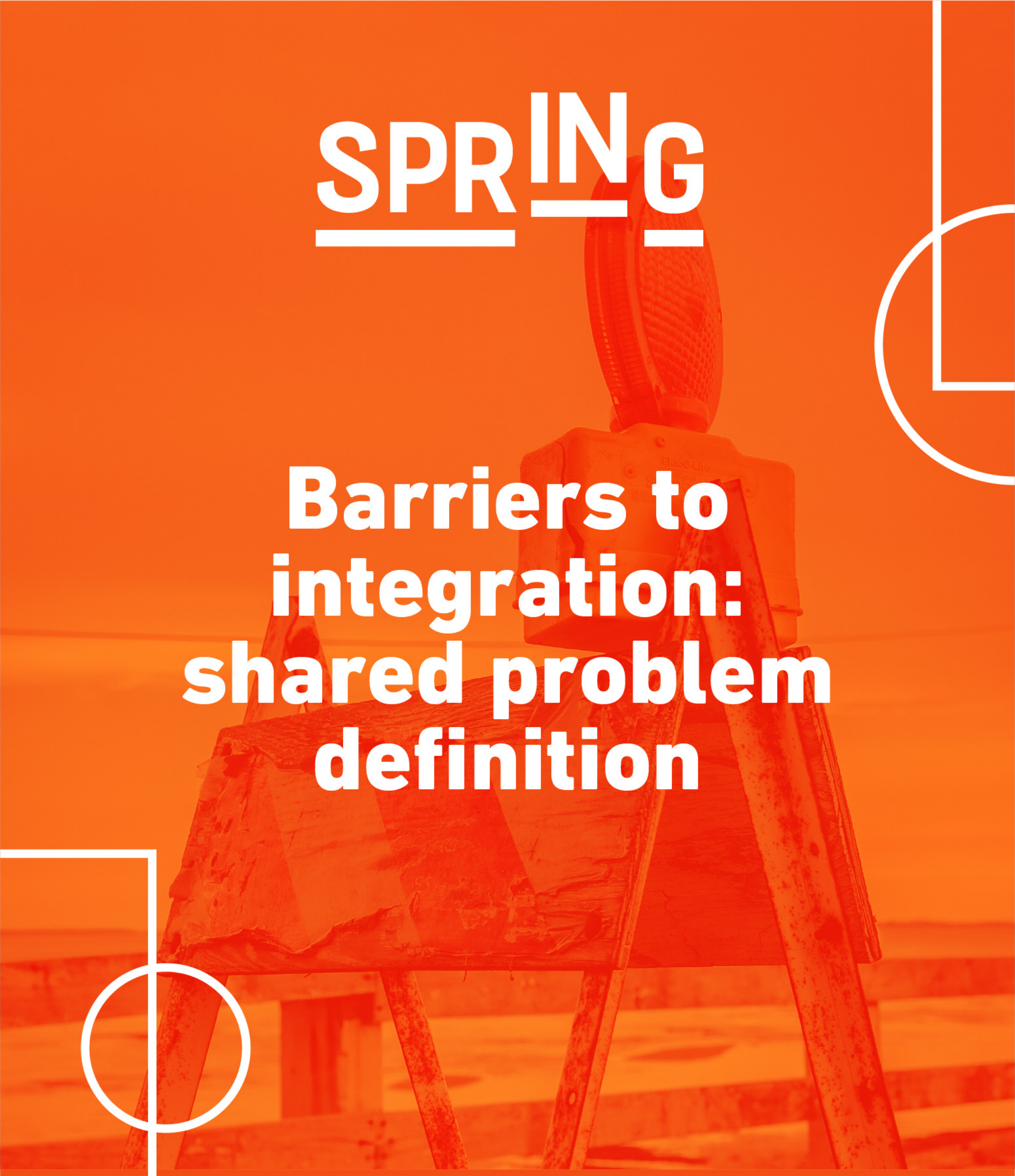
SPRING

Barriers to integration: shared problem definition



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1 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
AB	Advisory Board
EU	European Union
SG	Steering Group
TBC	To be confirmed
WP	Work Package
CD-trajectory	Co-design trajectory

2 INTRODUCTION

This report addresses the findings of phase 1 of the Co-Design (CD) sessions in the "Barriers to integration" series. The CD trajectory is built in such way that the efforts go from diverging to converging, first brainstorming factors that constrict integration efforts (problems) and secondly creating a shared problem statement through discussion with various practitioners. We do this to work towards designing solutions and coping strategies to address these barriers to integration in phase 2.

