



# Living more sustainable lives: Circular Solutions for Refugees' Integration in Europe

2020-1-PT01-KA204-078418

## White Paper



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



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# **White Paper on Refugee Knowledge on Sustainable Lifestyles: Intercultural Best Practices contributing to a Circular Economy**



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# 1. Introduction: backgrounds and goals of the project and the partners

The White Paper on Refugee Knowledge on Sustainable Lifestyles: Intercultural Best Practices contributing to a Circular Economy is a fundamental Output of the Erasmus+ project “Living more sustainable lives: circular solutions for refugee integration in Europe” (2020-1-PT01-KA204-078418).

The project “Living more sustainable lives: circular solutions for refugee integration in Europe” aims to support the socio-economic integration of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe through the acquisition of competences in upcycling techniques. Through the process of converting old or discarded materials into something useful, beautiful and of higher value, this project will contribute for the refugees’ integration, as well as promote innovative economic models. Both are essential to meet the target of 70% recycling for 2030 and the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, identified by the European Commission as relevant for the circular economy, namely number 12 “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”. Furthermore, the project aims to foster the professionalisation of refugees and migrants, in particular women, creating new job and business opportunities in areas such as food, fashion and design, while contributing to the development of a Circular Economy (CE) oriented to the integration of refugees and migrants in Europe. Life as a refugee is, perhaps, a first experience of circularity and collaborative economy. Many times, we see refugees and migrants, who lost everything, develop certain skills such as learning crafts, building objects, and subsisting through the exchange of services, recycling and reuse of products, that is, what we know today as a Circular Economy. In addition, it is important to understand that many refugees have previous experience, in their home or host countries, with an informal economy and experience in working with crafts, woods and other materials that they can access easily in these countries. The current project wishes to redirect these competences and bring opportunities for refugees to boost their self-confidence, entrepreneurial mindset and creativity.

The White Paper on Refugee Knowledge on Sustainable Lifestyles: Intercultural Best Practices contributing to a Circular Economy comprises a collection of several best practices that the refugees and migrants bring with them from their home countries. Some sustainable practices are already being implemented in everyday life, under the framework of certain cultures and local customs, without people being aware of it or adopting mainstream environmental terminology to frame their actions.

Nowadays, sustainable practices are being embraced throughout Europe, under the umbrella of living a more sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle, without being aware that some of those practices are already part of everyday life in the home countries of many of the refugees and migrants now living in Europe.

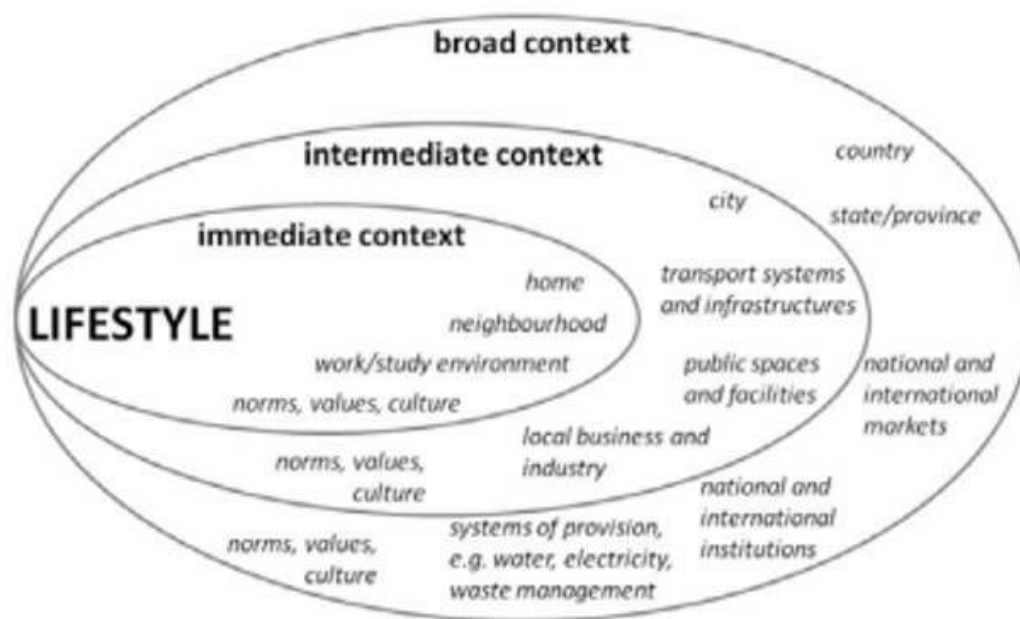
By collecting these best practices and making them available online for everyone to access, this paper aims to bring awareness and will contribute to refugees and migrants' integration in Europe by sharing knowledge of different cultures and sustainable habits, which in fact are similar to the ones Europe is now embracing.

