

BEST PRACTICE PAPER

Educational project “CHANGE”

funded under AMIF 2017 Integration priority 01

“Raising Awareness on migrant's contribution to EU Societies”

JRS Europe's CHANGE project aims to illustrate good practices in involving civil society in AMIF funding, specifically raising awareness and promoting solidarity within countries hosting migrants. It is an example of cooperation within a transnational AMIF project funded with central EU funds. The Best Practice paper was developed in the context of the ECRE/PICUM project 'Deploying Good Practice: increasing EU funding for inclusion' to assess experiences of projects funded under the AMIF Multi-Annual Framework 2014-2020, to draw lessons from them, and to provide recommendations for the Multi-Annual Framework 2021-2027 on the importance of funding actions that promote social inclusion and integration.

1. Relevance and aim of the project:

Background

Education is a powerful agent of change. It plays a strong role in the socialisation of children, and can foster social cohesion and mutual understanding between third country nationals and receiving societies. Introducing civic education courses in secondary schools was highlighted in the [European Commission's June 2016 Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals](#) as something to be explored in order to promote inclusive education,¹ a topic JRS has always prioritised in the 50+ countries in which it is present.²

CHANGE is an awareness-raising project funded under the Call for Proposals AMIF-2017-AG-INTE that aims to encourage secondary school students (13-18 years old) to think critically about refugees, migration and the creation of inclusive societies. CHANGE was launched by JRS Europe in January 2019, together with eight partners,³ and is being implemented in 9 European countries (Belgium, Spain, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands and Portugal) over a period of three years (January 2019 to December 2021), with a budget of 1.082149,85 Euro. It was a response to a call for

¹ COM(2016) 377 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals

² <https://jrs.net/en/programme/education/>

³ Associazione Centro Astalli (IT), Fundacion Alboan (ES), Isusovacka Sluzba Za Izbjeglice (HR), Jesuit Refugee Service Malta Foundation (JRS MALTA) (MT), Jezus Tarsasaga Magyarorszag Rendtartomanya (HU), Jrs Portugal - Servico Jesuita Aos Refugiados Associacao Humanitaria (PT), The Jesuit Refugee Service (IE), The Society Of Jesus Trust Of 1929 For Roman Catholic Purposes (UK)

proposals for awareness-raising initiatives, development of communication tools and mobilization of civil society actors and/or the media.

JRS Europe developed CHANGE as a conclusion to and on the basis of an assessment of previous European education and awareness-raising projects that had been implemented jointly with transnational partners. One example is the Pedro Arrupe award, a programme started seven years ago that promotes tolerance and openness among 13-19-year-olds through the creation of group projects on their choice of issue, with the help of their teachers. At a national level, CHANGE partner JRS Italy coordinates the Finestre ('windows') programme in 100 primary and secondary schools to put students in direct contact with refugees through storytelling. Likewise, in Portugal, Sou Como Tu ('I'm Like You') focuses on fostering understanding and acceptance of 'the other' through direct student participation, with storytelling and photography in 40 schools around the Lisbon area. Similar JRS projects exist or have existed in Malta, the UK, Hungary and Ireland. CHANGE builds on these educational experiences, by combining different elements of former programmes with new ones, such as reflecting on prejudices, self-learning, or critical analysis of sources—all fomenting critical thinking. It allows for a general Europe-wide message of tolerance to be filtered and taught through the lenses of national teaching methods and perspectives.

To reach its objectives, CHANGE proposes three key points: 1) a six-stage classroom curriculum in 2ndary school (#Think4CHANGE); 2) encounters between students and forced migrants (#Share4CHANGE); 3) encouraging students to take action within their schools and local communities through the Student Ambassador Programme (#Act4CHANGE). Each of the project stages includes a lesson plan for the teacher, with a specific goal and various proposed activities, and a worksheet for the students. The programme is flexible and can be adapted for different age groups, interests, and needs. This creates three groups of 'actors': teachers, students, and people who have experienced forced migration, each with a role to play, see <https://www.jrschange.org/>.

Rationale

The CHANGE project responds to the titular needs outlined in the [EU policy framework for migrant integration](#). CHANGE directly tackles anti-immigration sentiment in schools by enabling classroom encounters with migrants, and supporting both students and migrants in taking action and raising awareness.

