

inclusions

INCLUSION GOES LOCAL

TRANSLATING PROJECT
PRACTICES INTO POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS

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Foreword

Local and regional governments (LRGs) are at the forefront of providing a human rights-based reception for newcomers. They provide services related to housing, health, employment, and education, to children and adults alike, for example by offering local language courses, and facilitating the recognition and transferability of qualifications. Also in the longer term, local and regional governments have a crucial role to play in supporting entrepreneurship, social cohesion, reducing inequalities, integrating newcomers who wish to stay, and valuing their history and contributions to the local life. LRGs can also foster dialogue between different segments of the population, from the youngest to the oldest, regardless of their origin and sex, contributing together to the transformation of the environment in which they live. In a globalised world, there is a human and social interdependence, beyond the economic one, for which inhabitants of a city are co-responsible and co-creator. In this perspective, global citizenship education is a crucial policy for municipalities and regions to enable people to contribute constructively, to develop a critical mindset and thus counteract hate speech, discriminations and exclusion that undermine coexistence in a peaceful society.

What is at stake now?

In 2022, the war in Ukraine accelerated the number of asylum applications received in the EU and allowed the rapid activation of the Temporary Protection Directive. The EU was quick to trigger this unprecedented mechanism to respond to the immediate needs of asylum seekers. European funds were also quickly redirected and made flexible in their use (state aid, AMIF, cohesion and structural funds), in order to facilitate the reception and integration of the fleeing population. The mobilisation of citizens has also been very strong, accompanied by a generally positive political discourse in favour of rapid reception under good conditions. This approach gives hope that European and national institutions will be able to show solidarity in the event of a massive influx of refugees leaving precarious situations, war, or crisis elsewhere in the world. A positive narrative for all refugees, whatever their origin, as we have seen, is crucial for welcoming them in full respect of human rights, quickly, and with a strong recognition of existing competences and qualifications which paves the way for a better integration on the labour market and in the socio-political life of the country.

Coordination between institutions at different levels, from local and regional to national and European, has allowed a constant dialogue on the needs and capacities already in place and the gaps to be filled. Increasing this collaboration outside of crisis periods, in a counter-cyclical way we might say, would facilitate long-term responses to future crises and possible influxes, whether related to environmental change and extreme weather events, geopolitical instability and conflict or war, or even new forms of economic adaptability. Partnership and regular dialogue will enable rapid responses in the future and build resilience at all levels.

Systematic communication and coordination mechanisms between different levels of government (including European, national, regional, and local) are needed when the issue of migration is at stake. We strongly believe in the added value of initiating a positive and fruitful exchange of ideas between LRGs, national and European institutions on the overall European migration approach.

Finally, inclusion is a permanent process of learning, participation and understanding. Cooperation between local and regional governments and administrations is crucial in order to constantly improve their public policies and approaches, whether between cities with different degrees of experience in this field, or between territories of first arrival, transit, and destination.

The IncluCities project, from which we draw lessons in this paper, is part of this approach.

Marlène Simeon, Director of Operations, CEMR

Introduction

This policy paper aims at linking the advocacy and policy work that CEMR does with the evidence-based practices experienced in the three year-long project [IncluCities](#), in the field of migrants' integration at local level. The main goals of the paper are to stress the importance that projects have in acting as a springboard for better policies thanks to the exchange that cities and regions have had during its life cycle, and to come up with concrete policy recommendations that can be valid for most territories in Europe.

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) represents the interests of Europe's local and regional governments (LRGs) and their associations in 40 countries. It promotes citizenship and exchange between elected representatives. The CEMR advocacy and policy work in the field of migration dates back to 2013 with the creation of a Thematic Network on Integration and Diversity, which was then transformed into a Task Force on Migration and Integration, boosting the participation of more CEMR member associations. Most recently, in December 2022, the task force has been formalised into a permanent Expert Group on Migration and Inclusion. Participation in and partnerships with several networks of local and regional governments has been one of the main tools to advocate for their role in the policy making arena and to foster a more effective multilevel governance in the field of migrant integration. The Urban Agenda Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, an initiative by DG HOME, together with participation in the activities of the Migration and Integration department of the UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments), and the latest initiative of the Committee of the Regions, Cities and Regions for the Integration of Migrants are an example of this constant engagement. A series of more ad-hoc collaboration and exchange of practices have been put in place between the CEMR, the EPIM network and the GFMD-Mayor Mechanism (jointly steered by IOM, Mayors Migration Council and UCLG). The information produced during these exchanges in the last three years has contributed to the final policy recommendation contained in this paper, alongside with the practices observed and built during the IncluCities project. What was the project about?

