

SUPPORTING REGIONS, CITIES AND RURAL AREAS IN MIGRANTS' INTEGRATION

Key Messages of Thematic Sessions

1 Housing young refugees: local challenges and good practices

Participants discussed success factors and contingency planning needs for effectively addressing housing challenges arising at two transition stages: when applicants get an international protection status and when unaccompanied children turn 18. Among the most important factors discussed were:

- ❖ Neighbourhood participation: involvement of local communities (neighbours - locals and refugees), for example, inviting locals to visit the reception centre, helps to build trust, raise awareness and find solutions.
- ❖ Offer accompanying integration support: combine housing with integration and other support helps find durable housing solutions at time of transition, e.g. co-housing, self-sufficiency through employment, language training, continuity of social workers accompanying change of school in case of transfers, support life plan development.
- ❖ Consider refugee-specific difficulties: while young refugees face similar difficulties in finding affordable housing as other people, the difficulties are more severe if they are young, often alone, do not have a network, cannot meet the requirements for social housing, face difficulties to navigate the national social system, etc. Local authorities can address the obstacles for example by making subsidy schemes available, offering intermediation services or guarantees for landlords and tenants, cooperating with rental agencies, and improving social housing management, e.g. by not extending social housing for tenants who no longer qualify as priority tenants.
- ❖ Better planning: Local authorities need reliable data on the number and type of persons arriving, e.g. as long as family reunification prospects are uncertain, cities cannot assess future needs for larger apartments. Local authorities also need to participate in a consistent national-regional and multi-departmental planning process.

SPEAKERS

FATMATA SAIDANKAY, Founder, Euro-Africa Diaspora Resettlement Organisation

JÚLIA TRIAS, Cabinet of Marc Serra, City of Barcelona (Spain)

HEIKE THÖNE, Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing, City of Berlin (Germany)

2 First things first: Access to health services

Participants discussed successful practices to facilitate the integration of migrants into a national health care system in Europe. Among the key points discussed were:

- ❖ All migrants – refugees / asylum seekers – and also other categories, such as for example work migrants and students, need to be integrated in health systems and have easy access to services.
- ❖ Currently migrants in many EU countries face cumbersome procedures, which delay/make it difficult to quickly access public health services. A customised approach, simplification, active outreach of health professionals especially to vulnerable migrants (for example the homeless) are important factors to facilitate their access.
- ❖ Interpretation and cultural mediation is crucial while providing health services to migrants who do not master the local language. Interpretation needs to be carefully planned and is often financed by local communities, rather than by already strained health systems. Interpreters need to possess knowledge and understanding of health terminology.

SPEAKERS

APOSTOLOS VEIZIS, Doctors Without Borders (Greece)

NIKOLAOS GKIONAKIS, “Babel” - Day Centre, Athens (Greece)

ALEXIS ANDRIES, Doctors of the World Flanders (Belgium)

OLIVIA B. OBTINARIO, Sauda Commune (Norway)

JOSEP ENRIQUE ROVIRALTA, College of Physicians of Ceuta (Spain)

3 How to develop a local strategy for integration?

Participants discussed the opportunities and challenges of designing integration strategies on the local level. The most important lessons learnt include:

- ❖ For an effective local integration strategy, one should apply a whole-of-community, collective and inclusive approach, where the needs of migrants are taken into account *within* general social policies, without excluding other vulnerable groups.
- ❖ Local integration strategy should also be institutionalised within existing service providers – e.g. schools, health authorities, police and be the result of a vision on what the local authority wants to achieve in terms of integration.
- ❖ Defining a local integration strategy requires a broad and real consultation.
- ❖ Local authorities need to measure and evaluate integration measures, cf. the initiative of the Council of Europe, the Intercultural Cities (ICC) Index (indicators which make it easier to identify where a city stands in relation to intercultural integration).
- ❖ Making migrants visible: they can then to bring their ideas to the table and to build on the skills and competencies they have. Migrants' council is one possibility to do so.
- ❖ National and local authorities need to cooperate.
- ❖ Regional authorities can help to reach rural areas.
- ❖ Flexible integration policy need to be flexible (to react e.g. to an increase of the number of migrants), even it is challenging to find the balance between a long-term approach and the need to deal with deal with emergencies.
- ❖ Raising awareness among staff working with migrants is useful (in local social services, in Public Employment institutions, in healthcare services, in schools etc.)

