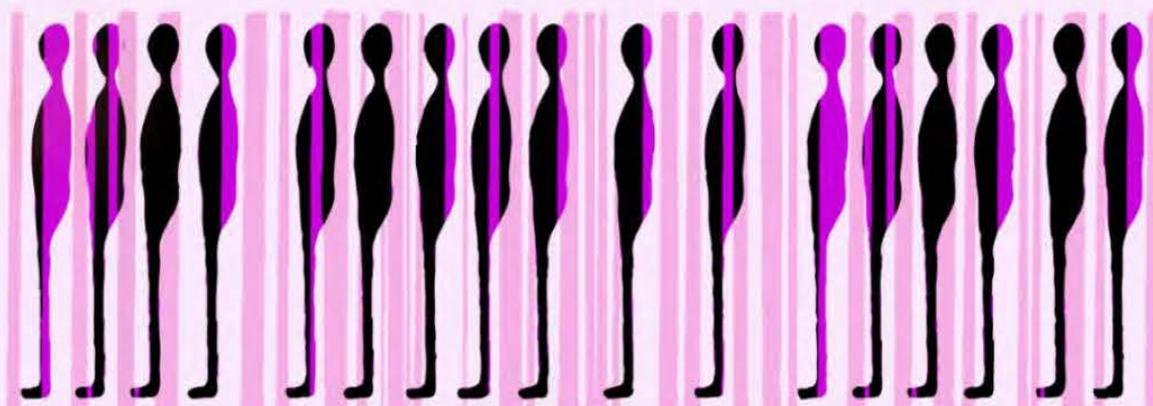


MINUTES

**POTENTIALS & LIMITATIONS  
OF SUBNATIONAL RESPONSES TO  
THE MIGRANT QUESTION IN EUROPE**

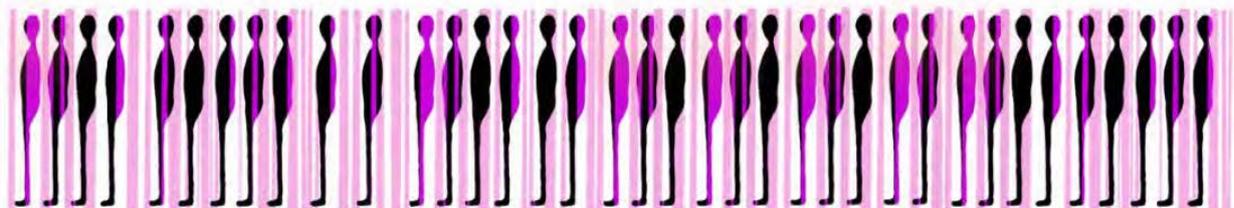
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

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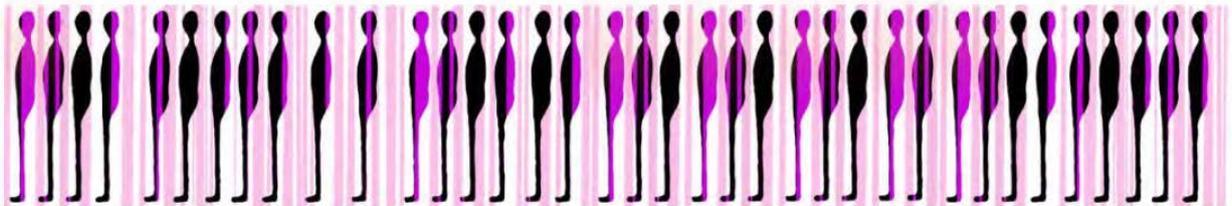


From the Sea to the City  
A conference of cities for a welcoming Europe

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This is our common ground



## FOREWORD

The international conference “Potentials and Limitations of Subnational Responses to the Migrant Question in Europe” brings together mayors and local representatives, EU policy makers, civil society and scholars to discuss EU migration policy and policies outside the framework of nation-states, including local governance institutions and civil society.

The current public-health crisis attests some cold facts; first, that contemporary threats, such as major diseases or natural disasters, cannot be stopped at borders. Second, that nationally planned, centrally imposed responses to challenges that are transnational in nature and local in effect are bound to be fruitless, disproportional and divisive. Third, that lack of access to basic services, rights and decent living conditions due to “unforeseen circumstances” is both possible and terrible.

As in the case of the pandemic, migration is defined by the interconnectedness of contemporaneity and, as such, it transcends divisions -inside/outside, us/them, voluntary/forced, regular/irregular. While European polities were fast to accept this reality in the case of the pandemic, they have chosen the path of denial regarding their capacity to divert migration. They have therefore failed to carry their responsibility in dealing with the issue in a humane, effective and sustainable manner.

The Asylum and Migration Pact, recently drafted by the EC, increasingly links migration to border management. The Programme for Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU confirms this trend, moving the focus away from policies that could enable integration and full access of migrants to their fundamental rights. This is unsurprising; placing national governments in the forefront of migration management is problematic both on political and moral grounds.

## FOREWORD

The objectification of human life and the association of migration to security, constitutes a choice as much as a self-fulfilling prophecy; it aims to vindicate and legitimise centralised policies that offer a bad service to Europe by intensifying xenophobia and moral panic among citizens.

Cities and local governments do not have competence over migration policies. Still, local administrations are charged with enabling social cohesion and the Right to the City. This enables them both to be in closer contact to organised civil society and solidarity initiatives and have better understanding of the specific needs of vulnerable groups. At the same time, it highlights a more inclusive perception about people in need that disregards their origin or culture and is better aligned to human rights and European values.