1. The project

IncluCities project has been the flagship project of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) for the last three years. Funded by the AMIF programme¹, it brought together eight cities and six national associations of local and regional governments² (CEMR members). The workload was divided in three main phases that contributed to a massive collection of information on the topic of local practices of integration in six small and medium sized cities, across six EU Member States: Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, and Spain. The project was developed following a mentoring scheme methodology that saw mentee cities and associations of local governments on one side, supported by mentor cities and associations of local governments on the other side. The objective of this structure was to put in place a peer-to-peer learning scheme ensuring a constant exchange of (good) practices between the different tiers of governments, including the EU level assured by the CEMR. The main final product of the mentee cities and their associations was an Action Plan based on the specific needs of the city, while the main product for the mentor cities and associations was an online one-stop-shop that contained all the relevant information regarding inclusion at the local level for all sorts of newcomers.

¹AMIF-2018-AG-INTE project n.863770

² Schaerbeek and Brussels City accompanied by BRULOCALIS (BE); Jelgava accompanied by LALRG (LV); Saint-Jean-de-la-Ruelle accompanied by AFCCRE (FR); Fuenlabrada accompanied by FEMP (ES); Levadia accompanied by KEDE (EL); Capaci accompanied by AICCRE (IT) and Mechelen accompanied by VVSG (BE).

Learn

The first phase of the project focused on the compilation of needs analyses for each of the four mentee cities, and it corresponded to the preliminary learning process essential for a complete understanding of the local context, its challenges, and potential elements to use as leverage for the future actions. This phase was carried out with the technical support of the consultancy Migration Work CIC, specialised in the approach with local communities³.

Connect

The second phase corresponded to the implementation of the study visits. These were the occasion for the mentor city and the mentee city (and their respective accompanying national association of local and regional governments) to meet, together with the Local Support Network of both cities, formed by local stakeholders (mainly associations, diaspora organizations and citizens initiatives). The study visits were developed following a scheme of two visits in the mentee city and one visit to the mentor city to explore and connect with contexts from both perspectives. This phase lasted for one year and half and it was the background for the first capitalisation activities of the project: the Transfer Knowledge Workshops. The study visits were essential for conceiving the Action Plans, the main project products created by the mentee cities. Each Action Plan contains a strategy, declined with concrete actions, that should serve the scope of implementing a more effective integration policy towards Third Country Nationals (TCNs) and other newcomers in the city.

Capitalise

Phase three represented the capitalisation chapter of the project, and it was therefore oriented towards the external dissemination of the results of the process launched by the project actions on both mentor and mentee side. The concrete outcome was a series of four Transfer Knowledge Workshops and four Training Academies. The workshops were meant to share the first results of the Action Plans by the mentee cities and their associations with the other mentee cities and associations working in pairs in the project. On the other hand, the academies were the occasion for the mentor cities and associations to showcase the one-stop-shops and to foster the discussion on multilevel governance at the national level with relevant stakeholders and policy makers.

2. The role of the national associations of local and regional governments

CEMR is an umbrella organisation, representing nearly 60 associations of LRGs in 40 European countries, and the work done at the Secretariat level corresponds to a specific strategy led by the CEMR Policy Committee. The Policy Committee is the largest deliberative body of CEMR, it is composed by elected representatives that are members of the national associations who serve for three-year mandates. This structure ensures a large diversity of inputs, priorities and needs that the Secretariat then condenses in an upscaling exercise to advocate for them vis-à-vis the EU institutions. This step is essential to understand the role that the associations of LRGs play in the projects, as well as in the policy decisions and priorities within CEMR level.

In Includities, the ecosystem of the project was built on a three-level basis: CEMR as lead partner and appointed for the systematisation and upscaling of the inputs collected, the national associations of LRGs (one per involved country, as the bridging partner between the municipalities and the CEMR), and the municipalities as the beneficiaries and implementers of some of the main actions in the project. The associations of LRGs, both in their roles of mentor or mentee, contributed fundamentally to a good steering of the project, accompanying the cities during the implementation of the actions they were

³ They worked on a specific set of guidelines within the 'Implementoring' project with Eurocities on mentoring schemes and programmes as an effective vehicle for better migrants' integration policies. More information here: <https://www.migrationwork.org/work/implementoring>

required to do and in a mutual learning process between different realities, while also disseminating at the national level the ongoing results from the project. They were the structural partners while the cities the implementing partners and in this framework the role of the associations was to support the choice of the actions for the mentee cities according to the priorities at a national level as well as to the type of narrative they wanted to highlight on the specific issue of migration and inclusion. This has been the case also for the mentor cities and their associations, as in their case the one-stop-shop and the Training Academies served the scope to counterbalance a negative narrative on a national level by adding evidence-based practices and information to the discussion on the policy-making process and on the delivery of specific services for newcomers.