The project partner organisations implemented several workshops, focus groups and surveys, in the different refugee and migrant communities of their respective countries, in order to collect the best practices that are now comprised in this White Paper.



## 2. Sustainable Lifestyle in Europe: the role of the individual and the community

Many sustainable products are being introduced all over Europe with the overall growing concern for environmental issues. One of those examples is the Luffa sponge, which is in fact an edible ripened fruit of a plant of the cucumber family, but is commonly known in Europe for being a sustainable sponge used for bathing, cleaning and exfoliated. The loofah (or luffa) sponge is 100% natural and completely biodegradable and has an average life span of around four to six months.



"Lifestyle is a set of behaviors that is presented by people, families and societies in different situations (physical, psychological, social and economical)." [1]

[1] [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5401917/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5401917/)

Lifestyle is a branch of habits that include social fundamentals; it is a set of behaviors by people, families and societies. It has a significant impact in the respective community. Individual actions can influence the actions of others around them and in their respective community.

According to the EU Sustainable Lifestyles Roadmap and Action Plan 2050, “sustainable lifestyle is one that respects the limits of our environmental capital, respects well being and wellbeing of all and can be continued for future generations.”

Therefore, to achieve a sustainable lifestyle, there is the need to take into account the three pillars of sustainable development: social, environmental and economic.

Only by mainstreaming sustainable lifestyles, with the change of our current lifestyles and consumption patterns, we as a collective will be able enable a shift in the paradigm of thinking.

Civil society, being a source of creativity, plays a major role as an enabler of sustainable and resilient change. Yet, that is not enough. Enabling sustainable lifestyles will also require political leadership, collective actions and responsive citizens.

Governments should be held accountable for their actions, making decisions according to a collective vision, fundamental to fit the diversity of contexts across Europe. Government policies are decisive catalysts for obtaining a sustainable lifestyle, namely through the development of a political intervention strategy along with policy goals. Yet this doesn't overshadow the importance of participation by all other actors in the societal sphere. The establishment of networks to share experiences, practical skills and knowledge can greatly contribute to the spread and commitment towards more sustainable lifestyles.

### 3. The impact of Refugees and Migrants' shared knowledge and sustainable habits

According with UNHCR the definition of 'Self-Reliance' "is the ability of an individual, household or community to meet essential needs and to enjoy social and economic rights in a sustainable manner and with dignity." [2]

Sustainable practices are already being implemented and followed in everyday life, under the context of certain cultures and local customs, without people being much aware of it.

Sharing experiences regarding their hosting countries, and their environmental-friendly and sustainable habits/products, brings value to their heritage and cultural background.

Also, understanding that they have valuable knowledge and sustainable habits can be used as an interesting first step to understand how we all share very similar behaviours and habits. These similarities and shared experiences can help and deepen their integration process in the European countries.

"More quality, less quantity" should be followed as a way of creating more sustainable habits. Yet it is important to explain how that can be attained and followed in the long run.



[2] <http://www.unhcr.org/530f107b6.pdf>



## 4. Intercultural Best Practices examples by country of origin

The participants of the project (workshops, focus groups, questionnaires, etc) described products or practices that are considered sustainable and/or environmentally friendly and that they have been using in their country of origin.

Here is a detailed list, accompanied by some online research to further learn about the sustainable and eco-friendly practices, procedures and/or products.



### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN (A to Z)

# 01 AFGHANISTAN



**Plantago ovata**, best known by other names, such as **blond plantain** and **ispagol**, is a medicinal plant, commonly used for treating children when they have obstipation.

First you have to crush or grind the flowers and then boil it in water.