The conference endorses the agenda of “From the Sea to the City” (<https://fromseacity.eu/>), an initiative that was set off by the Palermo Charter Process Platform in 2018 and aims to:

- Take coordinated action to strengthen and promote existing and new initiatives between cities and civil society organisations on European migration policy
- Ensure protection of migrants’ and refugees’ lives and needs in the Covid-19 crisis
- Ensure active roles of cities and civil society organisations in the management of EU-funds
- Create safe arrivals and legal corridors to Europe
- Ensure access to fundamental rights and dignity to migrants and refugees arriving to European cities from the rights to seek asylum, access to the social and healthcare system, to adequate housing to decent working conditions.

MARCH 4, 2021

LOCAL GOVERNANCE & MIGRATION POLICY

## Panel 1: The Migrant Question and the Principle of Subsidiarity: Tensions and Rapprochements

Discussants:

**Niels Tubbing**, Senior Policy Advisor Civic Integration of Migrants and Refugees

**Damian Boeselager**, MEP, Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament

**Epaminondas Farmakis**, Common Ground Greece

**George Sarelakos**, Cities Network for Integration Project Manager

Chair: **Sotiris Petropoulos**, Assistant professor at the University of the Peloponnese, Director of HIGGS (TBC)

### Summary

Subsidiarity is a crucial concept when it comes to the migrant question. Local institutions have a more pragmatic and practical view of the situation on the ground than the national or supranational ones, and therefore are better equipped to deal with important aspects of migration, especially integration. Particularly since the 2015 'Migrant Crisis', municipalities have proven to be more able and willing to collaborate with each other than their national governments. The Cities Network for Integration in Greece involving municipalities in developing integration instruments is a good example. The Greek government has mostly distanced itself from this collaborative approach. However, recently, communication channels between the local and national levels are built in order to enable integration. Finally, the local level, since it is about individual interactions and everyday life, is able to highlight the value of migration and, more specifically, integration by creating a positive narrative.

Despite the clear advantage of local institutions in responding to the migrant question, difficulties in accessing decision-making and implementation remain. Often, migration is highly centralised, meaning municipalities do not have the power or resources to make decisions about applying integration practices or welcoming migrants into their communities. Moreover, funding issued by the EU to facilitate the handling of migration often goes first to national governments, who decide a specific focus areas and then pass it down to the local level. As a municipality or an NGO, it can be very difficult to apply for funding directly, particularly if they are smaller, due to a high administrative burden. On top of this issue of access, EU funding takes a project-based approach, often with a focus on innovative methods. Key questions such as integration require sustainable, long-term approaches, rather than innovative, short-term projects, therefore this mentality can sometimes hinder, rather than support, the work of the local level in welcoming migrants.

Strengthening the principle of subsidiarity in dealing with the migrant question is key. It is crucial to engage local communities, NGOs, municipalities, and even new arrivals in conversations and policy-making regarding migration, particularly the question of integration. A top-down approach does not work: the case of Greece, where the situation on the ground is in many cases very problematic, particularly in hotspots, is proof of this. Teamwork and collaboration are crucial: organisations and municipalities should work together both within and between member states, learning from each other and working toward similar broad goals. Current barriers to voluntary solidarity including funding and the criminalisation of solidarity need to be removed. Finally, local, national and supranational levels must work to change the narrative surrounding integration and break the negative cycle which comes from labelling migration as dangerous. In its place, new stories are needed which emphasise the positive impact of integration. Highlighting these positive stories at a local level, an approach which may encourage national governments to discuss integration more concretely and improve conditions for migrants and locals alike.

## MINUTES

### Niels Tubbing:

- 2015 in Amsterdam: there was quite a large decentralisation on the social field – obligations came to municipalities but not always with the necessary funding.
- 2015 – there were many newcomers in Amsterdam. Started the current Amsterdam Approach to asylum holders – more dedicated case managers, started integration and guidance right away (from first day of arrival), within the boundaries of the legislation.
- Legislation: National Civic Integration Act states that language courses and efforts to pass integration exams were the responsibility of refugees themselves. If they do not do this, they may get fined. But we immediately started guiding them from the beginning, e.g., regarding finding work and getting around the city.
- The Civil Integration Act (outlined above) has been a national organisation over the last couple of years but will go back to the control of the municipalities again. So, we'll have more opportunities to guide people straight away – help them integrate, find jobs, and not get fined and go into debt. So, it is good news that it is moving to the municipal level.
- However, it is also quite a struggle. Unsure to what extent we'll be in charge, what information we'll get, which elements will still be the responsibility of newcomers.
- So, the national government does realise that local government is better equipped to assist newcomers.
- Financing: when we look at subsidiarity on the European level, the European Commission can assist on that through funding. However, many Member States (MS) have their own ideas about integration.
- Cities around Europe have a more pragmatic and practical view – people living in the cities become regular citizens and we have to enable them to be able to participate in regular life.

- Financing: when we look at subsidiarity on the European level, the European Commission can assist on that through funding. However, many Member States (MS) have their own ideas about integration.
- Cities around Europe have a more pragmatic and practical view – people living in the cities become regular citizens and we have to enable them to be able to participate in regular life.
- There are quite a few funding programs, but it often goes through MS– MS decide on the specific focus. There are also direct programmes you can apply to as a municipality or NGO, but there is often a large administrative burden and red tape. Also, when you look at their topics, there is a lot of focus on innovative methods. Integration is about human beings – there are a lot of programmes that are proven to work so a new project does not always have to be innovated.
- Amsterdam focuses on getting funding for programmes that work and making them more sustainable – integration does not happen overnight so it is important to look in the very long-term (maybe even over generations).
- More direct access to those funds and more of a focus on sustainable integration would help cities to focus on integration.
- It is not always possible to do the same programmes in every city in Europe (different political situations, infrastructure, financial situations), but it is a good idea to connect cities and see how they can help each other in different ways. This could be financially or finding legal pathways for resettlement. Also exchanging knowledge or helping out education, labour migration, building housing.
- How to make subsidiarity connect to solidarity is an important question.