3. From project actions to policy recommendations

These policy recommendations represent an effort towards a systematisation of the practices, data, interviews, and fieldworks done during the implementation of the project and are built on:

- the exploration of the main challenges and needs that local and regional governments experience on the ground in Belgium, France, Italy, Greece, Latvia, and Spain;
- the identification of best practices that worked well also when transplanted in other local contexts (transferability);
- the Action Plans developed by the mentee cities, and the evaluation results in terms of sustainability of the actions.

(1) **Integration as a holistic process:** evidences from all the municipalities involved in the project and especially those municipalities who have started to host migrants only recently, show the need to rethink integration policies, in the long run, in a more holistic way. They should follow the Whole Community approach, considering the entire population of a city and avoid the polarisation and dichotomy between the newcomers and the ‘old’ citizens. Services need to be conceived for all, in a collaborative, smart and open co-design approach that if chosen, will also increase the possibility that newcomers could actively participate in the socio-political life of the city as they feel entitled to do so, as local citizens. The local citizenship⁴ is one of the different ways to strengthen the links with a territorial form of belonging that, in the short and medium-term, is the first one that newcomers will experience and that will enhance the possibility of co-creating an inclusive city for all.

(2) **From integration to inclusion:** if integration means a one-way process in which the newcomer has to learn and then adapt to the new environment, inclusion implies a multilevel and multidirectional process in which the community as a whole is involved in shaping a new form of coexistence, in moulding a new paradigm of living together in a way that makes everyone comfortable. The demand to be recognised as agents of the change and not anymore as mere subjects of policies shifted the paradigm of the old Gastarbeiter approach⁵, at least culturally. This shift is also well-represented by the latest EU Commission Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, where for the first time the Commission is pledging for a holistic inclusion instead of a cluster-oriented integration.

⁴ Peer Learning Exercise N.28 UCLG, MC2CM project paper, March 2021 accessible here: https://learning.uclg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/28_local_citizenship_and_migration.pdf

⁵ <https://www.thegame.photos/en/series/diasporas-and-dichotomy/guest-workers-germany/>

- (3) **Train the ecosystem, not just one actor** offering training and expertise exchange (through study visits or other form of practice sharing) is an essential tool to ensure the sustainability of any actions that involve local authorities. Building on the old but gold tool of twinning and revitalising it under the form of mentoring pairs or exchange between peers on policy issues, like integration of TCNs, has been proved as very effective and beneficial for both parties. This is especially valid when the training or the sharing practice is built in cooperation with the entire ecosystem of existing organisations working on the same topic in the local territory⁶. This process ensures a broader outreach, a multiplier effect, and a greater chance of sustainability of the action after the end of the project funding, because a specific collaboration mechanism have been put in place.
- (4) **Meaningful participation as a basic need:** political volatility can affect the continuity of the action, beyond the end of the project and sometimes also while the project is still ongoing—for example, if elections take place during the project lifecycle. A good risk prevention strategy would be to ensure that meaningful participation is treated as a basic need and thus formally recognised in a legal endorsement by the local authorities, following the procedures each municipality has to adopt binding resolutions. This approach builds resilience in policy formulation and it is applicable to every policy field.



<< If the door is open, it does not mean everyone will come in. when we say that the theoretical framework does not match reality, it reinforces the need to include migrants in all policy cycles. Their stories and experiences must drive policy and be included in policy design and implementation. So, we do not just leave the door open. We keep it open, we give directions, and we invite people to come in. That is how we ensure equal access for all⁷>>

Razan Ismail, Founder of Association Kudwa, Barcelona

- (5) **Women's participation is essential** to see an improvement in the overall participation of migrant communities in the socio-cultural and political life of a city or a region. Amongst all the actions implemented in the different Action Plans in the four mentee cities, and in best practices presented by the mentor cities, at least one third were clearly and specifically addressed to migrant women and girls. This was the result of a combined approach between the first need analysis conducted in the mentee cities and the political will of the local councils that recognised the multiplier role of women in the diaspora communities. This is also backed up by several studies⁸ and it is also stressed in the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, where the mainstreaming of gender and anti-discrimination priorities is underlined in the entire document. *The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life*⁹ offers guidance for local governments to promote gender equality in their territories, including in terms of balanced political representation (Art. 2), participation in political and civic life

⁶ Brulocalis Note de Bureau N.10 Projet Inclucities, Resultats du Projet et perspectives/recommandations, March 2023, accessible here : https://brulocalis.brussels/sites/default/files/2023-04/20230320-Bureau_Note_Inclucities-FR.pdf

⁷ <https://www.kudwa.org/post/if-the-door-is-open-it-doesn-t-mean-everyone-will-come-in>

⁸How do female migration and gender discrimination in social institutions mutually influence each other?, OECD working paper n.326, 2015 <https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/WPAE%20326.pdf>

⁹ https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_European_charter_for_equality_EN.pdf

(Art. 3), tackling multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage (Art. 10) as well as social inclusion (Art. 18).



