

MIGRANT MINISTRY REPORT IN EUROPE **DURING THE** PANDEMIC CRISIS



GOOD PRACTICES
MARCH - DECEMBER 2020

4. AWALE PROJECT



Source: <https://www.fisat.es/proyecto-awale-cartagena/>

Verb: to promote

Country: Spain

Initiative: to foster the integration process through the development of language skills

Beneficiaries: regular refugees

Thematic area(s) of good practice example: Spanish lessons

Duration of project: 2008 – to present.

Source of funds: public funds

Website: <https://www.fisat.es/>

Catholic Church organisations involved and contacts: *Fundación Iniciativa Solidaria Ángel Tomás (FISAT) of Cartagena; David Barqueros Húngaros, Director Plataforma Social Salesiana Cartagena, Email: david.barqueros@fisat.es.*

INTRODUCTION

The **Fundación Iniciativa Solidaria Ángel Tomás (FISAT)** was born in 2008, continuing the work carried out by the Don Bosco Association for Cooperation, to promote the social projects of the Salesian Province of Valencia. After more than a decade of activity, it now represents the network of all the social programmes carried out by the Salesians in the Valencian Community and the Region of Murcia.

Through several projects, FISAT offers residential, socio-educational and labour insertion resources targeting the most vulnerable groups, especially for minors and young people in situations of social exclusion, but also migrants, people with addictions, women and men deprived of liberty or former inmates who need accompaniment in their social and labour insertion.

FISAT currently runs a total of 34 projects spread across eight different locations (Saragossa, Burriana, Valencia San Antonio Abad, Valencia San Juan Bosco, Alcoy, Villena, Alicante, Elche, Cartagena), where it offers a wide range of services, including childcare centres, day centres, emancipation flats, educational support projects, immigrant care projects, urban camps for young people at risk of social exclusion, training programs, and volunteer promotion.

As a part of the Salesian Foundation, **FISAT Cartagena** also is committed to promoting paths of social inclusion of the most vulnerable, with a special concern for the youngest, consistent with Don Bosco's sensitivity. The activities of the Salesians family in Cartagena have long roots since they started even before the birth of the Foundation, eighteen years ago. It all started with work with the inmates of the prison, offering educational activities and means of social reintegration at the end of the time of reclusion. A flat was even bought with the help of the Salesian Congregation, recalls José Joaquín Coma, director of the Casa Salesiana de Cartagena during an interview on Instagram [SOURCE: https://www.instagram.com/tv/CQwFvtaKmE5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link].

With the closure of the Cartagena prison, projects began to serve another vulnerable social reality: the migrant population. This is how the first project with migrants arose. It was the *Awalé* Project, which offers classes of Spanish language and culture. After these practices were integrated into FISAT, which welcomes the various social resources of the Salesian houses, the *Awalé* projects was replicated in other cities such as Valencia and Alicante, which also have a very significant migrant population.

Awalé is a project that involves many resources, both human and material. It has demonstrated the capacity to reach the highest number of migrants and to be one of the most attractive services for the immigrant community.

This Good Practice aims to promote the social insertion of immigrants, launching a series of designed and structured actions based on cultural and linguistic learning. The project is aimed at migrants, men and women,

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of different nationalities and ages, residents in Cartagena or its surroundings. To participate in the program, they must own a residence permit.

The main actions carried out are:

- Spanish and literacy classes.
- Cultural, leisure and free-time activities.
- Informatics courses.
- Gender equality workshop.
- Toy lending service (for children of participants, especially women).
- Sports workshop.
- Assemblies.

Awalé Project aims to develop to the maximum the linguistic capacities of the participants but also to make known to them the culture of the host country, as well as of the various countries of origin of each participant, from an intercultural perspective. The final goal is to raise the communicative competencies in the language of the host country of migrants who have arrived in Europe.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, FISAT continued to run all of its programmes, adapted to the restrictions related to the pandemic. During lockdowns, activities moved online in digital communication platforms, developing new learning processes and tools. Indeed, teachers made an exceptional effort preparing special material to continue their work from home and to keep the attention of the students even in these troubled times. Online classes were held and this has also represented a very efficient way to help young migrants come out from the isolation of the confinement.

However, this change has brought unpleasant challenges for these people. Indeed, as services and activities moved online during the lockdown, migrants experienced digital exclusion caused by limited access to equipment and/or the internet and to the common streaming services. During an interview conducted online, David Barqueros Húngaros underlined this concerning aspect: *"During the pandemic, the difficulty was to be connected. There are a lot of people who live without pc, internet connection. These days if you don't have internet you are disconnected from the world"*. If an internet connection is normally considered an essential service in our daily lives, with the pandemic it has turned to be even vital

since during the confinement it has been the only tools to figuratively go out, go on with the life and have social contacts. Therefore, FISAT had to respond to this new demand and it strived as much as possible to ensure its users had the possibility to stay in contact with the language classes.