### **George Sarelakos:**

- Presenting the Greek reality.
- 2015: municipalities had to face the consequences and challenges related to the flow of refugees without coordinating with each other, or without being part of a holistic national plan.
- As a result, in 2017, the Athens Coordination Centre was established to manage these challenges in the municipality of Athens.
- Even back then, the other municipalities in Greece that started to realise the impact of changing conditions expressed interest in developing similar mechanisms or being part of a holistic network.
- So, in January 2018 – the Municipalities of Athens and Thessaloniki signed a memorandum of cooperation based on integration.
- 2 years later – 18 municipalities are participating in the Cities Network for Integration (CNI).
- We can see that the municipalities are moving faster than the central government. Today they participate in the CNI and have an interest in developing holistic plans.
- Example: in CNI – a number of municipalities are developing/have developed integration strategies. This is unlike the central government which at the moment is looking to develop a new framework.

- Since its establishment, the Cities Network worked to bring together municipalities, assess needs at local level, develop common tools for all members, and develop practices/ solutions at local level.
- So, member municipalities all develop similar tools, while the central government does not really participate in the same rhythm.
- CNI members have lately built communication channels with the central government to bring forward the issues that municipalities are facing in order to bring integration onto the agenda.

### **Damien Boeselager:**

- Voluntary solidarity is the main way to get out of the current situation on European level. We can see that even mandatory solidarity cannot really fly.
- There is great potential of cities that actually want to welcome asylum seekers. We need to remove all the boundaries that currently exist that stop voluntary solidarity from taking place.
- New initiative: mapping all the communities across Europe that have proclaimed that they would be willing to welcome asylum seekers. Idea is – once we have all this voluntary potential shown on a map, we can use this to put pressure on MS and also as a tool to councillors and citizens across Europe to change something in the debate by addressing local councillors and mayors and asking to be represented on this map.

### **Epaminondas Farmakis:**

- The Netherlands example has been, for us and civil society, the best case.
- Common Ground aims to bring civil society together around the vision of creating social change and strengthening democracy, human rights and environmental sustainability.
- Since 2009, with the economic crisis and rise of the far right, our response to migration has been a disaster, both internationally and locally in Greece. More than 3 billion euros has come to Greece for refugee response and we still haven't even been able to start talking about proper integration.
- Only solution going forward (and it is already too late) is to collaborate.
- We have been using a failed model in Greece for more than 25 years – a top-down approach from the ministry, who has no expertise.
- We need to dive down to local governments and even communities and ethnic groups and focus on other individual leaders in local communities so we can engage them.
- We especially need to do this now as we will have a difficult post-Covid-19 situation both financially and in social, economic, and political terms.
- In Greece we are starting a new initiative this month on the Green and Just Recovery Alliance. The aim is to include as many stakeholders in Europe to advocate for a greener and more just implementation of the EU funding package which will lead us out of Covid-19.
- So, this is an opportunity to protect human rights and vulnerable groups.



*Often it was funding that initiated the process of subsidiarity. Do you see the predominance or existence of a third party (e.g., UNHCR) that pushes the whole process, or is there a self-motivated ecosystem that goes towards more interconnectedness without having an initiator being EU funding, for example? What would you expect in the years to come, as the integration issue becomes more crucial?*

#### **Niels Tubbing:**

- In the last couple of years there has been a shift towards community sponsorship. Need a less top-down situation, at the European level but also within city level – we must include the people actually living in the city and newcomers themselves to see how they think we can improve the integration situation. In Amsterdam there are advisory boards for refugees to see what can be improved from their point of view. Their feedback is important, and they may have important insights.

#### **George Sarelakos:**

- Since 2017 –The main argument of municipalities was how to ensure better access by municipalities to EU funding. But it is about shifting our mentality from integration which is founded on project-based mentality. We should also look for how to better use/manage available funding – this is another issue.



*Aware that not all municipalities are at the same level (e.g., some are larger than others), and that this can create frictions when it comes to sharing best practices, joining an EU proposal for funding, or joining an activity. How do you understand this diversity and how does this create problems moving forward? How can entities (European Parliament, UNHCR) work on that to find solutions?*

#### **Epaminondas Farmakis:**

- There is a disconnect from a main governing body (e.g., European Parliament) to local government – there are priorities set without consultation of important actors like local municipalities and local communities. For example, advocacy and mental health (very important for refugee response and during COVID for local populations) are not included in funding. The government in Greece always likes the control of priorities for funding and does not consult local governments.

- Also, often we see a lack of flexibility in terms of reporting to the entity giving the funding, it is a very complicated process. Also, funding might have been given a few years previously so might not have any relation to the needs on the ground currently.

### Damien Boeselager:

- Fully agree with Farmakis. When we see both the design of programmes and the handling of the money, it is very difficult to include the local level in the right way even though there are some partnership principles already in place to do that. We need to find better ways of cooperating with the European and local levels.

### Niels Tubbing:

- Access to funding at local level gets easier with more experience but there are many smaller municipalities who might not have the available people to put the time into the application. Also, the emphasis is on the financial reporting (making sure all the money is accounted for) – it should be more focused on the things you achieve too.

- The Partnership Principle is something where cities can assist each other – smaller municipalities can piggyback onto larger municipalities and apply together. On the European level – municipalities should share own knowledge and be open to learn from other cities. You cannot often copy projects or programmes, but you can shift your perspective even a few degrees by uncovering blind spots for example. An example – Eurocities Network.