CHANGE showcases positive social contributions of migrants and refugees through a concrete education curriculum and by letting migrants tell their stories. This helps promote social inclusion and fight racism and xenophobia in the long term, by encouraging young people to think critically and form value-based judgements: recognising anti-migrant propaganda, resisting hate speech, and generally searching for facts in today's media landscape. Beyond that, they are encouraged to counter misinformation with positive and factual messages. The following is a reflection by students on the insights gained after encountering a young Syrian refugee: "I think that these kinds of stories should be told more often to students so that they see the world through the eyes of people who have gone through war and migration rather than via the media."

JRS created an online evaluation form for teachers to provide feedback on the materials, activities, guidelines, encounters, revised online materials prompted by COVID-19 restrictions, and support received by partner organisations. In general, the feedback was very positive. Many teachers appreciated the programme's relevance and potential in understanding and engaging with social matters. One teacher stated, about an activity: *"The Town Hall role play was excellent, as it made students empathise with different sections of society."* Several teachers pointed out how insightful and enriching the encounters between students and refugees are.

CHANGE also addresses the main findings of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education project, which promotes public policies for multiculturalism and an education that better responds to the needs of students with an immigrant background, such as: 1) actively involving them in cooperating with educational, health, social or other administrative services, including connecting with associations of and for immigrants; 2) better understanding and respecting diversity; 3) recognizing, supporting and implementing educational strategies geared towards pupils with an immigrant background.⁴

2. Design and implementation of the project:

Project Design

To develop the curriculum, JRS Europe first collected existing educational and/or awareness-raising materials from the national partners' own resources, such as Finestre (IT), and from other organisations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, Servicio Jesuita Migrantes Latin America, and JRS Hungary. Following an open call to research institutes, JRS chose the Hochschule für Philosophie to develop pedagogical material based on the existing resources provided by JRS. A panel of experts from diverse backgrounds (refugees, educators, communication and awareness-raising experts) assessed the results, ensuring it fit both CHANGE's awareness-raising purpose and the needs of the users (students and teachers).

A preparatory Methodology Advisory Committee approved and monitored the implementation of the project. The committee was composed of JRS Europe representatives, a Pedagogical Expert, a Communication Expert and two representatives from among the national partners (co-applicants) who are particularly strong in implementing education and awareness-raising initiatives. A Steering Committee was created to advise on the prospective activities and to assure adherence to the schedule. The Steering Committee is composed of representatives from JRS Europe and all project partners, and maintains regular correspondence. Finally, the materials were translated into the participating member states' languages. JRS Europe staff is responsible for the overall management and coordination of the project.

To promote and disseminate the project, JRS Europe opened a call for a communications agency to develop the website and the communications strategy aimed at young students. While the strategy was drafted by the winning agency, the JRS Europe communications officer elaborated on how to diffuse the materials and raise awareness about the project. The www.jrschange.org website was

⁴ <https://www.european-agency.org/projects/multicultural-diversity-and-special-needs-education>

set up in cooperation with the agency in the languages of the nine participating countries, allowing for direct registration of teachers and students, and it includes a blog updated several times a week with testimonies from students, teachers and refugees involved in CHANGE, or activities related to the project. Each partner has created social media profiles to disseminate information about the project online. Some partners have even added a section dedicated to CHANGE on their website (e.g. JRS IT), while others embedded a link to CHANGE on their domains.

Project actions

The project foresees different actions in relation to the three main elements of the project (the course, the encounters, and the action of the Student Ambassadors):