After lockdown, FISAT Cartagena reorganised their structures and their programmes to guarantee the resumption of in-person activities. Every measure to prevent transmission was taken: social distancing, reduced number of participants, masks, etc.

The Foundation in figures

- Projects: 34
- Locations: 8
- Volunteers and collaborators: 214
- Paid staff: 156
- Direct beneficiaries: 1,304

RELEVANCE

FISAT Cartagena endorses the values of the Salesian education system with a preferential option for the neediest young people, having confidence in them. FISAT has a positive and hopeful look at the world of young people, helping them to unleash all their potential. In a broader perspective, through educational processes, the project seeks to educate young migrants to integrate into society as responsible citizens for a more just, fraternal and supportive world. For this purpose, the learning of the language of the host country represents a method to be able to participate equally in society. According to the words of José Joaquín Coma, the abovementioned director of FISAT Cartagena, the objective of these resources is "to serve this migrant population so that it can fend for itself." To this end, the learning of the language of the host country has a major role to play in supporting the integration of young migrants into education systems, the labour market and society at large. Being fluent in Spanish is a key element to start any kind of communication. It is also a vehicle for inclusion since it is necessary to create a relationship of proximity with the other and to actively participate in the social environment. Furthermore, mastery of the language helps migrants deal with bureaucratic issues such as papers or other formalities.

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Awalé Project works with a methodology that encourages the active participation of users, an aspect that is considered essential to achieve full social integration of the participants. The core value of its activities is the centrality of the person. In FISAT each person is considered as an active subject, the main protagonist in their process of change and improvement through educational processes. Involving the participants throughout the process, classes represent spaces for debate, reflection and decision-making regarding the direction of the project.

Moreover, in *Awalé* the educational relationship is based on unconditional respect and the presence of educators among migrants is continuous to create a family atmosphere. In FISAT projects the family atmosphere is always a priority, emphasising dialogue and care.

INNOVATIVENESS

This Good Practice stands out as it combines the learning of Spanish with other teaching relevant to the life of each individual. It is a great opportunity that offers various cultural inputs indispensable to fully integrate into the host society. It also gives the occasion to practise some sports, fostering the physical well-being of the users, as well as their social life. Moreover, within *Awalé* Project, classes represent also a moment when teachers promote an attitude of respect and appreciation of gender differences and create resources that encourage participation in equal conditions for women. Doing so, FISAT tries to fill a cultural gap that often exists between migrants and the local population.

Thanks to all these different results that the course can produce, the motivation of the migrants involved to learn the language is more likely to increase since they can see the results in their daily lives. As a consequence, they demonstrate a personal engagement with the language learning process, which is necessary to success.

Besides this aspect, to achieve good results is essential what David Barqueros Húngaros in the interview called charisma: *"We have a special charisma: we never leave people outside. We are always open, we don't close the door to anyone. The environment is very important. People must feel good in our environment"*.

IMPACT

Awalé is the oldest project in Cartagena and, therefore, the one with the longest trajectory and stability over time. It is a project in which many volunteers participate and in which there is much interaction between people of different nationalities. For all this, it is one of the richest projects in terms of intercultural learning. Through the language course, migrants have achieved personal development, as well as proficiency in the language of the host country. This result has an important impact since sometimes it is required as a necessary step to obtain a regular administrative status. Indeed, some European States are increasingly requiring migrants to attain certain minimum levels of proficiency in the language of the country before they are granted the right to long-term residence and, beyond that, to citizenship.

- 45 migrants learned Spanish from their laptop or telephone in 2020

SUSTAINABILITY

FISAT is committed to quality, responsible volunteering, for the benefit of both the recipients and society and, for this purpose, it provides follow-up, recognition and training. When a person decides to volunteer, they are informed about the different projects of the Foundation. Once they choose the project in which they want to collaborate, they are appointed a tutor who accompanies them in their volunteer work. Then, if a person excels in their involvement, effectiveness and efficiency in the exercise of their work, they are proposed to be a collaborating partner of the Foundation and also to be able to assume some responsibility in the different work teams. Moreover, the Foundation facilitates participation in the training courses organised each year and in the training of the State Coordinator of Salesian Social Platforms of which the Foundation is a member.

Awalé Project FISAT relies on public funds coming mainly from the Region of Murcia, in particular from the General Direction of Social Service and Relation with the Third Sector.