*Question: if we agree that we need an enhancement of EU rules over what the local level can do and that we should provide them with more tools (funding, resources related to capacity-building, etc.), and taking into account advocacy campaigns in recent years, how connected are all these things? How isolated are the different advocacy campaigns, and how can we see not just municipalities communicating with each other, but networks of cities communicating with, for example, the Greens in European Parliament and civil society?*

### Damien Boeselager:

- Local level really can be the changemaker for the European level. It is very important that all initiatives do what they do best and also have a slightly separated approach, but when it comes to European policymaking, advocacy campaigns, etc., we can all benefit hugely from a coordinated approach. We should bundle our work together in the best possible way and create big platforms. It shouldn't be a branded campaign (e.g., 'the Greens are doing a campaign'), but instead open 'hashtags' that we can make our own – be separate in the way we do it but all paying into same message and same goal.

### Epaminondas Farmakis:

- Agree with Damien. Too often NGOs and other groups do not want to open up this kind of discussion because they were afraid there would be too many 'competitors' for this funding, or they could make the campaign very personalised to a cause belonging to a particular NGOs – we have to find ways to make these campaigns open to all groups that could take on their own local angle.

### Niels Tubbing:

- At city-level, we need to ensure that the funding programmes at a European level are actually applicable to the city level. Sometimes it is a bit of a rat race – who wins the funding.  
- More direct access by cities to the funding would be helpful in this sense. Again, funding for integration programmes are often focusing on innovation, but we need to move away from this focus. Also, often if funding falls away after a couple of years, good practice falls away too. So, in the coming years we need to look at how to look more towards sustainable integration both on the national level and European level.  
- Also, the European Action Plan mentions that MS should be encouraged to use funding for integration, make local and regional authorities responsible for elements. This is not a law and many MS will probably just wipe it off the table, but at least it may start a discussion about opening up funding for integration more to a local level.

Q

*In the US a lot of the discussion is about fact that funders should try and give more long-term funding as this usually creates more sustainable solutions.*

### George Sarelakos:

- In Greece, access to funding still remains the main question for all municipalities. We cannot always have bigger municipalities providing assistance to smaller municipalities, we need to see how information can be channelled at all levels.

Q

*Also, funding should go directly to municipalities: not just funding placement or reception of people, etc., but also to the development of municipalities. This is being missed by all the funding schemes.*

### Damien Boeselager:

(regarding a question in the chat) municipalities might potentially be reimbursed for welcoming people. This is an interesting idea about how we can jump the national level which is often blocking. It is a good idea to do this.



*In terms of funding structures, has there ever been a proposal to increase taxes on wealthy international investors (or perhaps taxes on big companies imposing environmental harms) in order to raise money for integration projects?*

### Niels Tubbing:

- In the Netherlands, there is the Social Return on Investments – if you want to acquire services from companies you can include the need to do something socially as well – opening up workspaces for people, something else for civil society. Sort of social taxation. It is obligatory in Amsterdam and could be relevant to this.

### Epaminondas Farmakis:

- Greece has a very old taxation system and it is very important to address that and move forward. However, it isn't really a question of more funding, it is a very political issue.
- When the PM comes out and says the word 'integration' (which hasn't happened in Greece in the last 6 years), on a national level that would increase the opportunities for integration.
- So, it is primarily a lack of political will. Politicians often afraid of negative reactions and ignore a lot of the positive things that would come from integration and the economic benefits.

## Final comments

### Damien Boeselager:

- Overall, it would be great if Greece's PM would use the word 'integration'. The way we can change the sub-optimal political landscapes is to write positive stories – and these can be written by those who are most credible to tell them and that is on a municipal level – we can see the cases of integration, wanting to have a welcoming culture (it is where the actual life is).
- Whatever effort we can make to showcase these positive situations also takes a lot of fear away from politicians.

MARCH 4, 2021

LOCAL GOVERNANCE & MIGRATION POLICY

## Panel 2: European Governments and the Civil Society: Towards a Permanent Break over the Migrant Question?

Discussants:

**Yasha Maccanico**, Researcher at State-watch & Bristol University

**András Kováts**, Director of Menedek Association

**Livio Amigoni**, Collective Progetto20k. Laboratorio Sociologia Visuale, Unige

Chair: **Nikos Papakostas**, co-founder of Inter Alia

### Summary

The 2015 European Agenda on Migration was another step toward criminalising solidarity in Europe. The EU's crackdown on migration clearly did not want to leave any space for states or municipalities to undertake a human rights-focused, support-based, or even pragmatic stance on the refugee crisis. On the contrary, it argues that the work of NGOs, governments or individuals to support refugees act as a pull factor for prospective migrants and exacerbate the crisis. Refugees are crossing the EU's borders with or without this support, and providing refugees with basic services such as shelter and food creates a more positive environment not only for arrivals but for the local community too, as people are be forced to sleep on the streets.

In the Hungarian context, the rhetorical and legal criminalisation of solidarity groups led to a more divided NGO society, one that the public began to view as an enemy that contributes to the migration 'problem'. Therefore, the EU's migration policies, rather than targeting migrants (the 'outsiders'), has become an attack on itself, feeding polarisation and criminalising EU citizens and organisations. Similarly, the EU's migration policies aim to overwhelm states' and municipalities' capabilities in dealing with the refugee crisis, particularly at the external border. An example of this is the concentration of arrivals to the EU in the Greek islands through the closure of borders and lack of resettlement schemes, creating a human rights crisis and often high tensions between locals and migrants. The EU's attempts to create an explosive situation at the external border enables the continuation of the sentiment of crisis, enabling national and supra-national levels to justify emergency policies which at times violate international laws and side-line the humanitarian argument for accepting refugees onto EU territory. These emergency policies (for example the implementation of the 'hotspot' system) in turn overwhelm the local level, creating a cycle of crisis, allowing the EU to take extraordinary measures against immigration and turn them into routine practices, by pointing out the dire situation on the ground.