The CD trajectory was officially launched, within the EU Horizon 2020 SPRING project WP1, on February 1st, 2022. It kicked off with a series of semi-structured interviews with 24 integration practitioners all over Europe, and even beyond. This wide-ranging scope allowed for a deep understanding of what are the struggles that these experts go through and what mechanisms they have installed and adopted to face them. Moreover, this varied geographical distribution shined a light on finding common patterns and trends within the industry. While this sample is not representative and migration-related matters are contextual and situational, this does not necessarily mean that there is no common ground. Instead, we noticed a series of overlapping themes that are worth exploring. These themes formed the fundament for four online interactive workshops (CD trajectory). The **aim** of the CD trajectory is to bring multiple practitioners together in an "online" room and have them exchange ideas on common problems, coping strategies, and best practices. An interactive workshop format is very suitable for this form of co-creation, in which the participants work together towards a common goal and "create an output" which in phase 1 is a *shared problem statement* and in phase 2 a *solution/stepping stones/interventions/coping strategy* that may help overcome these problems.

3 THE CO-DESIGN TRAJECTORY: PHASE 1

Based on the interviews and their availability, the 24 practitioners were spread over four groups.

These 24 practitioners represented a rich mix of individuals that included experience practitioners, younger social entrepreneurs, and small scale organizational to bigger associations all having one thing in common: they are all migration integration passionate practitioners. Phase 1 included two meetings that were organized in short succession as the second meeting builds forth on the previous. The sessions were hosted in video-conferencing app 'BUTTER' and we used the online collaborative whiteboard 'MIRO' to support the visual interactive workshop assignments.

Each session lasted 90 minutes and was moderated by a member of the research team. In the first meeting, we first hosted a visual exercise to get to know each other in a professional capacity, before kicking off the brainstorm on "Barriers to Integration". Participants were asked to use post-it notes to write down their thoughts, and in the discussion, we grouped these notes and looked for overarching themes and connections. In the second meeting, the research team made a visual recap of the previous brainstorm results, and participants were asked to respond, make changes and add thoughts. They were then guided through a visual exercise that challenged them to think about actors and factors in common problem statements.

4 RESULTS

After analysis of the results of all four CD-groups (using an open coding process), we see three main themes emerge and a few related sub-themes. However, each theme has come across in different ways (multi-faced problems), thereby making it challenging to come up with an overall problem statement. We have identified these different 'faces' as themes indeed, indicating different outlets of the generic issue. In the remainder of this chapter, 1) we mention the theme as we distilled it from the CD-trajectory, 2) we elaborate on how it was discussed among the CD-groups, showing the different sub-themes 3) we summarize this into a problem statement on each theme that does justice to the multiplicity and intricacy of each theme. The identified themes and sub-themes are:

1. Discrimination
    a. Negative public opinion
    b. Biased information
    c. Discriminatory and non-inclusive frameworks
    d. Insufficient interaction with host-communities

2. Policy
    a. Lack of vision in policy
    b. Absence of long-term policy strategies
    c. Colorized policy
    d. Considering migrants as 'one big unit'

3. Organizational (in)capacity and funding
    a. Short-term funding

b. Long procedures and extremely stiff legal requirements
c. Lack of collaboration
d. Acknowledgement that many challenges (e.g. in housing, education, health-care services) are interrelated
e. Burn-outs of practitioners

a) DISCRIMINATION

Racism and discrimination seem to be a disease of our societies as the practitioners confirmed in their experience. This phenomenon showcase itself in *negative public opinion* and twisted framing of migration matters, dark connotation of migrants, misconception, and perceptions of host communities towards foreigners (CD-group 2 and 3). According to our participants, this is often fed by *biased information,* as communicated by different media channels (CD-group 1), leading to a very negative *narrative* about migrants and the issues associated with them (CD-group 4). As a consequence, *policy decisions are often discriminatory* (as indicated in CD-group 1) and based on non-inclusive frameworks (CD-group 2). In turn, practitioners call for more *interaction between the locals and the newcomers*, the creation of more contact spaces and moments, and ultimately call for the following shift: from integration to inclusion (CD-group 1).