# 02 BOLIVIA



In the small village of Machacamarca, it is common to use a conservation method, called **chuño**. This is a tradition from Quechua and Aymara communities, who use this dehydration practice, allowing potatoes to be eaten decades after they are dug up, while still keeping their nutritional properties. This is a local practise used for centuries as way of making sure that there is always enough food to eat.



# 03

## BURKINA FASO



**Keratin** is used as an important medicine for skin problems, such as acne, and is used in the kitchen as an alternative to olive oil.

**Bay leaves** are known to cure stomach aches. Leaves are also useful in cases of diarrhoea. Yet, a bay leaf decoction will also help in cases of insomnia, nervousness, and menstrual pain.





# 04 DR CONGO



**Ngadiadia (Garcinia Kola)** is a plant, with fruit, seeds, nuts and bark that can be used as a natural traditional medicine to cure headaches, stomach aches and fever.

According to a study published by the US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, published online on the 27th of October 2021, with the title “Antidiabetic Medicinal Plants Used in Democratic Republic of Congo: A Critical Review of Ethnopharmacology and Bioactivity Data” [3], *Garcinia Kola* is one of many medicinal plants used by traditional healers in DRC to treat different maladies, such as diabetes, gastroenteritis and malaria.



[3] [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8579071/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8579071/)

# 05 GHANA



**Teeth-cleaning twig, datum or datun** is used as an oral hygiene tool for brushing the teeth.

The teeth cleaning twig is more commonly used in India, due to its antibacterial properties. In the last couple of years, Datum is becoming known throughout the world, being used specially by those who are concerned with sustainability and environment, protection, because it is an eco-friendly and organic way to keep your gums healthy.



# 06 LESOTHO



**Aloe ferox** is originally from Lesotho and South Africa. It has been used for a long time as a laxative. The plant contains at least 130 healing agents with anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antiseptic, germicidal, antiviral, anti-parasitic and anti-tumour properties. It is regularly used to treat arthritis, conjunctivitis, sinusitis and burns. Aloe Ferox has great potential to alleviate symptoms associated with non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disorders, cancer, neurodegenerative diseases and diabetes.



# 07 MADAGASCAR



In Madagascar, the **Momordica charantia** is a very common folk remedy for diabetes. It has a long history of use as a hypoglycaemic agent. The aqueous extract of the fruit of *Momordica charantia* is a potent stimulator of insulin release.

**Catharanthus roseus** also has a distinctive therapeutic role as a source of the anticancer alkaloids vincristine and vinblastine, the complexity of which makes them impossible to be synthesised in the laboratory. It is commonly used in traditional medicine in the treatment of rheumatism, skin disorders, venereal diseases and diabetes. The plant also has peripheral neurotoxic effects including neuralgia, myalgia, paresthesia, loss of tendon reflexes, depression, convulsive episodes and breathing difficulties. Other side effects include alopecia, gastrointestinal disorders, ulceration of the oral mucosa, amenorrhoea and azoospermia.



# 08 MAURITIUS



**The use of medicinal plants** is a strong component of the traditional medicine in Africa, involving indigenous herbalism and African spirituality.

In Mauritius, one of medicinal plants commonly used is the **Centella asiatica**.

This plant has a pan-tropical distribution and is used in many healing approaches, including Ayurvedic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, Kampo (traditional Japanese medicine) and traditional African medicine. It is mainly used in the process of healing wounds, burns and ulcers, and is employed in the treatment of leprosy, tuberculosis, systemic lupus erythematosus, fever, inflammation, asthma, high blood pressure, rheumatism, syphilis, epilepsy, diarrhoea and mood disorders.

In Mauritius, the application of Centella Asiatica in the treatment of leprosy was first reported in 1852.



# 09 MOROCCO



**Argan oil** has been used as a medicine by Berbers for centuries and, most recently, it has been used as a main component of many beauty products.

This is a plant oil produced from the kernels of the argan tree (*Argania spinosa*). The argan tree is endemic to Morocco and, besides its extensive use for cosmetic purposes, it is also used as food oil, having many uses, for example as salad dressing, flavouring porridge, to be dipped in bread or to drizzle on couscous or pasta.

The long and labour-intensive task of extracting the oil from the drupes has traditionally been undertaken by Berber women. This is a process in which nothing goes to waste. First, the kernel is broken open by tapping between a large stone and a smaller handheld one.