SPEAKERS

MARINA CHRISTOPHIDES, Intercultural Council of the City of Limassol (Cyprus)

IRENA GUIDIKOVA, Inclusion and Anti-Discrimination Programmes, Council of Europe

ANNA SZADKOWSKA, Social Participation Office, City of Lublin (Poland)

CHARLOTTE SCHNEIDER, Social Action Centre, City of Paris (France)

CÉCILE MINÉ, Direction Social Action for Childhood and Health, City of Paris (France)

DJILLALI LAHIANI, Municipal Council, City of Toulouse (France)

4 Dribbling past the hurdles of integration: how is sport facilitating the integration of refugees across Europe?

Participants discussed how sport can contribute to successfully integrating migrants into their new communities. Among the key points discussed were:

- ❖ There is a need to change the approach to integration. We should stop thinking of it as a problem and make the narrative positive. The focus on the local level is essential as it allows to create links with other policies, such as health, employment or education.
- ❖ Need to know the “landscape” of the community you operate in, to create networks and build a solid structure that can be of help to migrants and refugees not only when it comes to practicing sport, but also in providing support for other issues they encounter, such as housing, language, schooling, insurance etc. It is essential to create networks and exchange good practices.
- ❖ Communication and trust are key elements, integration should be a participative process that involves and listens to the needs/desires of migrants and refugees, without imposing activities to them but asking them what they would like to do and building from there.
- ❖ The support of the local community is essential and it can be difficult to reach. A possible approach would be to reach out to the community and explain any project before the project starts and in detail. Explain who the people involved will be, through which activities, on which budget and make them feel included in the decision-making.
- ❖ Most successful projects involve refugees and migrants at all stages of planning and implementation not only as addressees of the action but also as volunteers, coaches, people working in the administration etc.

SPEAKERS

LAURENT THIEULE, Kraainem Royal Football Club (Belgium) & European Committee of the Regions

VOLKER REHM, Programme “Sport and Refugees”, Sportjugend Hessen (Germany)

DORANTINA LIKAJ, Molenbeek Sport (Belgium)

CARINE NKOUÉ, UEFA Foundation for Children (Switzerland)

PIARA POWAR, FARE Network (UK)

5 The local dimension of integration in EU urban and rural areas: How data and analyses can contribute to policy-making

Participants discussed success factors regarding how local data and analyses can support integration policies. Some of the most important factors identified include:

- ❖ While most efforts to monitor integration have been done at national level, it is key to go beyond 'national averages' and consider experiences and statistics at a more granular scale. Research and data on migration and integration at local level can support the planning and prioritizing of integration measures. They can also facilitate benchmarking and knowledge transfer between various local and regional authorities.
- ❖ Most local, regional and even national authorities in the EU struggle to identify the precise impact of policy intervention on integration outcomes among immigrants. While descriptive statistics may not be sufficient in itself, collecting and using solid data is a first necessary step.
- ❖ To unleash this potential, one needs creative partnerships between all levels (from EU and national to regional and local) aimed at:
 - better use and making sense of existing but also potential data and improve their quality;
 - combining various sources (administrative data, registers, surveys) rather than relying on single/easy data source;
 - supporting rural/smaller authorities in having access and making use of data and evidence and raise their awareness of the importance of quality collection and monitoring;
 - not focussing only on hard measures of integration (employment, poverty) but also considering softer measures such as sense of belonging and other evidence supporting a balanced narrative on migration and transfer of knowledge.

SPEAKERS

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GUIDO TINTORI, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

MANAR AMELI, South Ostrobothnia Youth Association (Finland)

CINZIA CONTI, Italian National Institute of Statistics (Italy)

TIM FORAN, Settlement and Integration Policy, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (Canada)

GERLINDE DOYEN, Department Equal Opportunities, Integration and Civic Integration, Government of Flanders (Belgium)

6 Narrative Matters: Communicating Integration on a Local Level

Participants discussed how local authorities can play a role in the narratives on migration and integration in their communities. The lessons learnt included:

- ❖ Communicating on migrant integration poses several challenges:
 - Success stories of integration policies emerge in the longer term, but investments are needed today.
 - There is lack of evidence and data at the local level. (However, good stories and positive integration examples are also "evidence").
 - Integration narratives that are too responsive to public opinion limit policy options.
 - Successful integration stories are not newsworthy, while failed cases easily capture headlines and interest.
- ❖ Nevertheless, local authorities can shape narratives through communication efforts (such as the anti-rumour campaign in Fuenlabrada or telling positive stories through #immigrationmatters in Canada). They should take into account that:
 - Communication should be tailored to specific audiences and embedded in a broader integration strategy. It should promote the meaningful participation and representation of migrant communities as [New Women Connectors](#) does, or drawing on the potential of migrants as interpreters as in the region of Regen.
 - Data and emotions both matter and should go hand in hand. Understanding citizens' concerns about migration in order to attenuate is essential.
 - Leadership is needed to communicate certain narratives. However, involvement of several stakeholders is necessary, since sometimes the most effective messages do not come from official government institutions, but from the private sector, media or civil society.
 - Media should receive training, data and be rewarded for non-biased reporting (e.g. through awards).
 - Newcomers should be involved in communication activities through communication efforts for migrants, those that include migrants and those developed by migrants. Local authorities should train them to communicate their stories.
- ❖ Collaborative cooperation and partnerships amongst cities should be fostered.
- ❖ The EU can play a unique role in linking the national and local level.

