li>3. Co-operation skills</li> </ol>
3. Steps of the asylum seeker	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing human dignity and human rights</li> <li>2. Responsibility</li> <li>3. Co-operation skills</li> <li>4. Knowledge and critical understanding of the Self and of the world (Human rights)</li> </ol>
4. Building intercultural and community bonds through food exchange (recreational event with dinner)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Openness to cultural otherness and other beliefs, worldviews, and practices</li> <li>2. Tolerance of ambiguity</li> <li>3. Co-operation skills</li> </ol>
5. Local traditions and community relations: Siena's contradas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing cultural diversity</li> <li>2. Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices</li> <li>3. Skills of listening and observing, Empathy</li> <li>4. Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (Culture(s))</li> </ol>
6. Right to health care	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law</li> <li>2. Self-efficacy</li> <li>3. Conflict-resolution skills?</li> <li>4. Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (Law, Economies, Environment)</li> <li>5. Media and information literacy</li> </ol>
7. Online risks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing human dignity and the rule of law</li> <li>2. Civic mindedness and responsibility</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Analytical and critical thinking skills</li> <li>4. Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (Media)</li> <li>5. Media and information literacy</li> <li>6. E-presence and communication</li> <li>7. Privacy and security</li> </ol>
8. "Aggiungi un posto a tavola" - Event Lunch	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Openness to cultural otherness and other beliefs, worldviews, and practices</li> <li>2. Tolerance of ambiguity</li> <li>3. Cooperation skills</li> </ol>
9. Drugs and alcohol consumption from an intercultural perspective: comparing Italy, Pakistan and Afghanistan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Value of cultural diversity</li> <li>2. Openness to cultural diversity → Being willing to engage with different perspectives without prejudice.</li> <li>3. Respect</li> <li>4. Listening and observing skills</li> <li>5. Adaptability and flexibility</li> <li>6. Knowledge of cultures and religions</li> </ol>
10. Laws concerning drugs and alcohol consumption	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Value of human dignity and human rights</li> <li>2. Responsibility</li> <li>3. Analytical and critical thinking skills</li> <li>4. Knowledge of social and legal systems</li> </ol>
11. Gender equality and equal opportunities in education for girls	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing cultural diversity</li> <li>2. Tolerance for ambiguity</li> <li>3. Empathy</li> <li>4. Knowledge and critical understanding of the Self and of the world (Culture, Religions)</li> </ol>
12. Equal opportunities in education for girls - Event dinner for fundraising in collaboration with Malala Fund	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Openness to cultural otherness and other beliefs, worldviews, and practices</li> <li>2. Self-efficacy</li> <li>3. Empathy</li> </ol>
13. Marriage, polygamy and women's role	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing human dignity and human rights, Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law</li> <li>2. Civic mindedness and respect</li> <li>3. Responsibility and respect</li> <li>4. Analytical and critical thinking skills</li> <li>5. Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (Politics, Law, Human rights, History)</li> </ol>
14. Democratic competences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing democracy</li> <li>2. Respect</li> <li>3. Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills</li> <li>4. Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication</li> </ol>

15. Peoples of the world - Telling stories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing cultural diversity</li> <li>2. Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices</li> <li>3. Flexibility and adaptability</li> <li>4. Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (Cultures)</li> </ol>
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*Table 2 - Democratic competences for each meeting*

The selection of the topics and themes of the meetings was based on several considerations regarding the project's target groups: meeting their specific needs and practical requests, offering intercultural perspectives about topics (such as religion, alcohol consumption, gender roles) that were relevant to them, exploring local traditions and cultural heritage, opening spaces for dialogue and experience-sharing between the groups, raising awareness about human rights democracy and democratic competences, spreading knowledge about the Italian laws, norms and regulations concerning relevant issues (such as drug consumption), discussing the appropriate use of digital devices.

As far as the migrant target group is concerned, many of the migrants, asylum seekers and refugees involved in the project lived (and are still living) in conditions of extreme poverty: they relied on charity for primary needs, the majority of them slept in one of the public parking lots in Siena or in shelters, they did not have documents or papers, they did not speak the local language (Italian), and a significant number of them were illiterate. Furthermore, they were completely unaware of the bureaucratic and social structure of the Italian community they had reached, and had no idea about what their rights were. Therefore, the first meetings were devoted to the illustration of the legal and bureaucratic path to be followed in order to be recognized by Italian law and to apply for international protection. At the same time, their rights to be protected and guaranteed went hand in hand with their right to be assisted by the Italian health care system; that is why a couple of events were dedicated to instructing them on how to navigate and benefit from the available health care services. Last but not least, being their smartphones often the only means of communication with the world around them, there was an urgent need to raise awareness among migrants about the risks of the digital environment. Talking about fake news, security and privacy, online frauds, and internet scammers, was thus essential in order to discuss possible consequences and warn them about potential dangers.