The kernel shell can be ground down. Afterwards it is used in pottery production and in cosmetics, for skin exfoliates. Then, the seeds are either cold-pressed for cosmetic uses, or lightly toasted and pressed for food oil.

*Artemisia herba-alba*, commonly known as wormwood, is native to North Africa and has been used in folk medicine in many cultures. In Moroccan it is used to treat high blood pressure and diabetes.

# 10 NIGERIA



**Soda soap** is used all over the country and is known as a cheap hygiene product.

“In Akwa Ibom State it is one of the most commonly used soap. Many homes used it for washing kitchen utensils. But low-income earners use it for every other thing such as bathing, washing clothes etc.” [4]

**Cloves** are also used to make a lengthening hair mask, when they are ground and mixed into a cream. Furthermore, in Nigeria, cloves became a female secret for women who want to get pregnant. An infusion of cloves, ginger and garlic is drunk daily to increase the chance of pregnancy. It is said to be an infallible remedy...

**Sage**, on the other hand, is an ally for stomach aches. It also has benefits for sore throats and excessive perspiration.



[4] <https://www.enibest.com.ng/all-posts/business/how-to-produce-soda-soap-in-nigeria-detailed-guide/>

# 11

## RUSSIA



At the end of the communist period there were some initiatives related to circular solutions. For instance, there were public containers located in the entrance of housing buildings to collect food waste and take it to farms to feed animals.

In the 80s, children were encouraged to recycle, especially paper, as a way to protect nature. As a result, children used to ask their neighbours to keep used paper or old newspapers for them and then take them to be recycled.

Usually, they would sew child's clothes from old adult ones. Since the breakdown of communist regime, and the rise of capitalism in Russia, most of these practices are less common.

# 12 SENEGAL



**Kola tree** can entirely be used for different purposes.

A piece of the fruit chewed after a meal aids digestion and the caffeine contained in the fruit improves concentration; it is also used to reduce feelings of hunger. On the other hand, cleaned and peeled branches of the kola tree are used to make sticks that are sold for dental cleaning.

But the most beautiful thing about this tree, is the liturgical function that the kola has in weddings in Senegal. When the groom asks his beloved's family for her hand in marriage, and the parents accept, they go to the mosque to inform the Imam of the marriage that is to be celebrated. The Imam will bless this future union and distribute kola to everyone present.

Also, in Senegal, as well as in many other countries in Africa and Asia, it has been a tradition to use available materials from daily use, such as jute bags, tin cans, wire and scrap rubber and plastic, that people usually discard as trash that ends up in the landfill.



When there is a need, there is a way!

Many children also use creative ways to reuse the materials available to them, for example juice cans and wire bicycles, transforming what would go to the garbage into colourful toy cars.

In the city of Saint Louis, Senegal, there is an association called “La Liane”, that helps street children and women who have escaped domestic violence or facing financial hardship. It also helps women, who had to quit school, to return and pursue an education.

The association created a project called “Atelier des Femmes” [5].

In this atelier women learn how to sew and crochet using recycled materials, such as plastic. The objects the women created are then sold in the association’s creative boutique in the city centre, with a percentage of the profits going directly to the women who made them.

The objects are ecological, but they are also characteristic of Africa and St. Louis.



[5] <https://laliane.eu/index.php/latelier-des-femmes/>

# SIERRA LEONE



**Bang Baa** is a traditional herb made from the roots of a forest tree. It is known to help in the treatment of kidney disease and, although there is no scientific proof, people say that it helps to treat malaria. How should you use it? First you have to keep it in water overnight and drink its juice the next day.

“Most of the people who take it are impoverished villagers; they cannot afford medical treatment. Medical authorities strongly advise people not to take it, but there doesn’t appear to be any efforts to take the root to a lab to do some research to see if it offers an alternative. (...) Sierra Leonean authorities are unwilling to test the country’s own natural resources.” [6]



[6] <https://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2013/12/27/malaria-sierra-leone>

# 14 SOUTH AFRICA



**Aspalathus linearis**, an endemic South African species, is cultivated to produce the famous herbal tea known as rooibos. Its tannin content, combined with its antioxidant, immunomodulatory and chemopreventive activity, has contributed to its popularity. It is traditionally used throughout Africa to prevent vomiting and abdominal cramps. There is growing evidence that flavonoids present in the plant contribute substantially to reducing the occurrence of cardiovascular disease and age-related disorders. Bronchodilator, antispasmodic and antihypertensive effects have been confirmed in vitro and in vivo. These characteristics make rooibos a useful aid in case of Covid-19 infection.

