

Working Group 14:

Integration of migrants and in particular of refugees: the role of local authorities and business; learning from civil society.

Background

Integration is a long-term and multi-faceted process. It includes respect for diversity and the EU's basic values, such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Agenda on Migration acknowledges that migration policy will succeed only if it is underpinned by effective integration policies. Although integration is mostly a Member State's responsibility, the EU can support their efforts through measures and, in particular, through funding. In that respect, at least 20% of European Structural Funds resources will be allocated to social inclusion during the new programming period (2014-20). The Funds can support targeted initiatives to improve language and professional skills; improve access to services; promote access to the labour market; encourage inclusive education; foster intercultural exchanges; and promote awareness campaigns that target both host communities and migrants.

In addition, other EU funds can support actions for integrating migrants, including the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the European Regional Development Fund (mostly for infrastructure), and ERASMUS+ for education-related issues. The European Commission is working on reinforcing its support to Member States, NGOs and civil society organisations active in this field and in June 2016 launched an action plan on integrating third country nationals.

Today's refugee crisis shows that without the tireless efforts of thousands of NGO/civil society organisations and volunteers throughout Europe, it would be impossible to handle the challenges that EU Member States are facing regarding the dignified reception and fulfilment of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. In many cases, NGOs and civil society were the only ones delivering the emergency assistance and support that state organisations should have been delivering. They help in the development of local communities. They provide education and healthcare; develop innovative ideas, advocate; protest; and mobilise public support. In addition, they carry out legal, scientific, technical, and policy analysis, whilst shaping, implementing, monitoring, and enforcing national and international commitments. They also have the ability to change institutions and norms.

In addition, local authorities in many Member States have been developing and implementing policies and measures related to the reception and long-term integration of migrants, particularly refugees, for years. In light of their success, some of these practices are being used as the basis for future initiatives.

The integration of migrants and their descendants is one of the key thematic areas of FRA's work. FRA aims to provide evidence-based advice to EU institutions and national, regional and local policy makers regarding social inclusion and immigrant integration. One way it is seeking to do so is through its Immigrant, Integration and Social Inclusion indicators, which it is currently developing. Results from FRA's second EU-wide minorities and discrimination survey (EU MIDIS II) will be used for populating some of these indicators.

Objectives

The workshop aimed to discuss examples of how local authorities, civil society and business can create effective short-term and long-term integration models that integrate a human rights perspective. The working group looked into different aspects of migrant integration and how civil society, local authorities, and business can cooperate in fostering integration. It touched upon different areas and dimensions of integration, such as education, employment, health and housing. Included in this were discussions on basic values and principles, such as democracy, the rule of law, non-discrimination, gender equality and non-violence. There was a particular emphasis on measures and policies targeting unaccompanied children and young adults.

Attention was paid to how it is possible to support integration policies with actions and initiatives that foster social inclusion and diverse and tolerant host societies. This could be achieved by raising awareness on the positive impact of migration, holding exchanges between communities through intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and fighting discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

Another point of discussion was how national authorities cooperate with local authorities, NGOs, and civil society organisations. While national authorities are mainly responsible for creating operational structures and frameworks, it is often organisations operating at a local level that implement policies and step in when there are structural problems. The workshop also explored how the business sector is involved in helping to realise the rights of asylum seekers and refugees in the EU, and how cooperation can be fostered between local authorities and NGOs. It mapped promising practices for cooperation, whilst looking into means for exchanging and building expertise at different levels. In addition, the group looked into the obstacles and the special facilities that help or hinder such cooperation.

Speakers

- Hans Janssen, Mayor of Oisterwijk, the Netherlands, Member of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX), Committee of the Regions
- Birgit Sippel, Member of the European Parliament
- Anny Knapp, Project Manager, 'Connecting People', Asylkoordination Austria
- Irena Guidikova, Head of Division, Intercultural Cities Programme Manager, World Forum for Democracy, Council of Europe

- Marina Roncoroni, Commissioner for Integration and Migration for the Berlin District Administration Steglitz-Zehlendorf, Germany

Main messages

1. Measures and policies that target and take into account each individual's situation, are needed; they should also be inclusive and designed for all members of society. If they are developed exclusively for refugees, it could prove counterproductive.
2. Integration is not one way. It requires welcoming societies that respect equality and non-discrimination, and refugees/migrants that respect their new environment.
3. Cooperation between various players needs to be better organised, coordinated and participatory. It should be multilevel and include different actors, such as local authorities, civil society and NGOs, businesses, professionals, social workers, and refugees/migrants themselves. Clear responsibilities should be communicated to all.
4. A new narrative needs to be developed and promoted, with stories on immigration, asylum and integration based on fact. These should make the positive sides of migration visible, while not ignoring the fears and concerns emerging from society. The media and social media should be the main 'avenues' for disseminating them.

Promising practices

- A programme has been developed for integrating refugee women. This sees professionals acting as 'integration guides' – *Integrationslotsen*, Berlin, Germany.
- Daimler Benz has provided vocational 'training on the job' and language courses for refugees, Germany.
- A contract between each refugee and the city has been drawn up. This ensures mutual commitment and leads to positive outcomes, which are visible to all, The City of Bergen, Norway.
- 'Frivillignet', a buddy mentorship scheme, provides asylum seekers/refugees with regular human contact and helps them to build relationships, Denmark.
- 'Intercultural Cities', a programme which twins cities, has been conceived by the Council of Europe. This creates a hotline between cities in case of emergencies.

Next steps

- Integration programmes should be tailored to individual needs and developed in a participatory manner.
- Integration should be mutually agreed, with the development of further platforms/networks of cities.
- It should be ensured that funding is sustainable and needs-oriented, with use made of available EU funding schemes.

- A top-down approach is often used in the development of co-operation structures/mechanisms. However, a bottom-up approach could also be used as part of certain decision-making and implementation processes in local administrations.
- In order to build trust, which is prerequisite of an inclusive society, all available information needs to be provided, with a transparent approach utilised from an early stage of the integration process. This should apply to all members of society, but in particular to those communities receiving refugees.
- Politics needs to be 'real'. At a representative level, it should include all members of the society.
- There should be no fear of operating on the ground and 'getting your hands dirty'.
- Good examples of refugee/migrant integration should be highlighted and publicised. Social media can be used to disseminate these, while the media can serve as a means for communicating facts.
- Lessons of the past need to be remembered – immigration flows and influx are part of and have defined Europe's history.
- As first reception impacts on integration in the longer term, local communities should be involved in the preparation of reception centres and welcoming refugees.
- Integration measures should be integrated into 'mainstream' policies: labelling initiatives as being only for refugees might be counterproductive.
- Mentoring programmes and buddy schemes should be developed, along with sufficient platforms for cities to 'come together'.
- Cities should serve as role models. Equality and non-discrimination should be part of local policies; local authorities and their contractors should also be equal opportunity employers.