Beyond primary needs, there was the necessity to find a connection between the migrant and the local communities, to have them meet and get to know each other in order to build a more inclusive and democratic society, which is, in fact, the aim of the MILAGRO project. On the one hand, this implied the discovery of some of the local traditions in the host society (in the case of Siena, the *Palio* horse race and the *Contrade*, the historical neighborhoods in which the city is divided since the Middle Ages). On the other hand, it required some more general intercultural discussions about a variety of global issues, including the consumption of alcohol and drugs, gender roles and gender equality, religion, and education.

In addition, both for the migrant and the local communities, “food events” (lunch, dinners, *iftar*) were key occasions - and arguably the most meaningful - allowing the groups to share experiences, activities, stories, and traditions. That is why recreational events dedicated to food were repeated along the project. As a matter of fact, thanks to these occasions, members of the communities involved had the opportunity to engage with different cultures through food, navigate cultural differences in practical interactions, socialize, as well as collaborate in an inclusive setting.

As for more formal kinds of events, such as the informative meetings about drug and alcohol consumption and legislation, participants had the chance to understand that social and legal norms vary

between countries and that they may be influenced by historical, social, cultural and religious beliefs; more specifically they were led to accept the fact that different cultures have distinct regulations and perceptions about drugs and alcohol, they were invited to pay attention to the dynamics that permeate different cultural contexts, as well as to adjust their behaviour and the way they communicate when dealing with sensitive topics in the host society. The understanding of such a cultural background is likely to help them make more conscious personal decisions about the use of substances.

As mentioned above, all the topics refer to and were somehow inspired by the democratic competences of the *RFCDC*, which remains the overarching theoretical model. By no means, the choice and discussion about democratic and digital competences is complete or exhaustive: on the contrary, it was the result of a very specific context (that of Siena, in Italy), and, as such, it is innerly subject to geographical, historical, social and political variations. For this reason, the present publication should be regarded as one possible model among many other plausible ones.

#### **4. Competence evaluation**

Assessing the acquired competences was a key aspect of the *MILAGRO* project's WP3 - Task 3.2, crucial for measuring the impact of the activities carried out. However, selecting the most suitable evaluation method was not easy, especially considering the specific needs of the participants and potential linguistic and literacy barriers.

After an initial attempt to use written questionnaires in English, it became clear that an alternative method was needed, as the written format and the use of English posed significant barriers—many participants were Pashto speakers with limited or no literacy. The focus group seemed to be a more suitable option. The main reason the focus group was chosen as a method to assess the acquired competences is because it promotes engagement through conversation, allows for clarifications, and captures both knowledge and emotional responses thus ensuring a more accurate and meaningful assessment of the acquired competences. Furthermore, a focus group is particularly effective for reducing literacy barriers and assessing the competences of participants who are unable to read or write for several reasons:

1. It helps avoid reading or writing barriers: surveys and questionnaires require participants to read questions and write responses, which can be a major obstacle for those who are illiterate or have low literacy skills; a focus group, on the other hand, relies on verbal communication, making it largely accessible to all participants;
2. It allows for clarifications and discussion: in a focus group, facilitators or mediators can explain concepts in real-time, ensuring that participants fully understand the questions; in contrast, a self-administered survey offers no opportunity for clarification, which could lead to incomplete or inaccurate answers;
3. It encourages expression through conversation: many illiterate individuals may feel uncomfortable or excluded when presented with a written survey; a focus group creates a safe and inclusive space where participants can share their thoughts through dialogue, making them more likely to engage and provide meaningful insights;
4. It captures emotional and non-verbal communicative responses: competences such as civic-mindedness, openness to cultural diversity, and self-efficacy are best evaluated through discussion rather than written answers; a focus group allows facilitators to observe non-verbal communication cues, such as gestures, tone, emotion and engagement, and nuances which a self-administered survey cannot detect;

5. It supports collective reflection and learning: participants in a focus group can learn from each other's experiences and build on each other's responses. This creates a richer and more dynamic evaluation process compared to individual written responses;
6. It is more respectful of cultural and linguistic differences: in this case, participants primarily spoke Pashto, and many of them had had previous limited exposure to formal education; a focus group conducted in their native language with an intercultural mediator ensured their thorough understanding and gave them the opportunity to express themselves more naturally;
7. It reduces pressure and encourages participation: written surveys can make participants feel as if they are taking a test, which might in turn discourage participation, especially among those with low confidence in their literacy skills. On the other hand, a focus group, especially when conducted in an informal setting (such as sitting in a circle) feels more like a conversation, making participants more comfortable and willing to share their personal experiences.