Problem statement:

Migrants are confronted by negative views and public opinions, which feed policy frameworks and the decisions based on those frameworks

b) POLICY

Practitioners argued that there is often a *lack of vision* when it comes to policymaking (CD-group 2, CD-group 4). The absence of particularly a *long-term strategy* in policy making and implementation has showcased to be a major problem in the conduction of integration work by practitioners (CD-group 2, CD-group 4). They often described their efforts as short-term solutions to long-term problems, thus highlighting their work as patchwork more so than systematic long-term work. Moreover, practitioners wished to *de-colorize policy* (which feeds back into the first issue), meaning that to the practitioners, policy favors some groups over others. Therefore, policy should be detached as much as possible from the current political trends and focus more on the humanitarian and societal needs (CD-group 4). Finally, more detail in governmental policies seems to be a recurrent factor: *taking migrants as one "big" unit of individuals* is understood as an outdated and unhelpful conceptualization. This implies that in policy migrants are considered as a homogeneous group, which does not do justice to the differences in national, ethnic, and educational background.

Problem statement:

The contemporary policy lacks a proper long-term vision about how to deal with integration issues. This has much to do with the unilateral approach of 'migrants', as well as (racist) political and societal influences.

c) ORGANIZATIONAL (IN)CAPACITY

The lack of clearly-visioned policy goes hand in hand with a lack of organizational capacity to address integration issues. For starters, practitioners explained how *funding* focuses on temporary projects which abruptly end in their expiry date, not giving room to the fruits of the work to be further nurtured. As a consequence, practitioners find themselves in the constant stress to acquire new funding to substantiate a more stable progression of their work (CD-group 2). In addition, *long procedures, extremely stiff legal requirements* and uncertain outcomes and renovations of permit of stays are amongst the most practical external issues practitioners face (CD-group 2). For example, working months on end on a family integration to then find out that the legal work did not keep up with the core inclusive work can be an incredibly hard pill to swallow. In addition, organizations tangible incapacities to sustain the load of work is an everyday challenge: cases of burnout, understaffing or unsustainable volunteering systems create heavy gaps in the day to day work. Furthermore, a *higher collaboration* between actors, both horizontally and vertically, seems to be a problem (and need) of these organizations (CD-group 3). This is very much related to the *interrelatedness* of integration challenges. For instance, limited access to the labor market, housing, education, health care, child care and transport are all evident in different domains. But in order to integrate, migrants need to have access to all of these services at the same time. This asks for extensive organizational collaboration and coordination, which often is not present (CD-group 3, CD-group 4). This often leads to frustrations not just among migrants, but also among practitioners, leading to *burn-outs* and *sick leaves* (CD-group 4). Practitioners complain even that they feel that their work is not *recognized* as a necessary part for a healthy globalized society (CD-group 1).

Problem statement:

Due to a lack of proper funding, bureaucratic procedures and a lack of a clear organization structure, practitioners often miss the resources to adequately address the challenges that migrants face.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The first CD-trajectory has shown us that integration challenges often are rooted in societal problems like discrimination and non-inclusive sentiments in society. These sentiments are communicated through a diverse range of media and result into policy decisions and the organizational capacity that is made available to implement these policy decisions. Although the generic themes hardly come as a surprise, the *interconnectedness* of these problems shows a complicated feedback loop in which many practitioners find themselves (even leading to burn-outs among practitioners). This first CD round shows that practitioners coming from different parts of Europe (and beyond) recognize similar dynamics when it comes to addressing integration challenges.

6 OUTLOOK

This report finalizes the first phase of the CD-trajectory. In phase 2, we will focus on possible solutions and coping strategies, to explore with each other what practitioners can do in order to address (parts) of these problems. We will proceed with a two-fold approach. On one hand, practitioners will be given the chance to connect, network, and learn from each other's best practices, which in turn might provide much-needed inspiration or a new operational key to these common problems. On the other hand, practitioners will co-design solutions and mechanisms, that they wish were institutionally put in place. Hopefully, this will help us to formulate expert-fueled advice to policymakers about how the feedback loop as put forward in this document may be modified.