- Implementation of the CHANGE educational course: the project creates a network of up to 400 schools across nine European countries (Belgium, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Spain and the UK), in which a total of up to 60,000 students learn and engage with the CHANGE materials and activities.
- Voices4CHANGE: the project gives migrants a platform to present their experiences to the schools involved in the project. By creating the Voices4CHANGE platform, about 100 refugees, asylum-seekers and forced migrants provide up to 800 presentations in the schools involved. Three partners (IT, MT, ES) prepared a guideline document on how to train refugees and support them in their interactions with students. The guidelines highlight the importance of seeking external psychological help if needed. With each encounter, there is a preparation and debriefing session between JRS partners, staff members, and refugees. JRS staff also help teachers prepare their class for the encounter and the type of possible sessions. There are detailed instructions on the CHANGE website.
- Student Ambassador Programme: of the up to 60,000 students expected to be reached by the project, 2000-4000 students become Student Ambassadors, collectively organising 800 events in their schools or local community with the support of their teachers. Linked to the Student Ambassador's programme is the planning of national events across nine countries. Students will share what they have learned over the course of the project and the actions they have undertaken. The events bring together the network of schools involved in CHANGE within each country. In 2021, at the end of the project, CHANGE will organise a European event in Brussels. A small group of students from each country, accompanied by their teacher, will be invited to participate, sharing their involvement in CHANGE and the impact of their Student Ambassador actions.

Stakeholders involvement

At the European level, we sought external collaboration with stakeholders who have expertise in developing pedagogical materials. A European Stakeholder Meeting was held in April 2019, to receive feedback from a group of external experts with a background in migration and asylum, education, communication. They reflected on the project's methodology, the educational concept, the student ambassador programme, and the participation of refugees/forced migrants. 10 people were present: three refugee experts, three education experts, and four civil society representatives involved in refugee education.



A group of students attending an encounter with a refugee. April 2021

At the national level, teachers, students and refugees have actively participated in the CHANGE project. Moreover, the project has, in some countries, encouraged teachers within and across schools to meet and exchange their practices and experiences with CHANGE, which reinforces existing school networks.

Other stakeholders included in the promotion of CHANGE are educational platforms and organisations, who publish CHANGE related content online (e.g. Educate Magis,⁵ an online community connecting educators from Jesuit and Ignatian schools worldwide) and in print. To organise refugee encounters and strengthen their participation in the project, several national partners contacted other organisations working with young refugees, like those that provide support and guidance to young refugees, and cultural organisations who organise workshops on migration, identity and interculturalism with the active participation of asylum-seekers in schools. Working with these organisations enriches the experience, and ensures that the refugees who participate in CHANGE feel accompanied and supported.

⁵ <https://www.educatemagis.org/blogs/sjr-lanza-change-todos-jugamos-un-papel/#>
<https://www.educatemagis.org/blogs/jrs-launches-change-we-all-have-a-role-to-play/>

3. Sustainability

CHANGE was 90% financed by the 2017 AMIF Community action call for proposals. Each partner has proportionally contributed to co-finance the project by using either complementary funds from



national education projects, or their organisations' core funding. The fact that the AMIF central programmes provided 90% co-funding has been a good experience, compared to national AMIF programme funds where co-financing of up to 25% is often required, which can be difficult for national partners who do not have sufficient funds or cannot use other national public funding for co-financing.

A group of students sharing their experience after a school activity for migrants . Portugal, February 2020

The financial sustainability of the project—understood as the ability to continue all the activities of the project once the AMIF funding ends—could become a challenge, in particular for certain transnational activities, such as the events to exchange good practices among student ambassadors at the national and European level. However, for the main activities related to the implementation of the curriculum in schools and encounters between refugees/migrants and students, all partners have expressed interest in continuing their awareness-raising activities, as they have done in the past, but using the new materials produced by the project. These materials will remain online, open source, for other organisations or schools to use once the project officially ends.⁶ The integration of project outputs into other existing activities that the co-applicants carry out in schools will ensure the materials won't be lost. An example of good sustainability practice is Centro Astalli in Rome incorporating CHANGE into different long-term school projects like Finestre, which they have been running for over 15 years.

During the first two years of implementation, JRS Europe and partners focused on providing training for teachers to increase their ability to promote critical thinking among pupils. To ensure the sustainability of an educational programme, it is important to combine strong training and capacity building for teachers with institutional and organisational support. For this reason, the project has dedicated time to establish stakeholders' commitment within the educational community (education managers and coordinators) but also at the level of national education authorities, where possible. JRS Portugal, for example, is working with the Ministry of Education to integrate part of the CHANGE curriculum into one of the national education platforms. In Belgium, JRS Europe is working with the network of Flemish SJ schools to include elements of the project in the new programme of the subject "Humans and Society".

