

Key points for the Public Consultation on the integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background

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Integration happens at the local level

Cities are key stakeholders in integrating migrants and refugees and they do so in a successful and sustainable manner. As the context at the local level is shaped by policies at the EU and national level, cities need to be closely involved in integration policy making. This document gives a brief summary of cities' main priorities and needs and includes best practice city examples for thematic focal points suggested for the Action Plan.

Provide more and direct funding to cities

Cities need **more direct access to EU funding** to support their integration measures at the local level. This is important to ensure that integration needs are met in a concise, swift and practical way. Initiatives such as the *Urban Innovative Actions* (UIA) are a very good starting point and need to be expanded with a topical focus on integration measures.

Many cities have already put in place integration strategies, projects and programmes that sustainably integrate migrants and refugees and include them in local societies. EU funding can often focus on innovative practices that promise short-term success, which ignores the fact that existing best practices that are proven to work need to be extended. Integration measures in cities therefore require **more long-term structural support** to ensure their continued success.

Cities should be more closely involved together with national managing authorities **to determine the usage of funds** (especially AMIF and ESF+) on the local level. This is especially the case in contexts where the national level may be reluctant to use EU funding for integration.

The funding dispensed in the context of the **recovery from the pandemic** (especially the *Recovery and Resilience Facility*) needs to take an inclusive approach. Migrants and refugees have been impacted heavily by the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Any recovery and/or future funding on integration needs to take this into account to offset the negative consequences of the pandemic on migrant communities. The European Commission should also encourage member states to see migrant integration as a priority when drafting their National Recovery Plans and implementing EU funds for the post-Covid-19 recovery.

Expand structures for multi-level dialogue

Cities should be included at all stages of putting integration policy making into action on the ground. They should be **consistently involved in the different actions arising out of the new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion as equal partners** with the European Commission and the member states.

Spaces for multi-level dialogue across the local, national and EU level governance structure need to be expanded. *The Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees* is a good example of an initiative that brings a diverse range of actors to the same table, especially also in its current second phase. This Partnership should continue to be strengthened and more opportunities be created to bring local and national governments at the same table when discussing EU policies.

Cities need **more direct communication channels** with the EU level. This holds true both for public dialogues (for instance through the *European Migration Forum* or the 2019 Conference *Go Local: Supporting Regions, Cities and Rural Areas in Migrants' Integration*) as well as for more direct and informal exchange. More city-EU Commission dialogues on migration and integration are needed to allow cities to provide real time feedback about local challenges, bottlenecks and solutions. As the network representing cities' interests at the EU level, Eurocities welcomes the involvement in future dialogues.

Invest in capacity building for cities

Capacity building, mutual learning and the exchange on good practices is a key element in fostering successful integration strategies in cities. It increases collaboration and cross-fertilisation in cities and has proven effective in spreading best practices that are applicable in different national contexts.

Eurocities' commitment through our Working Group Migration & Integration and our work in several EU-funded migration projects is a key outlet for city-to-city cooperation across Europe. Actions arising out of the Action Plan should be linked to such existing good practices to disseminate their learnings and support a sustainable approach. Special attention should be paid to more closely involving cities in Southern and Eastern Europe and/or those with a more recent focus on migration and integration.

Thematic priorities and good practices in cities

Migrant integration is a cross-cutting issue that spans across manifold policy areas. Although specific measures addressed at the population of migrant origin are needed, **integration should be mainstreamed** across other policies in education, housing, employment, or health, to name a few. Measures that promote the integration of migrants do not exclusively benefit them but are also beneficial for the broader society.

Many European cities know that investing in the integration of migrants is investing in the well-being of whole societies. This is the approach taken by Helsinki, whose 2017-2021 Integration Programme has as a key goal for the entire city to achieve successful integration. This means that all new measures and projects supporting integration are included in the programme of each policy sector. Munich also developed its Master Plan for the Integration of Refugees, adopted in 2016 and pursued in 2019, whereby all municipal departments are responsible for mainstreaming integration within their own units. The Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion should endorse a similar stance and ensure that integration is mainstreamed across all thematic policy areas.

Building inclusive societies

Integration is a two-way-street, and policies should not only target the migrant population, but also strive to create more inclusive societies. The Action Plan should include more resources and specific actions devoted to **strengthening welcoming societies, fight stereotyping, racism and xenophobia** and combat the negative narrative around migrants that has been growing in the past years.

Cities are making strong efforts to raise the profile of their integration and inclusion measures. Milan organises a yearly event where the entire city declares its commitment to inclusiveness and anti-discrimination. Nicosia organises several events that bring together locals and newcomers and has a day dedicated to anti-racism journalism and combatting hate speech. The European Commission should support such strategies that seek to build inclusive communities and cities.

Inclusion is also fostered through **anti-discrimination policies** in the workplace and the **diversification of workforces**. This also involves increasing the diversity of public staff. Cities are leading examples in this. Ghent adopted an action plan to ensure that by 2020, 30% of new city employees had a migration background, and Leipzig has a proactive diversity strategy whereby it directly approaches individuals with migrant background at job fairs or by giving presentations on career opportunities in migrant communities. Barcelona has trained over 5,000 civil servants, including police officers and teachers, on human rights and non-discrimination; and similar programmes reach 1,500 Munich employees every year. The European Commission should support cities in the development and implementation of these strategies, as well as strive for greater diversity within the EU institutions.

Employment and skills

The Action Plan should include targeted support to the **employment of migrants**. Training and skills development are key to ensure long-term integration in the labour market. The European Commission should support initiatives that help **migrants reskill and upskill, learn the local language and have their qualifications and skills recognised in their host countries**.