SPEAKERS

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GILLES SPIELVOGEL, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD

ANA TEJERO RODRIGUEZ, City of Fuenlabrada (Spain)

TIM FORAN, Settlement and Integration Policy, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (Canada)

ANILA NOOR, New Women Connectors

KRISTINA BECKERMANN, District of Regen (Germany)

SEVDALINA VOYNOVA, Sofia Development Associations (Bulgaria)

7 Facilitating access to quality basic services for people with a migrant background

Participants discussed what are the main barriers that people with a migrant background face in their attempt to access quality services and possible solutions to facilitate their access. Among the main points discussed were:

- ❖ An [OECD study](#) identified 12 points to promote the effective integration of migrants at the local level.
- ❖ Trust/mistrust in social services can have a very direct impact on accessing/benefiting from social services. A close cooperation between local authorities and civil society organisations, involving volunteers, is paramount to facilitating access to quality basic services for people with a migrant background. The lack of affordable housing, segregated housing and discrimination represent significant barriers in integration policies. Volunteers play an important role in tackling structural barriers.
- ❖ Local authorities are required by international human rights to ensure access to basic services for all, including particular vulnerable groups (e.g. undocumented migrants).
- ❖ The city of Utrecht emphasized the role of civil society organisations in mediation role, in particular in healthcare services. An agreement between cities and the national government is currently piloted in five Dutch cities where cities and civil society organisations provide professional (legal) guidance, shelter, activation programs (education) and access to health care.
- ❖ The Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee issues was established by the municipality of Athens to foster permanent dialogue between the local authority and civil society organisations and to promote cooperation in the fields of access and legal rights, livelihood and access to the labour market, education, health and wellbeing, gender issues.
- ❖ Following the presentation of local examples above, Syed Hasnain gave a personal account of his journey to Europe, highlighting his struggles and the lack of opportunities in accessing services and exercising his rights. He stressed the role of local citizens (volunteers) in bridging the gaps of needs and service provisions.

SPEAKERS

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JAN BRAAT, City of Utrecht (Netherlands)

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LEFTERIS PAPAGIANNAKIS, City of Athens (Greece)

ANNA PICCINI, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD

8 The Role of Young People in Migrant Integration

Participants discussed success factors on how to facilitate integration through a stronger involvement of young people and youth work. Some of the most important factors identified include:

- ❖ Apply a long term vision when designing integration activities.
- ❖ Create space and opportunities that will bring together newcomers and host society.
- ❖ Focus on providing the newcomers with (non-formal learning) educational activities with a special focus on language learning.
- ❖ Help newly arriving migrants/refugees access the public services at the local level (housing, education, health, etc.). Use intermediaries between migrants and institutions/public to help them connect.
- ❖ Promote/facilitate recognition of studies/skills of the migrants to promote their integration in the educational/professional systems.
- ❖ Carry out communication campaigns that help create positive feelings in the local population about helping migrants/refugees.
- ❖ Provide training to youth workers to cope with integration challenges. Be aware of the different needs young people have depending on their age (minors/adolescents/young adults).
- ❖ Allow newcomers to participate in the co-creation of non-formal learning activities which in turn will ensure their participation and will maximise the results.
- ❖ Provide opportunities/incentives to involve and promote synergies with the private sector in integration activities.

SPEAKERS

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SOPHIE LIESENBORGs, Municipality of Leuven (Belgium)

DESPOINA KONTOULA, International Organisation for Migration, IOM

MICHALIS MOSCHOVAKOS, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sports and Culture, European Commission

9 Innovative Financial Instruments

Participants discussed innovative approaches to financing integration projects and policies. The main takeaways from this session are:

- ❖ Social finance has a big potential to address integration challenges and complement public allocations. Several incubator pilot projects were set up with support of investments funds, private companies, foundations and local/national banks. The initiatives built up on the entrepreneurship spirit of migrants to set up their own businesses or to enable social enterprises to include migrants in community activities.
- ❖ Loans, guarantees and social impact bonds are among the most used financial instruments to foster integration of migrants into local communities and on the labour market. Finance could also help addressing housing challenges faced by asylum seekers in the reception phase.
- ❖ The European Investment Bank and the European Investment Advisory Hub are important players in supporting financial engineering and preparation of the intervention schemes.
- ❖ There is a need for continuing awareness raising actions and supporting the development of investments platforms composed of relevant administrations, service providers and financial institutions (including national and local banks).
- ❖ It matters to develop a positive narrative about the benefits of social public-private partnership and the use of EU funds and the InvestEU guarantee to lever private capital in a win-win situation.

SPEAKERS

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