Despite these damaging high-level policies, there are numerous stories of solidarity and collaboration throughout Europe. These include NGOs, local churches and community organisations, informal cooperation between municipalities, and 'normal people' from many different backgrounds, be it students, lawyers, or journalists. Due to the repressive nature of EU and national policies regarding migration, the local level has been pushed to work more closely and more actively with each other in many different aspects, advocacy, the welcoming of migrants, and the provision of basic services. Thus, despite the EU's best efforts, solidarity is clearly not dead.

## MINUTES

### Yasha Maccanico:

- European Agenda on Migration in 2015 - EU's war against migrants became a war against itself. This led to an attack on European citizens who were acting in solidarity.
- On one hand – it was an attempt to discipline frontline states. This would create a more explosive situation in frontline states – arrivals were concentrated there instead of throughout Europe.
- It was also a desire to keep an emergency situation going to allow national authorities to enact policies which violated some laws and normative principles.
- Very important aspect of this: redefine solidarity as the EU helping MS to perfect a policy blueprint that structurally disadvantages them. Italy and Greece had realised this, which is why they were not using Eurodac – it worsened their situation.
- Saving Eurodac: first objective of Agenda. So, there are pressures from the EU level on national governments to allow violence for fingerprinting, even on vulnerable subjects.
- Italy has particularly strong laws in its Constitution on right to asylum and non-discrimination, and the EU Agenda wanted to make sure that these were overwhelmed in practice, so there would be laws passed that de facto violated the Italian Constitution and would be turned into routine practices.
- This dogged pressure by the EU is a war against itself and amounts so self-harm in order to harm the people who are entering the EU. It harms the rule of law, normalises funding of torture camps in third countries (Libya), undermines law of the sea, and attacks virtuous local-level refugee and migrant integration experiences.
- Frontex made the effort to highlight that anything that was done to help refugees in Europe/at sea would act as a pull factor for migrants and therefore should be banned.
- Another example of how these EU policies harm the EU is the relaxation of the rules on re-implementing internal borders within Schengen, for example at the French-Italian borders.

## Livio Amigoni:

- Criminalisation is happening at French-Italian border.
- 2015 – Progetto2K. Focus on three main issues: material support to people; hospitality (no camp at that time so people were staying in the street); information (crucial for people to get practical information about transport, controls, legal advice).
- There was a campaign against help from NGOs and local people: the municipalities issued a local order forbidding distribution of food for more than a year. There was civil action, and the mayor was forced to retire the local ban.
- Organisations were accused of attracting people to Ventimiglia area.
- 2017 – formal camp opened, managed by the Red Cross because there were many people there. It was recently closed due to COVID. During COVID, 250 people were locked inside the camp with no possibility to leave. Finally, they transferred everyone, and the camp was closed. So now there is no camp welcoming people to Ventimiglia, and everyone stays on the street.
- From the French side – also saw the criminalization of associations and people who tried to help. Introduction of police controls on highways, trains, even mountain paths.
- If local administrations continue to criminalise solidarity groups, they will lose votes.

## András Kováts:

- Hungarian context.
- Since 2015 crisis – the government has spent roughly 30-40million euros on communication regarding the crisis.
- The impact of this is very strong. The governing party's popularity and support increased significantly.
- Also, significant increase in xenophobia and polarisation of public and political discourse on immigration.
- Result and conscious strategy of the government – NGOs are increasingly becoming the target of this communication. Targetting ranges from open confrontation to co-optation or even strategic alliances between NGO actors and government.
- Gradually the NGO society became much more divided than before.
- Scapegoating ended with making civil society actors enemies of the nation, even national security threats. There was a series of legislative measures introduced in 2017-8, aiming at labelling NGOs and nudging their activities towards certain directions. This is more communication than something that would be a legal function in Hungary.
- There is been a gradual change from blanket political communication to actual societal and institutional re-alignment – emerging new culture in which immigration is utterly unfavourable and related NGO activities are something undesirable and dangerous.
- This is an escalation situation. On one hand NGO society is increasingly polarised, societal support is gradually fading away or becoming politicised – talking about immigration in a nuanced and pragmatic way is virtually impossible.

- The solution should come from within, and not only from EU and other international bodies
- NGOs should focus more on national level activity – constituency building, awareness raising.



*Yasha, how do you reflect on the new European pact?*

**Yasha Maccanico:**

- The EU is trying to say there are some improvements re-integration and relocations.
- However, it does not seem to change anything regarding its intransigent outlook and idea that if anyone arrives outside legal channels they will be treated as illegal migrants. It undermines national law, EU law and sometimes international law at the same time.
- The pact is a re-edition of the Pact on Immigration and Asylum of 2008, promoted by President Sarkozy. The EU decided that the pragmatism followed by some local governments must be discouraged. Made it clear that creating a more open migration regime was not a solution to anything.
- The new Pact – one of main points is that EU territory should not exist for refugees unless they're sent to European countries through resettlement programmes. These programmes have very limited effects.
- The current pact is about changing a few small elements to make sure that the same line continues to be imposed.



