

NALAS Statement

on Local Governments facing the challenges and impacts of refugee crisis in South East Europe

Zagreb, October 2015

Background: Municipalities of South-East Europe are the first affected by the refugee influx

The SEE Region is witnessing an unprecedented massive refugee influx, testing the capacities of national and local institutions throughout the transit and recipient countries to ensure wellbeing of the refugees, but also the local populations.

A specific feature of the refugee crisis in SEE is that this region is a transit zone for the refugees aiming for the Western EU countries. Consequently, the situation on the field is changing rapidly, making planning and coordination exceptionally difficult. The local centres designated to receive refugees are insufficient in one moment, and deserted in another.

Local governments, in many cases small bordering municipalities, were the first affected by the influx overstressing their limited resources for supporting the refugees, while in the same time maintaining regular municipal services. On daily basis, local governments are simultaneously confronted with several challenges: (1) providing in a very short period of time shelter, food and allocating significant resources for sanitation and other necessary municipal services to dramatically increased number of people, while (2) maintaining the regular level of public services for their citizens, (3) finding the necessary funds and means to perform all the above, and (4) communicating with both the refugees and the local population in a way to avoid tensions and promote solidarity.

The overall support to local governments in facing these challenges proved to be inefficient and inadequate; in most cases national governments were slow to provide appropriate guidance and coordination, the communication and data exchange often failed, funding mechanisms were not appropriate or missing, centralized, slow and complicated. At the same time, the inter-municipal cross-border cooperation failed to provide information exchange among the local decision-makers and concrete assistance.

As daily life actually happens in local communities, this situation has proved once again that local governments are key stakeholders and must be included, as such, in discussions on dealing with the refugee crisis in all levels, European, regional and national. To be able to deal with the crisis, the national governments and international community must ensure appropriate support for the affected municipalities.

Immediate needs and challenges of individual local governments affected by the influx of refugees:

- *Needs related to the provision of the most urgent assistance:* shelter, food, sanitation, health care, clothing, mediation with the refugees, professional assistance in dispute management, security. Support in upscaling municipal services: drain pumps, transport vehicles and trucks, waste management equipment (containers, bins, tractors) and equipment related to water supply infrastructure, mobile toilets, utility connections, gas amenities, wi-fi facilities, etc.);
- *Challenges related to the inappropriate information flow, planning and preparation:* chaotic registration procedure, blocked traffic, refugees moving across the agricultural fields, using alternative roads, evident lack of coordination with national authorities, but also with neighbouring municipalities within the country and across borders;
- *Financial problems:* funds from municipal budgets were urgently spent for assisting refugees, which created a deficit in the local budgets for regular services to citizens, while state authorities are slow in bridging the gap;
- *Consequences for the local communities:* degradation of the environment, safety and health concerns, deterioration of the regular level of services provided to citizens.

Proposed measures: Time for action by all

Taking record of all the above, the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), consisting of 16 members, Local Government Associations, representing 9,000 local governments with over 80 million citizens, appeals that the national governments, the European Union, the donors and other relevant actors take urgent measures to address the following immediate and long term priorities:

National governments:

- *Provide strategic guidance to local governments.* Assess the expected duration of the crisis, numbers of people to be expected, their movements and intentions. Based on this, adopt general rules, standards and guidelines that enable fast and flexible response to emergencies.
- *Establish a mechanism of multi-level governance,* in which local authorities have a much stronger role. This includes and is not limited to:
 - Careful joint planning, locating hot-spots, anticipating potential changes and possible domino effects;
 - Data collection and exchange on daily basis;
 - Joint planning for securing the financing of all relevant needs in a timely manner (including earmarked grants for the affected municipalities);
 - Involving the LGs in programming of EU and other donor funds for addressing the refugee crisis, since only the national governments are eligible to mobilise and receive such funds.

Local governments:

- Regardless of the state borders, local governments need to cooperate with one another, especially in establishing mechanisms for mutual support in emergency situations, in which the exchange of information is of crucial importance;

- NGOs are important actors in dealing with crisis – they are flexible, adaptable and capable of creating networks. Thus, in addressing the refugee crisis, local leaderships might find a partner in credible NGOs;
- Local governments should play an important role in communicating the new situation to their citizens and making them part of the solution. The relationship with the media is important in supporting empathy and solidarity.

The European Union:

- Establishing a quick-response mechanism is necessary to help the local governments face the refugee influx. Therefore, the EU should consider simplifying the procedures for providing funds to national governments affected by the crisis.
- The EU should consider opening some of the funding mechanisms in the area of refugees and migration that are currently available only to member states to the candidate countries as well.
- The EU should improve the coordination between its instruments for EU and non EU-Member States.
- The EU should use its mechanisms to make national authorities in non-EU countries understand and take into account the needs of the affected municipalities when applying for funds related to the refugee crisis.