As previously mentioned, JRS has built evaluation tools into the awareness-raising project (students' pre-ante and ex-post evaluation) that will allow for identification of what enables students to develop valuable critical thinking skills. JRS has secured new funding to conduct in-depth research among the students who take part in the CHANGE project. The new project will, on one hand, involve existing school networks to conduct the research and, on the other hand, develop training materials for teacher and educators based on research findings, so that educators and civil society

⁶ The CHANGE curriculum in English will be on JRS E website, materials in other languages on JRS country offices websites, Magis and various educational platforms.

actors can better understand essential elements in changing perspectives and enhancing a critical mindset among young students.

4. Challenges and lessons learned

Design of the project

Ensuring that educational projects can have an impact on students' attitudes and values in the long run is a concrete challenge, identified as a weakness point in previous projects aimed at teaching theory on asylum and migration or promoting encounters between students and people with a refugee background. To combat this weakness, we employed the wide range and diversity of experience of the project partners, the input of refugees and migrants, and JRS expertise of Ignatian pedagogy to create solid material that not only teaches notions, but supports students in developing autonomous critical thinking.⁷

From the start, the team was confronted with the fact that forced migration is a very complex issue and that changing attitudes takes time. There is usually very little space for awareness-raising programmes in educational systems, so the pedagogic experts needed to strike a balance when designing the curriculum. The fact that the project was going to be implemented in nine different European countries with very diverse migration and national contexts reinforced the idea of building a curriculum based on the concept of self-education. In this vein, CHANGE invites students to explore the topics on their own with guidance from their teachers. Throughout the course, they are confronted with wide-ranging, surprising information and real experiences that put prejudices, stereotypes and/or previous (false) knowledge into question. Additionally, the project focuses on developing students' empathy through encountering refugees, which helps them better understand refugees or migrants' feelings and fosters open mindedness. When designing the encounter and the activities foreseen in Stage 3, special attention was given to classrooms with refugees and migrants who participated in class room action by sharing their experiences (such as different questions and suggestions for the teacher to adequately address the subject).

The project provides a very comprehensive approach, to foster critical thinking skills, empathy, and participation among the students. Nowadays, young people are often exposed to fake news and misinformation about migration online. Providing training to analyse and form their own opinions is not only beneficial to better understanding the complex reality of the topic, it also provides them with a lifelong skill that can be applied to other areas. Moreover, the empathy fostered through the encounter is key to developing emotional intelligence. Both processes are very complex and require training and preparing teachers to deliver the programme. As a result of this training, an internal guideline document for teachers and special training materials have been developed to accompany the activities.

During the European Stakeholders meeting, JRS suggested involving refugees and migrants beyond classroom visits, including them in the design of the Student Ambassador programme so the interaction between students and migrants is not limited to a single encounter.

⁷ Ignatian pedagogy is fundamentally based on contextualizing an issue, exploring it through experience, reflecting and then acting on the conclusions drawn, and evaluating the learning. More details: www.educatemagis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Document_on_Ignatian_Pedagogy_-_English.pdf

Besides quantitative outreach indicators (number of students/teachers or schools involved in the project), assessing the impact of these kinds of awareness-raising projects is always a challenge. JRS has embedded two evaluations in the project for students to fill out: one ex-ante and one ex-post. The aim is to find out which elements of the programme (pedagogical curriculum, the encounter, or the student ambassadors) have been key leverage points to changing perceptions. Analysis of the data will allow for better tailoring of future awareness-raising activities.

Implementation

A significant challenge that different partners are facing during implementation is the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the sanitary measures imposed by public authorities (from March to July 2020), schools in all participating countries were closed and teaching was shifted to online and distance learning. In some countries (e.g. Malta), schools did not re-open until October 2020. Since CHANGE materials are online, JRS partners were able to quickly adapt the existing six-stage programme to a curriculum that could be implemented online (shorter sessions, fewer teamwork activities and



more plenary discussions).⁸ This included encounters between migrants/refugees and pupils, which were organised online in many countries (Italy, Spain, or Belgium). However, there were difficulties in recruiting migrants and refugees to participate in online sessions, partly due to feelings of discomfort at being seen on camera, amid fears of being recognised in the future.