*Main political discourses regarding migrants utilised by the local community or by main political actors?*

**Livio Amigoni:**

- Mainly we were accused of attracting people – if you provide services you attract people here. Although it was clear that people weren't coming to stay, just to cross the border (they stayed because of pushbacks and border controls).
- Discourse about France – blaming them for not letting people enter. At national level there were issues between the two governments, and this was used by the right wing to create more tension.
- Also, there were big protests from citizens because NGOs tried to open a centre for minors. In the end they did not manage to open this centre.
- Another discourse: Everyone was initially against the camp set up by Red Cross (saying it attracted people). The camp was closed and now that the right wing is in local government,

they are asking to open a new camp outside the city because they see people staying on the street (the shops complain, people complain that there are people sitting on the public benches) – completely changed the discourse.



*Is the process of NGOs internalizing critique coming from government, instead of unifying and confronting governmental policies, a pattern in Hungary?*

**András Kováts:**

- Many NGOs who were attacked in the first instance by government messaging and shaming formed an umbrella network. It was not formalized but we constantly coordinated and shared information/offered each other services/etc. This network did really well during the most intense messaging by the government.
- What we couldn't achieve was growing the networks.
- The government's campaign was not only communication but offering different benefits/trade-offs in return for abandoning certain activities and certain principles.
- For those whose mandate was not directly advocacy, this was a feasible way of survival.
- What is really missing is that certain types of organisations tend to idealise their own strategy/approach rather than seeing that everyone is pointing to the same goal. There is no common platform where we could strategise based on supplementing each other's strategies. More trust and flexibility are needed.



*Have you collaborated with municipalities and in what ways are they more effective/easier to collaborate with than national government?*

**Yasha Maccanico:**

- Statewatch does not really cooperate with local municipalities – more concerned with linking European level to national level and getting a lot of information from the ground. No direct contact but still seems important to see the way different levels try to restrain local-level potentials. Active attempts to overwhelm capabilities.
- So, attempts to exacerbate the problem to get more funding and allowances to fight the problem that they helped to create in the first place.

**Livio Amigoni:**

- The local government did not want any cooperation with us.
- But we cooperate with the NGOs there. Also, strong cooperation with local churches that allow access to places, give funds, etc.

- We also have strong cooperation with local citizens that wanted to be active. New composition at the borders composed of very different actors (students, etc.) that gather to support migrants. Not state-sponsored institution so it is just about solidarity – important and hopeful point.

#### **András Kováts:**

- Since the present government came to power there is been a strong centralisation. Municipalities have less and less power, which limits the scope of cooperation.
- Two levels of cooperation: one level has become a political act. As long as municipality is opposition, the chances of cooperating on migrant issues are much higher than with a govt-affiliated municipality.
- Second level: emergent autonomous, informal cooperation with municipalities.



*Who should we consider our allies in this process? What has worked on the ground in making an impact?*

#### **Yasha Maccanico:**

- The strong attack against solidarity in Italy has given rise to cooperation between professions, e.g., journalists. Despite attacks from the government and far right, resilience and solidarity has been incredible.
- EU level almost explicitly turned to policy that practically emboldened far right, which shows that the solidarity was working.

#### **Livio Amigoni:**

- We wanted to establish a project with all actors that want to support migrants' rights. Does not matter where they came from. This was a huge strength – very heterogeneous network.
- I think this is why we managed to stay on the ground for 5 years under attack of the administration without resources etc. – why we managed to resist.

#### **András Kováts:**

- Most important ally is individuals – local community. We work with an expanded network of volunteers, rotating network of people.
- If people experience positive things regarding immigration and foreigners, then there will be debate on the situation.

MARCH 4, 2021

LOCAL GOVERNANCE & MIGRATION POLICY

### **Panel 3 - Discussion among European politicians & representatives of transnational institutions representing local bodies**

Discussants:

**Antje Grotheer**, vice-president of Bremen City Parliament, German, rapporteur of the European Committee of the Regions on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum;

**Leoluca Orlando**, mayor of Palermo;

**Maarten van Ooijen**, Forum chair for Social Affairs at Eurocities, vice-mayor of Utrecht;

**Alexandros Chrysafis**, President of the Committee for Migrants, Refugees and Crises at the Central Union of Municipalities of Greece, mayor of the Municipality of Trikala

Chair: **Lefteris Papagiannakis**, Head of advocacy, policy and research at Solidarity Now

#### **Summary**

Migration and integration begin and end at the local and regional level. There are technical, institutional and symbolic aspects of local institutions' engagement. All are important and interplay for placing the issue in context and bringing its real dimension to the public eye. Direct funding is definitive for the level of implication of local and regional institutions. Were there to be direct access to EU funding, local and regional authorities, even from countries that have governments that oppose burden sharing, would be more willing to get involved and set an example for others.

As the example of Eurocities, Safe Harbours and other initiatives have shown, networks of cities have an important role to play for positioning and addressing the migrant question as a European issue. However, diverse competences provided by national legislation as well as from unequal distribution of the populations undermine networks. For instance, EU border regions and areas and especially the islands are under severe pressure. By drawing policies based on national average populations misrepresents the situation on the ground. Finding common ground on migration is essential to move forward. We need a system of genuine solidarity, and therefore proper consultation of local and regional levels of governance.

Local and regional institutions may be involved in decision making either through institutional channels and the respective competences or through conflict with the central governments. In case where the former are missing, municipalities need to raise tension.

Alternatively, they should utilise EU funding instrument to circumvent national-level obstructions. This is much easier when municipalities are equipped with resources and knowhow. Municipalities need to prioritise and uphold human rights; through their policies and daily praxis, they have an important role to play for cultivating knowledge, providing information and creating a cultural environment of respect and tolerance. Cooperation with local NGOs is crucial and has delivered significant results. Grassroots organisations can contribute significantly because they are the ones closer to the migrants and refugees and are better aware of their needs. Municipalities need to collaborate with the civil society in order to change the discourse and the image of the general public towards migrants and refugees.