**Harpagophytum procumbens** is native to South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. The indigenous San and Khoi peoples of southern Africa have used devil's claw medicinally for allergies, arteriosclerosis, dysmenorrhoea, dyspepsia, fibromyalgia, malaria, migraine, myalgia, neuralgia, tendonitis, urinary tract infections.



It is also used as an antiarrhythmic, analgesic, antidiabetic, antiphlogistic, antipyretic, appetite stimulant and diuretic. Several clinical studies have been conducted to determine the efficacy of *Harpagophytum procumbens* for its use as an anti-inflammatory, general analgesic for lower back pain and anti-rheumatic agent. *Cyclopia genistoides* is the main component of the indigenous South African herbal tea known as Honeybush, used for its positive effects mainly on the urinary system.

It is also used as an expectorant and in pulmonary tuberculosis.

***Pelargonium sidoides*** is native to the coastal regions of South Africa and available ethnobotanical information shows extensive use in acute respiratory infections, including acute rhinosinusitis and acute bronchitis. The antibacterial activity of extracts and isolated constituents of *Pelargonium sidoides* has been evaluated against gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria.



# 15 SUDAN



A traditional remedy for headaches is drinking **herbal tea** made with cumin: boil a spoonful of cumin in hot water for five minutes and sip. Instead, for stomach aches, it is common to use **fenugreek**. The procedure is longer, you have to put it in water for a few hours until it releases its colour. When the water is yellow, you can drink it and benefit from its properties.

Chewing cloves is also known for its capability to relieve toothache. When infused, cloves will help with digestive problems.



# 16 SYRIA



The use of **paper bags** was implemented in many shops to reduce plastic consumption.

Also, bars of soap are used overall to avoid packaging. In the city of Aleppo there is a **traditional soup, called Durairah**. It is made of a mixture of powdered pelon (Alebian green stone) with healthy and improved properties for the hair and scalp, with Al-Mayah perfume. This soap is known to be the oldest in the world.

In Portugal, a group of Syrian women refugees created a brand called “Amal” ([www.amalsoap.com](http://www.amalsoap.com)) to sell their unique handmade soap.





# 17 TUNISIA



**Artemisia herba-alba**, also used for other purposes in Morocco, is used in Tunisia to treat diabetes, bronchitis, diarrhoea, high blood pressure and neuralgia.

Artemisia herba-alba tea has been used as an analgesic, antibacterial, antispasmodic and haemostatic agent. The unique antifungal activity of Artemisia herba-alba was found to be associated with two main volatile compounds isolated from the fresh leaves of the plant, carvone and piperitone.



# 18 VENEZUELA



There are many recipes for "reusing" food, for example, **ropa vieja** is a dish that mixes food cooked in the past couple of days with new ingredients, **Torta de pan** is a cake with old bread or with cooked rice they make **Arepas** or a dessert called **Arroz dulce**. They also reuse used olive oil to make soaps.



## 5. Recommendations for Future Research

- **Circular Economy Action Plan**

[https://ec.europa.eu/environment/pdf/circular-economy/new\\_circular\\_economy\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/pdf/circular-economy/new_circular_economy_action_plan.pdf)

- **European Green Deal**

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

- **EU Sustainable Lifestyles Roadmap and Action Plan 2050**

[https://www.cscp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Roadmap-and-Action-Plan\\_2050-1.pdf](https://www.cscp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Roadmap-and-Action-Plan_2050-1.pdf)

- **The UN Environment Programme (UNEP)**

<https://www.unep.org/>

- **UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development**

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

- **A new Circular Economy Action Plan for a cleaner and more competitive Europe**

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:9903b325-6388-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1.0017.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:9903b325-6388-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1.0017.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)



# CIRCULAR SOLUTIONS

for refugees' integration in Europe



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