Students in Ireland, creating a wall about migration as part of CHANGE activities. March 2021

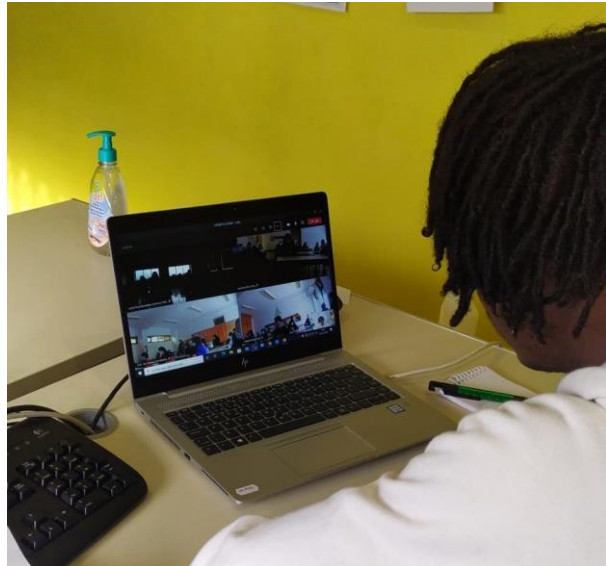
These difficulties continue in the 2020-2021 academic year. While most of the countries have decided to reopen schools, teachers and management staff are under pressure to continuously adapt to changing measures, such as hybrid models of teaching, to support national authorities in containing the pandemic. Educators are trying to catch up with missing material from last year, and third parties (external visitors) are often not allowed into the schools, making the encounter with refugees only possible over the internet. Additionally, the pandemic and social distancing rules hinder the organisation of some Student Ambassador initiatives (as physical encounters or group action are not possible) and could impede the organisation of planned national and European events.

Besides the pandemic, the full implementation of the proposed six-stage activities often poses challenges. Even if many teachers have expressed, through different evaluations, that they find the project extremely interesting and well-elaborated, they also point out the difficulty of inserting all the different steps into their already full pedagogical curricula. Fortunately, the materials are flexible and allow for teachers to select only certain activities. JRS and its partners have been working on adapting the curriculum to simplify its implementation and adapt it to online schooling where needed.

⁸ <https://www.jrschange.org/2020/03/23/thinking4change-during-covid-19/>

In the long term, the partners have been trying to identify subjects in the curricula with which CHANGE materials can easily align, so that teachers can integrate the activities with minimal effort. Usually this is the case for subjects like ethics, religion, citizenship education, or social studies. In Belgium, JRS is in contact with the teachers responsible for creating and reviewing the content of the latter subject in the curriculum.

In addition to the complexity of integrating the programme into different national curricula, CHANGE competes with many other projects offered to schools that focus on migration or other relevant topics. To overcome this issue, the partners look at ways in which CHANGE can complement or enhance other projects or subjects, avoiding conflict. This is easily applied to the Student Ambassador programme where pupils are asked to become proactive in organising an awareness-raising activity for their local community. A recent award-winning example from Spain is the initiative of the Students of the Sacred Heart School (secondary school, 16-17-year-olds) from Pamplona who were involved in CHANGE and decided to reach out to refugees and forced migrants in their city, as well as organise awareness-raising sessions for their younger schoolmates.⁹



*Virtual Presentation - CHANGE in a new format.
December 2020*

Regarding cooperation with AMIF managing authorities as the project's funder, a kick-off meeting was organised by the EU to introduce the project management and get to know the other funded European projects. JRS Europe, as the contract holder of the CHANGE project grant, established fluent bilateral communication with the AMIF programme desk in Brussels, who helpfully clarified ad hoc questions related to the grant administration. To JRS Europe's knowledge, there has been no further space for common dialogue between AMIF and civil society organisations regarding the funded projects or the programme's priorities, which would be valuable, if it could be set up in the future multi-annual programme.

Project outreach

Although all partners have varying degrees of experience organising awareness-raising activities in schools, such a complex project requiring the participation of teachers in its implementation has proven to be a major challenge for organisations that used to just offer awareness-raising sessions in schools, run with limited involvement of school staff. Furthermore, the project set very ambitious outreach indicators, and creating links to new networks of schools has revealed itself to be a very laborious process that requires a lot of time and effort from the partners to present, train and convince school staff to engage in the project, as it requires integration into their curricula.