## MINUTES

### Lefteris Papagiannakis:

- Particularly interesting that all participants are not only representatives of local institutions but that, at the same time, they have an institutional role in national or transnational efforts of networking and collaboration of municipalities and regions.
- I will address two questions: one about the general role of their institution internationally and as members of the network and one about their city with particular reference to the different competences among municipalities that makes it difficult to organise.

### Antje Grotheer:

- The Migration and Asylum Pact and Integration and Inclusion Action Plan are intensely interconnected and interdependent.
- European Committee of the Regions: the Euro-political assembly bringing together elected local and regional representatives. Its role is to ensure that European policies take into consideration the local and regional dimension.
- This dimension is important: 70% of European policies are implemented by local and regional authorities.
- Migration and integration begin and end in regions and cities.
- Must find common ground on migration in order to move forward – new proposals are a start but are not enough: we need a system of genuine solidarity, and therefore proper consultation of local and regional levels of governance. E.g., consultation before resettlement or return measures are implemented, as these have large effects on these levels of societies.
- We must recognise that pressure is especially high on border countries and their border regions. These pressures are minimised when we look at national averages.
- Support mechanisms are needed for islands and border towns.
- Deep ideological divides over migration determined by national interests and transcending political parties.

- Protecting human rights is necessary, especially of vulnerable groups, not just refugees.
- The border procedure must be as short as possible, to alleviate pressure on border regions. It should be 8 weeks long, rather than 12.
- Also, there must be attempts to get rid of the first country of entry from the asylum process. It should be the region where the person applies for asylum who is responsible for the application, rather than where they first entered.
- Regions need a strong say in this issue because the regions are the ones that have to do the integration work.
- In Germany the regions have a strong say in legislation and implementation of laws. Bremen is one of the cities of Safe Harbours, committed to integration through contribution of every citizen. It has worked with other regions to share good practices. Regions need direct access to EU funds without national governments involvement, as they are the ones implementing policies.
- Minimum age in the EU asylum system in the new Pact was proposed to be 6 years. We fought for it to be increased to 12 years. Before that age, children fall into the category of extremely vulnerable and should not give their personal data.
- Cities work closely with NGOs and have together initiated legislative amendments.
- Were there to be direct access to EU funding, local and regional authorities, even from countries that have governments that oppose migration, would be more willing to be involved and set an example for others.
- Regional and local authorities need to set an example for upholding human rights, for schooling, for social welfare in general.

### Leocula Orlando:

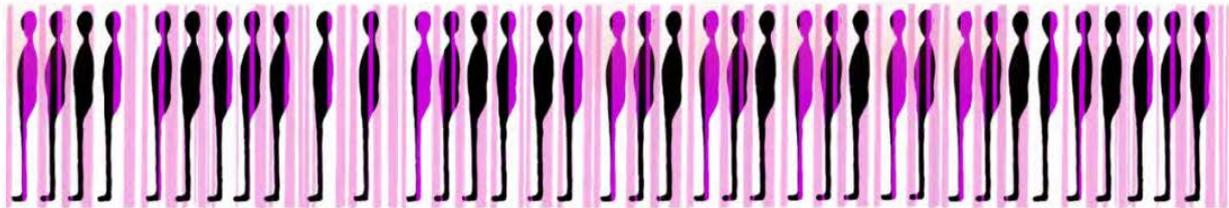
- The global dimension of life is very important. COVID shows this. Global means mobility (information, humans, etc.).
- International human mobility is a human right. Borders are a new slavery/death penalty.
- Local dimension – what can we do? The mayors are freer than the prime ministers, as they have no voters, no army, no currency. Their role is defending human rights.
- Invisibility means violation of human rights, means danger. We give residence to everyone who asks for one: opportunity to legally rent an apartment, work, pay taxes.
- We need to respect law but first need to uphold human rights. When these contradicted I chose to respect the declaration of human rights and the constitutional court vindicated me over the Minister of Interior.
- Competences are very limited. But, we have a cultural and educational role. We, municipalities, can contribute in changing the climate. To communicate that we can live together.
- We used the term resident in all administrative acts instead of the term citizens. We do not give passports. We give residents' permit. With one single act he changed the term in all regulations. In this way, everyone became eligible for social services.
- He gave all rescue at sea organisations the flag of Palermo to fly during their operations. Concretely, this might change nothing but on a symbolic level this is very important.

## Maarten van Ooijen:

- Discussing the Utrecht approach of undocumented migrants.
- Next year, integration and organising of newcomers in the Netherlands will be decentralised to the local government. We know better how to handle problems and the national government also recognises this.
- 20 years ago, the national government told the Utrecht local government to stop with the policies relating to migration, but we did not stop. Migrants are living here no matter what, and we are a human rights city.
- Utrecht approach for undocumented migrants gave shelter to about 300 undocumented migrants a year. Secondly, we give legal counselling and return counselling to all these undocumented migrants. Aim: work to a durable solution. In the last 20 years, our solution rates are very high: 60% of migrants in the shelter was legalised because of professional legal guidance. 20% went back to their homeland via voluntary return. 12% went back to national asylum centres. 8% were lost to illegal stay. Our rate is very high compared to national rates.
- The work is done by specialised local NGOs, not by local government. We have good relations between local government and NGOs, and between NGOs and migrants, and that is the reason for the success.
- 2018 – Utrecht with 4 other cities struck a deal with the national government to work together rather than in competition: led to the National Working Together Programme. We were expecting solution rates to get even higher, but that is not the case.
- In the last 20 years the success factors include the following. 1. must stay bold and confident in the competence of cities to solve the problem. 2. working closely with local NGOs. 3. We can show to the national government that the approach is working – we better results, fewer people on the street, etc. 4. Working together with cities in and beyond Europe, with 30 cities in Europe. This helps to strengthen our approach and get new ideas on how to improve. 5. Also works on opening up European fronts for migrant integration and undocumented migrants.
- Eurocities have been in favour of direct funding for a long time. We need to keep on lobbying and advocacy. Also, we need to have a seat in the table to give our insight on what cities want to do.
- Connecting grassroots initiatives for decriminalising migrants: in Utrecht, local grassroots initiatives are main ambassadors of a changed discourse on migration as they know the subjects personally.
- Municipalities need to give the floor and resources to local NGOs to do what they can.
- How do you deal with confrontation between national and local governments: you need to fight for competences. Show what you can do and leverage your power to get the competences. You need to manifest what you have done. If this is not possible, use the European channel of funding.