The donors:

- The donors should provide urgent and substantial support to municipalities affected by the refugee crisis in addressing the immediate needs listed above;
- The donors should support NALAS and the LGAs in their advocacy and coordination activities towards the EU and the national governments; in collecting, updating and managing data; in conducting needs assessments; in developing technical specifications for the needs of municipalities; in preparing applications for funding and organizing events to discuss possible solutions for the crisis;
- The donor community should consider a more comprehensive approach if the crisis lasts longer and if part of the refugees will settle in the region for longer period. Such support could include thorough research of all relevant aspects related to the settling of refugees, integrating them into local communities, providing all necessary services in the longer run and building capacities of all relevant institutions.

To assist its member LGAs and their members, the local governments, **NALAS** commits to:

- Support its member LGAs in advocating national governments to activate the available EU funds for dealing with the refugee crisis;
- Partner with CEMR and other relevant organisations to advocate for eliminating administrative obstacles to provide efficient utilization of EU funds for dealing with the refugee crisis;
- Set-up coordination and cooperation instruments between the Southeast-European municipalities ;
- Develop a good practice platform and guidelines, that will be based on the multi-annual experiences of LGs from the Region in dealing with crisis;
- Work on codifying the current experience and drawing lessons learned that could improve response to future possible waves of refugees.

List of Participants of the Zagreb meeting:

	Name Surname	Function	Organization
1	Emil Draghici	NALAS President, Mayor of Vulcana-Bai	Association of Communes of Romania
2	Naim Ismajli	NALAS First Vice President, Mayor of Shtime	Association of Kosovo Municipalities
3	Darko Fras	NALAS Third Vice President, Mayor of Sv. Trojica	Slovenian Association of Towns and Municipalities
4	Ivica Klem	Mayor of Njemci	UORH - Association of Municipalities of Croatia
5	Ruža Veselčić Šijaković	Mayor of Tovarnik	UORH - Association of Municipalities of Croatia
6	Ivan Hanžek	Mayor of Zabok	UGRH, Association of Cities of Croatia
7	Andrija Rudic	Mayor of Kutina	UGRH, Association of Cities of Croatia
8	Sasa Paunovic	Mayor of Parachin	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
9	Dr.Mihalj Bimbo	Mayor od Kanjiza	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
10	Robert Lacko	Chairperson of Kanjiza Municipal Assembly	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
11	Zuver Cetinkaya	Deputy Secretary General	Kahramanmaras Metropolitan Municipality
12	Abdulkadir Yeler	Expert	Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality
13	Ilir Sadriu	Head of LED office Presevo	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
14	Milimir Vujadinovic	Member of Novi Sad Municipal Assembly	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
15	Zorica Vukelic	Deputy Secretary General	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
16	Nives Kopajtich-Skrlec	Coordinator	Association of Cities of Croatia
17	Mladen Ivanovic	Deputy Secretary General	Association of Municipalities of Croatia
18	Sazan Ibrahimimi	Executive Director	Association of Kosovo Municipalities
19	Vesna Travljanin	General Secretary	Association of Municipalities and cities of the Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina
20	Agron Haxhimali	Executive Director	Albanian Association of Communes
21	Sergiu Tara	Secretary General	Association of Communes of Romania
22	Mustafa Ozkul	International Cooperation Director	Union of Municipalities of Marmara
23	Veselka Ivanova	NALAS Knowledge Management Assistant	National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria
24	Branislav Misovic	NALAS Knowledge Management Assistant	Association of Towns and Municipalities of Republic of Srpska of B&H
25	Irena Nikolov	Program Officer	Association of the Units of Local Self-government of Republic of Macedonia
26	Adrian Miroiu Lamba	Project Officer	Association of Communes of Romania
27	Darko Drndic	Advisory Center Manager	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
28	Adrian Stefancu	Liaison Officer	Romanian Federation of Local Authorities
29	Vesna Fabris	NALAS Knowledge Management Assistant	Association of Municipalities of Croatia
30	Kelmend Zajazi	Executive Director	NALAS Secretariat
31	Boran Ivansoki	Program Officer	NALAS Secretariat
32	Milena Garthley	Program Officer	NALAS Secretariat
33	Jelena Janevska	Knowledge and Communications Manager	NALAS Secretariat
34	Natasha Iljeva Acevska	Program Officer	NALAS Secretariat
35	Joachim Roth	Eu Project Officer, CIM expert	NALAS Secretariat
36	Michael Samec	Project Manager	GIZ Institutional Strengthening Project to NALAS
37	Christophe di Marco	Fund Manager	GIZ Open Regional Fund MMS
38	Pavle Donev	Component Manager & Country Coordinator	GIZ Open Regional Fund MMS
39	Regula Babler	Local Governance and Migration Advisor	FDFA - Swiss Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina
40	Svetlana Zdravkovska	Program Officer	GIZ Institutional Strengthening Project to NALAS
41	Regula Babler	Local Governance and Migration Advisor	FDFA - Swiss Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina
42	Carlos Mascarell Villar	Policy Officer on Governance and Citizenship	CEMR - Council of European Municipalities and Regions
43	Emanuela Hanes	Office on Social Cohesion / Demographic Changes	The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns
44	Alexandra Schantl	Project Officer	KDZ - Centre for Public Administration Research
45	Alexandra Pres	Expert	GIZ Open Regional Fund MMS
46	Bernd Burwitz	Expert	GIZ Institutional Strengthening Project to NALAS