The first focus group took place on February 14th, 2025, mid-way through the calendar of scheduled meetings. The group that participated in the activity was composed of approximately 15 people (some participated for the entire duration of the activity, while others were present only for part of it), two thirds of whom were of Pakistani nationality, while one third were originally from Afghanistan. All the participants identified themselves as belonging to the Pashtun ethnic group.

The focus group was led by Lavinia Bracci, the SIS director<sup>4</sup>, and the representative of the Pakistani community, Murad Khan, who served as an intercultural mediator. Participants were invited to sit in a circle to create a more relaxed, participatory and egalitarian atmosphere, and the intercultural mediator asked them to reflect on the proposed questions. For each of the meetings held up to that point, a few questions and prompts were prepared to help initiate the conversation. Such questions were asked directly in Pashto, since the majority of the respondents were Pashto speakers, did not speak any English (or very little), and in many cases were illiterate.

The following is a brief summary regarding reflections and insights from the participants along with relative prompts and questions.

*Meetings 1 and 3: Did you learn something you did not know during the presentations about the procedures for asylum seekers in Italy and the role of the “Commissione territoriale”<sup>5</sup>?*

Many participants stressed the importance of this class. A lot of them realized only after this meeting that the challenges they faced in their home countries, such as unequal access to education and unsafe conditions due to the Taliban and military presence, were actual human rights violations. This meeting allowed them to be aware of their rights in Italy and the steps necessary to obtain international protection. They became more aware of the meaning and value of the concept of freedom and of fundamental rights while taking their first steps in Italy.

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<sup>4</sup> Lavinia Bracci (from now on more generally indicated as the “SIS director”) is the founder and director of SIS Intercultural Study Abroad, the associated partner in the MILAGRO project. Together with Murad Khan, the intercultural mediator, she fully engaged in the education of refugees and migrants who attended classes and participated in the MILAGRO WP3 events. She is herself a language teacher and an educator, and she conquered the trust of participants thanks to an extensive activity of relationship building. Her presence, together with the mediator’s presence, was key to the implementation of this focus group evaluation.

<sup>5</sup> The *Commissione territoriale* is the body that evaluates and decides whether an asylum seeker has the right to obtain international protection.

*Meetings 2, 4 and 8: In what ways did sharing food help you connect with others and appreciate different cultures? Did this lunch make you feel more connected and respectful toward people from different backgrounds? Did you practice talking with new people and creating friendships? What did you learn about other cultures through food and conversation?*

Many of the participants underlined how sharing food was a great occasion to overcome the differences between Afghans, Pakistanis, Ukrainians, Italians, etc., all of which were present during the above-mentioned “food events”. Interestingly, while discussing cultural differences they did not mention the religious affiliation. Since religious views can sometimes represent a significant barrier in intercultural interactions, the mediator explicitly asked the participants if sharing food could also be a way to overcome the differences between Muslims and Christians. Most participants responded that they did not perceive this as a difference of any kind.

*Meeting 6: What did you learn about your right to health care, and how can this help you in everyday life? Do you now know where to go if you need medical assistance? Do you feel more confident in accessing healthcare services? Did you learn what healthcare services you are entitled to?*

Everybody agreed about the importance of this meeting to become aware of the functioning of the Italian national health care system, the importance of possessing a *tessera sanitaria*<sup>6</sup> and the different steps to obtain it. In general, the asylum seekers’ relationship with the presenter of this topic, whom most of them had already met before, was a very close and friendly one. This aspect played a twofold role. In fact, while everybody found the meeting extremely informative and useful, it seemed sometimes hard to decide if such appreciation was more related to the meeting content or to the person of the speaker, who has always been extremely available and empathetic with them. Undoubtedly, however, they all became aware of the fundamental steps to achieve healthcare assistance.

*Meeting 5: How did learning about Siena’s traditions help you feel more connected to the local community?*

A little bit of knowledge about Siena and its traditions had reached the group of asylum seekers: everyone knew that Siena has 17 *Contrade*, and that twice a year, ten of them participate in a historical horse race called the *Palio*, an ancient tradition deeply rooted in the city. The participants were also aware that the *Palio* is not just a race, but a defining event for the Sienese citizens, where the entire community comes together to celebrate. Some participants expressed that learning more about such a significant local tradition helped them understand the strong sense of identity and belonging felt by the Sienese. It was an opportunity to feel more connected to the local culture and appreciate the traditions that bind the community together. Many of them felt that learning about the *Palio* and the *Contrade* gave them a glimpse into the rich history of Siena and, in turn, a greater understanding of what it means to be part of this community, even if they are still new to the city.