⁹ [Pamplona, ciudad abierta. Experiencia de encuentro. Colegio Sagrado Corazón de Pamplona - YouTube](#)

One of the lessons learned has been to identify very motivated teachers who not only implement the project but become real ambassadors in their schools, convincing other colleagues to participate and facilitating contact with administration. The strategies followed by the various partners have differed according to their previous national contacts. The use of social media has helped promote and give visibility to the project among the educational community, however it has not resulted in a large number of new teachers' engagement, at least in the first year.

Promotion of the project on JRS Europe's and its national partners' social media has helped give visibility to our work on awareness-raising and education to our existing followers. However, as the main targets of the group are not among JRS' current followers, using social media channels has not resulted in more registrations on the CHANGE website. Acquiring the attention of the target audience for CHANGE will be a long-term process.



Young migrants and students getting to know each other. Spain, September 2019

Partnerships with educational platforms to give visibility to the project among teachers has been crucial; for instance, Magis Education has published several articles about the project, and when classes went online due to COVID-19 restrictions, they shared the adapted materials in several languages for teachers to use in their virtual classes.¹⁰

The CHANGE website has proven quite ineffective when trying to engage new refugees and migrants with the project, as it has more of an educational focus that might feel outside their purview, though sacrificing this focus would instead possibly alienate educators. JRS and partners benefited from their direct contact with refugees and migrants through the different services and accompaniment that they provide to migrants. However, JRS was hoping to start new collaborations, so a further effort has been made to reach out to migrants' associations in the arts and culture sector.

Testimonies from teachers, students and migrants/refugees are shared in CHANGE's blog. It has been probed as a useful tool to give a voice to young people, who do not always find platforms to share their experiences. It has also opened the door to migrants and refugees who participated in the project to tell their stories after having visited students in the schools. Most of these testimonies have been shared on social media to help raise awareness about the topics of migration and asylum, and to promote the project.

In some countries, such as Belgium, direct mailing has been used to reach teachers. In others, materials such as brochures and flyers have been distributed.

¹⁰ www.educatemagis.org/blogs/change-educational-project-on-migration-and-diversity

Recommendations

With the project in its third year, among the lessons learned thus far is that a successful recipe for NGOs to raise awareness in schools is to consider such a programme as a long-term investment. Education is a powerful agent of change, but it takes time and requires proactive involvement of students and teachers, working to foster critical thinking skills. Partners like Centro Astalli (IT), who have been working to raise awareness for 20 years, have pre-existing relationships with dozens or hundreds of schools that they could quickly activate and pitch new ideas to. Many partners had to start from scratch, and there is a real risk of the project running its course just as these partners with smaller networks are hitting their stride. Awareness-raising initiatives need to be supported long-term. Better options need to exist for follow-up funding, in order to expand existing successful EU project, since current evaluation criteria discourages long-term approaches.

Involving stakeholders and collaborating with other organisations running similar initiatives enriched the CHANGE project and its partner organisations, creating synergies and avoiding competition in the different schools. For similar good results, JRS recommends organising national stakeholder meetings, and attending educational and awareness-raising events and networks meetings of other organisations. For example, through their Teaching-About-Refugees school project, the UNHCR organised a biannual informal networking meeting in Brussels, for civil society organisations and institutions interested in educational awareness-raising programmes.

JRS is aware of the European website on Migration-Integration, which gives insight into all the projects funded by national and central AMIF funds.¹¹ It would be valuable for the website to add a collaborative element, allowing for networking between initiatives and organisations working in the same field, especially for sharing experiences and tips on how to maximise the impact of projects' outputs including after the end of funding.

Finally, JRS concludes that the priority of "raising awareness of migrants' contribution to EU societies" under AMIF funding 2014-2020 is an important component to promote the integration of third country nationals and, in particular, of refugees. It is JRS' wish that the new Multi-Annual-Framework 2021-2027 will make funding available for awareness-raising and inclusive education by civil society actors, who, in doing so, would also directly contribute to the implementation of the new EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion.¹²

¹¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country/stories>

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/integration/action-plan-integration-third-country-nationals_en