<< Women migrants and refugees are mostly viewed as passive recipients of migration and integration policies. When I was a newcomer myself in Europe in 2015, I realised how crucial it was to be involved in these issues because they are the root causes of gender inequality in the response to humanitarian crises. Shifting that paradigm and considering women as active participants is key to economic resilience. >>

Anila Noor, World Refugee and Migration Council¹⁰

- (6) **A more effective multilevel governance: multilevel governance is essential to the co-creation of inclusive policies.** LRGs need to be supported with ad-hoc and flexible funding resources, monitored by periodic direct evaluations that would also facilitate the transfer of knowledge between different tiers of governments as well as between peers. Since 2011, the European Commission recognises the essential role of local and regional authorities in the integration process, with the European Agenda for Integration¹¹ that explicitly mentions the need for multi-level cooperation and how the management of the integration process is a shared responsibility as well as the the accessibility of funding resources for LRGs, that usually passes by the national governments. As a matter of fact, in the new Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion 2021-2017, the EU Commission stresses even more the dimension of multi-level governance and multi-stakeholders' partnership applied to integration processes including, for the first time, all people with migrant background, meaning not only newcomers but people already present on the local territory, with a path of migration behind them. However, the concrete application of multilevel governance is not always a simple or easily doable task and most of the times this occurs because of stringent policies at a national level that prevent the local level from acting in a more autonomous way. A very good example of a piloting action in this direction is the Urban Agenda for the EU [Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees](#). Active since 2016, it includes a multitude of stakeholders, working at the urban level, and it aims at reaching a common ground of action between different tiers of governments in EU Member States. CEMR and Eurocities have been involved in its creation and are currently active members of the Partnership.
- (7) **Work in cluster-advocacy approach:** even if it may sound anachronistic, the cluster approach is actually a very good way to start if it is taken on a content-wise structure. Local and regional governments often lack the time and the resources to scan and monitor the third sector operating in all the social fields that are subject to the local governance. What LRGs experienced in IncluCities is that creating a thematic Local Support Network that includes a wide (and permanent) range of associations and organisations working in the field of local inclusion, was the most effective way to gather updated information on what was going on the ground, reliable data and accountable partners for activities and policy guidance. It is worth mentioning that not all the LRG associations share the same power structure and leverages in each of the countries involved in the project and this translates with more or less bargaining power vis-à-vis the national government. In this sense, it is even more relevant for those associations with less

¹⁰ <https://wrmcouncil.org/news/opinion/inclusive-policy-making-to-give-women-migrants-opportunities-for-resilience-and-financial-independence/>

¹¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0455:FIN:en:PDF>

bargaining power to join forces with other relevant stakeholders on specific issues to gain more credibility and thus be able to sit at the national consultation tables and influence on a more consistent basis.

4. Conclusion

These recommendations represent one of the outputs of the work CEMR does at different levels of political representation, local, regional and European. The input that those recommendations want to give to the policy and decision makers at the European level is clear: local and regional governments are not only the frontrunners for the reception and inclusion actions but also the main actor for an effective understanding of the new socio-demographic trends at the national level. They need to be empowered and brought to the national discussion tables on a permanent basis, no matter the administrative structure of the country. Small and medium sized cities have the right to be represented at the same tables through their associations, in an effort to systematize the inputs and produce more effective policies aiming at reaching a long-term impact. In some cases, the inclusion of newcomers represents also a way to boost the depopulation of some areas¹² combining the presence of new people with new needs, in terms of services and structures and thus bring new life into depressed areas, boosting the economic and social fabrics. This discussion is nowadays even more important where we assist at the European level to the consultation on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. In the entire legislative package, LRGs are rarely mentioned (only a couple of times) and this paper would like to contribute to make space in the EU political arena for local authorities to be listened in the consultation about the legislative documents that, as the New Pact, will have a direct impact on their daily administration.

¹² <https://whole-comm.eu/working-papers/comparative-paper-on-local-integration-policies-and-multi-level-policy-making-interactions-in-smstra/>

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