City practices show that timely recognition of qualifications eases labour market integration. In Tampere, for example, the International Skills Centre helps residents of migrant background enter the labour market through a comprehensive two-week skills assessment, including soft skills and language command. Tampere also offers subsidised work experiences for migrants, whereby they can obtain official recognition of their skills and enter the regular job market afterwards. Cities need more support to draft and implement such programmes. The European Commission should support cities with guidance on how to recognise qualifications. Capacity building on the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals, as well as its further adaptation to local level needs, could be a practical step towards direct EU-local cooperation on this topic.

Cooperation between cities and employers and business associations should be strengthened, for a better matching of migrants' skills to labour market needs. Solna is a good example of how continuous dialogue with migrants and employers leads to careful and thorough matching of labour market needs and increases the chances of long-term employment (83% of participants obtained employment). Stockholm has recently launched a network of business, non-profit and public sector organisations to coordinate efforts to train newly arrived migrants and help them find employment. The Action Plan should include direct support for cities in establishing such networks and providing incentives to

businesses to participate. On the EU level, more spaces for interaction between the EU Partnership on Integration and city networks or the Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees can contribute to fostering collaboration.

Education and children

Education plays a crucial role in fostering migrant integration from an early age. Cities play a strong role in the **provision of education and services to children**, including migrant children. Cities need support to diminish the impact that their socioeconomic background can have in educational performance, paying special attention to children of migrant origin. These measures should not only target migrant children but also second and third generation, for whom substantial disadvantages remain.

Many cities have measures in place to provide children of migrant origin with **specialised educational support**. Ghent has dedicated schools where newcomers aged 12 to 18 can learn Dutch, in preparation to enter the regular education system. Others, like Rubi, have special reception classrooms that offer language support to migrant children, while other subjects are taught in mainstream classes together with other students. Malmö offers students the possibility to receive tutoring in their own language so they can improve their performance. Such initiatives should be strengthened, also with a view to training teachers and childhood educators on how to tailor teaching to the specific needs of migrant children. More generally, the Action Plan could include concrete support to promote inclusive educational environments that foster cohesion and a sense of belonging.

Special attention should be given to **unaccompanied minors**, who are at an extremely high risk of vulnerability. Cities need support to ensure that they receive adequate housing, psychosocial support, healthcare, access to education and guidance on their future employment opportunities, and that they are protected from violence. Especially important is ensuring their adequate transition to adulthood, by investing in their integration from the very beginning and institutional support to avoid them falling into irregularity and ensure adequate alternatives to institutionalised care.

Cities work closely with unaccompanied minors, especially in providing them with shelter. Madrid has a dedicated project that guarantees comprehensive care for unaccompanied minors in risk of exclusion and works towards their educational, social, cultural and labour market integration. Milan opened an innovative multifunctional centre in 2019, which acts as initial reception centre for unaccompanied minors, coordinates with and trains voluntary guardians and works closely with the Ombudsperson for Child Rights. The centre is also in charge of conducting comprehensive assessments of minors' psychological and health conditions, specific needs and personal history, from which specific measures can then be put in place. Cities contribution in this area should be recognised, and stronger assistance is needed for them to cater adequately to this target group.

Housing

Migrants are at a higher risk than the general population of falling into homelessness, of living in housing in inadequate conditions and overcrowded spaces, they are more vulnerable to energy poverty, and are more affected by growing rental prizes. Migrants are also more likely to experience discrimination in renting and buying. In line with the European Parliament proposal for access to decent and affordable housing for all, cities need to be supported in their efforts to reverse this trend. Specific actions are needed to ensure that migrants have **access to affordable housing** that allows for dignified living

conditions and reduce their risk of becoming homeless. Ghent, for example, has identified migrants and refugees as especially vulnerable to energy poverty, and its taskforce on housing works on ensuring affordable, quality and energy housing for people with low income, including migrants.

Access to public services

Cities have developed innovative practices that are targeted to migrants' particular needs and ensure their **equal access to public services**. Barcelona has built one-stop-shops where migrants can obtain information and advice related to multiple policy areas, including refugee status, voluntary returns, language courses, housing, employment, social care and education.

Cities are also adapting their **communication strategies** to reach all members of the community equally and make sure no one is excluded from public provisions due to language barriers. Nuremberg, as well as over 60 other German cities, uses the Integreat App, a multilingual platform that provides newcomers with information about their lives in their new city, including work, school, child day care, immigration law and leisure. An increasing number of cities also offer their services in several languages spoken by the migrant community. More capacity building and exchange on best practices on digital and multi-lingual information services would contribute significantly to making public services more inclusive.

Cities' potential to foster migrants' integration through the provision of basic services (including shelters, education, health care and legal counselling) can be highly dependent on migrants' legal status. The **inclusion of migrants with precarious status** in the provision of services allows local authorities to build trust in migrant communities at the margins of society and promote durable solutions to precariousness and irregularities including stabilisation of status, regularisation and assistance to voluntary returns.¹

Amsterdam's Undocumented Migrant Programme created 500 places where undocumented migrants can stay for up to 18 months and are given professional assistance to work on their future. Ghent also offers emergency shelter and healthcare whilst working towards durable solutions. Utrecht adopted an integrated 'problem-solving' approach, where shelters and other services are integrated with case-management and counselling aimed at terminating a condition of irregularity, delivering a 92% solution rate. Local service providers though are often faced with legal and funding impediments related to migrants' precarious or irregular status. The Action Plan should aim at preventing befallen irregularity, address long-term precariousness, foster flexibility in the use of EU funding to provide services for migrants with precarious status, and support cities in building links with all migrants, regardless of status.

¹ Delvino N., Spencer S. on behalf of the City Initiative on Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe (C-MISE) (2019), *Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe: Guidance for Municipalities*, available at: www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/CMISE-Guidance-for-Municipalities-1.pdf