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Coordinated responses

## ‘My community – make yourself at home’, Germany

The ‘Meine Gemeinde – Heimat für alle’ (‘My Community – make yourself at home’) project brought together local stakeholders into inclusion working groups using LEADER support. They developed a range of activities to promote migrant integration, tapping into the energy of more than 1 000 local volunteers.

### Caritas call to action

In 2012, Caritas Kempten-Oberallgäu had a first meeting with representatives of various churches and municipalities to find practical ways to deal with the complex issue of inclusion at all levels of society. The vision was that all people should have the freedom to shape their life, participate in community activities, have equal opportunities and free access to social, political and cultural life, and work.

Caritas approached the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG), ‘Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu e.V.’ to look for possible cooperation in 2013. Their ideas resonated with the work of the LAG, as it had already been active in developing innovative projects for the development of the area covering 27 municipalities.

*“Every project needs someone who is taking responsibility and is making sure that the idea becomes a project. In this project this person was Dr. Armin Ruf of Caritas.”*

**Dr Sabine Weizenegger**

‘Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu’ LAG manager

As it turned out, the timing for cooperation could not have been more opportune. Summer 2013 saw the arrival of the first refugees associated with the current wave in Kempten-Oberallgäu. This process intensified the need to work together on how the local community could deal with the new arrivals. The result was the ‘Meine Gemeinde – Heimat für alle’ project.

### Integration working groups

Within the LAG, municipal representatives, business and social partners have an equal say when it comes to deciding which actions have to be taken. An important aspect is citizen participation both on the decision and implementation levels. This encourages people to take responsibility for their community, but also greater political and social engagement in projects like ‘Meine Gemeinde’.

With guidance and consultancy support from the LAG, the project brought together existing boards, advisory committees and representatives of the



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Many language courses are delivered across the territory to help immigrants to learn German.

local government into working groups for inclusion. These groups planned and coordinated different activities, acting as 'steering groups' for the inclusion process.

*"We had several common activities between professionals and volunteers supported by LEADER. Most of the time, the total cost for this type of project is comparatively low, but still the funding is indispensable – and the effects are priceless."*

**Dr Sabine Weizenegger**

'Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu' LAG manager

'Meine Gemeinde' mobilised more than 1 000 volunteers in Oberallgäu and 400 in Kempten to help with the inclusion activities. To carry out their tasks successfully, the working groups and municipalities provided the volunteers with guidance and information. Representatives of the local government played a key role in providing inter-municipal communication to connect people.

The project provided an online platform ('Inklusionsmelder' – inclusion detector) – to communicate existing services and examples of good practice. The platform offers information and details on the benefits of inclusion, as well as specific activities, job and training offers, and contact people.

A formal launch took place to attract media attention and inform a wider audience. The platform also became better known after presentation at a local trade fair and more people started to post their projects working with refugees and migrants.

### Activities across the region

The project highlighted and promoted exchange on a wide range of integration activities in the region. Most of the initiatives involved groups, associations, churches and volunteers making an effort to reach out and include new arrivals in their activities. The range of activities included gardening, amateur theatre and football.



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Immigrants and locals come together through activities such as football.

*"If a community is able to recognise, appreciate and use the benefits of diversity, society will become more knowledgeable and competent. Safety and quality of life will increase because inclusive cultures can deal better with threats."*

**Dr Armin Ruf**

Caritas, Project manager

Efforts were also made to meet specific needs. For example, a coordinator of the 'Kleiderkammer' collected and distributed clothes to refugees. In the beginning the clothes were given out for free, but it was found that it is better to charge a small fee. In this way, the refugees do not feel that they are receiving 'charity', but going shopping.

A notable feature was the number of initiatives focused on children and young people. This included language classes and volunteers helping migrant children with their homework – many older people volunteered for such tasks.

*"The LAG Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu has received new project ideas that can build on the project 'Meine Gemeinde – Heimat für alle'. The funding of the project is over, but the task has just begun."*

**Dr Sabine Weizenegger**

'Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu' LAG manager

Project Name	'Meine Gemeinde – Heimat für Alle' ('My Community – a Home for All')
Type of beneficiary	NGO Caritasverband Kempten-Oberallgäu e.V
Period	2013-2015
Project funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total cost: € 56 558</li> <li>• EAFRD contribution: € 8 461</li> <li>• Bavarian regional contribution: € 12 265</li> <li>• Other sources: € 35 832</li> </ul>
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