*Meeting 7: What dangers online did you learn about, and how can you protect yourself? How can you determine if online information is reliable or false? What actions can you take to protect your personal data online? How can cultural differences influence the way we communicate on the internet?*

This meeting was perceived as both informative and highly beneficial. Many participants shared that they were previously unaware of the numerous online dangers, such as fraudulent apps and the risks associated with sharing personal data. They emphasized the importance of safeguarding their personal information and ensuring that it is stored in secure spaces. Additionally, the session provided them with

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<sup>6</sup> The *tessera sanitaria* is a personal document issued to Italian citizens and/or residents in Italy, allowing them to benefit from the services of the National Health Service.

practical strategies for identifying unreliable information or fake news online. The participants also gained a deeper understanding of how cultural and linguistic differences can influence online communication, from differing norms about privacy to varying approaches to digital interactions.

*Meeting 9: How can different cultures influence the way people view drug and alcohol use? How can you make informed and safe decisions about drug and alcohol use? Did you discover new perspectives on this topic by talking with people from different cultures?*

During this discussion, led by the SIS director and the intercultural mediator, both trusted figures who have built strong, personal relationships with the participants, there was a shared understanding that alcohol and drugs are often classified similarly across cultures. However, participants also recognized that cultural beliefs significantly shape how these substances are viewed. For example, what is considered *haram* (forbidden) or *halal* (permissible) varies from one culture to another, especially within religious contexts. The SIS director and the mediator encouraged an open conversation, where participants reflected on the complexity of determining what is considered risky or harmful, acknowledging that these judgments are not always straightforward or universally agreed upon. The discussion provided valuable insights into how cultural and religious differences influence people's perceptions of drug and alcohol consumption, and it helped participants broaden their understanding by hearing new perspectives from others in the focus group. This exchange was essential in helping participants navigate their own views on substance use, and it created a space for them to make more informed decisions.

Overall the focus group confirmed that the participants had at least partially acquired the envisioned cluster of competences, as it provided clear evidence of their growing awareness and understanding across key topics. During the discussions, participants demonstrated some grasp of the core concepts introduced in the meetings, including their rights in Italy, the health care system, and cultural norms. They were able to articulate how the knowledge gained in these areas had influenced their perspectives and behaviors, such as understanding asylum procedures, navigating healthcare services, and appreciating local traditions. Additionally, their ability to discuss sensitive topics like drug and alcohol use, intercultural communication, and online safety reflected the development of critical thinking and informed decision-making. The presence of trusted speakers and of the intercultural mediator further enhanced participants' engagement, ensuring that the exchange was not only informative but also empowering, as they felt supported and comfortable sharing their thoughts. While some competences are still in the process of being fully internalized, the focus group indicated that participants were starting to apply the skills and knowledge gained, suggesting that progress has been made and thus confirming the importance of continuing with meetings during the upcoming Fall.

## **5. Conclusions**

As outlined at the beginning of this document, these Guidelines concern the activities undertaken by the Italian partner and coordinator of the MILAGRO project, the Nuova Associazione Culturale Ulisse. They are designed to reflect the project's overall objectives and aims, tailored specifically to the unique socio-cultural environment in which the Italian partner operates. The present document provides a comprehensive description of the methodology employed throughout the activities, along with a first analysis of the competences developed by the migrant target group and an evaluation of the results achieved during implementation. While the focus remains on the Sienese local context, the insights and practical approaches presented here offer significant value beyond this setting. They serve as a foundational reference for replicating and adapting similar activities in other cultural and national contexts, where migrants are likely to face comparable challenges.

In particular, the logistics and thematic content of WP3 – Task 3.2, to which this deliverable is directly connected, have been structured in a way that facilitates transferability. This is because the issues addressed - such as social integration, cultural adaptation and the empowerment of migrants - are relevant across various countries and settings. Consequently, these Guidelines not only support the Italian partner's work but also provide a flexible framework that other partners or organisations can implement, modify, and expand according to their specific local circumstances and migrant populations. This adaptability ensures that the project's impact can extend well beyond its initial environment, promoting a broader exchange of knowledge and best practices among stakeholders involved in migrant support, inclusion and integration efforts.

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