## Alexis Chrysafis:

- We have been experiencing a very difficult situation especially in the past 3 years in Greece. This was basically due to external geopolitical reasons but also due to the philosophy of our countries' policies in the past, that enabled a big flow of migrants/refugees.
- There is a huge numbers of persons stranded in our country who want to go elsewhere but due to circumstances and the legal framework they remain.
- Local governance has no competences and experience in dealing with the migrant issue.
- How different would it be if municipalities had institutional and financial power? Given that cities need to be dealing with this issues. Previous interventions by colleagues made me feel melancholic. We were asked to deal with this situation alone.
- Municipalities in Greece, especially the ones at islands, had 4 times more migrants/refugees than permanent citizens. There is a lot to be done not just for the integration of migrants/refugees/asylum seekers but also for providing basic infrastrucutres and services both for the permanent citizens and migrants. Fragmentary actions of governments led to social disruptions. I think that my colleagues who spoke earlier did not experience such situations.
- Lack of information and preparation by citizens as well as fears. Our country is experiencing a huge crisis leading to reservations that needed to be dealt with by municipalities, kede etc.
- Lately, there are efforts to inform and collaboration not for the management of numbers but for integration to the local societies. We need to use methods and tools for local administration with few resources to follow a full plan of integration.
- To have an open society supporting inclusiveness and respect to persons that follow legal rules. It supports dialogue, cohesion, development of the country with the participation of citizens and migrants.
- 2021 is a challenging year for integration. In an area with over 2000 refugees/asylum seekers we have managed to have social peace and make steps towards integration. Challenges made us much more mature.
- Our complaints are related to the lack of solidarity by European peers. We need holistic solutions and we did not receive this attitude from other EU countries.
- Active engagement of municipalities and the Central Union of Greek Municipalities (KEDE) in the recovery fund with a view to integrate these citizens (meaning migrants/refugees) in our societies. These instruments are crucial because expressing wishes or a general philosophy on matters such as migration is not enough. We also have a philosophy towards these people who we consider CITIZENS since they are here to stay. But this necessitates resources and I hope the ongoing discussions in the Central Union of Municipalities of Greece on the involvement of municipalities in the management of funds will be fruitful.
- Nowadays there are national and European funding tools, there are resources for education, integration, health, hygiene, professional skills, cultural awareness. Important programmes such as HELIOS, HESTIA etc. We finally have a good cooperation with the ministry.



MARCH 4, 2021

LOCAL GOVERNANCE & MIGRATION POLICY

## Panel 4 - Migration and Local Democracy: Ways and Prerequisites

Discussants:

**Antonella Valmorbida**, Secretary General of ALDA European Association for Local Democracy

**Drahoslav Štefánek**, Special Representative for Migration and Refugees of the Council of Europe

**Erjona Balani**, Advocacy officer at Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality and Diversity

Chair: **Adla Sashati**, Office director at the Greek Forum of Migrants

### Summary

Engagement of migrants in local politics, including voting and other forms of political participation, is important as an end in itself and as a stepping stone for integration. Local politics is the place where real democracy happens, and is about creating solutions to tangible, real-life problems. Everybody affected by these problems should play a role in addressing them, and this includes migrants who settle in the community. Participation in politics is an extremely important and effective means for integration. Encouraging this participation will enable newcomers to become a part of the community in which they live. Integration is key for a cohesive society, and for the wellbeing of migrants and locals alike. Thus, governments should enable political participation as a stepping-stone to integration.

Migrants can bring significant benefit to local politics. Often, they have huge drive to get involved: refugees are often politically active because they are political refugees, and campaigning for change in their home countries may represent their only hope for returning. Also, migrants can be extremely valuable members of a political community as they often bring diversity, alternative viewpoints and, most importantly, hope. Therefore, facilitating political participation will ensure that host countries really make the most out of the phenomenon of migration.

Currently, there is no EU or international law ensuring that migrants are able to vote in member states' local elections, despite the benefits described above. In fact, migrants often feel discouraged from participating in politics in their host countries. Lack of information, fear of being used as scapegoats, or a sentiment that the law does not protect them from discrimination, cause reluctance or fear in engaging in local politics.

However, political participation is not limited to the right to vote. Governments must put policies in place which enable migrants to feel less afraid to be citizens, for example by enshrining in law the formal right of migrants to participate in local politics. Education is a crucial aspect: without civic education, people are unable to participate meaningfully. This means sharing information with everybody (both migrants and locals) about the political system, the community, its problems, and potential solutions, so that then individuals can vote conscientiously. Before an individual is able to participate in politics, some level of integration is necessary; and here, the role of NGOs is important. It is undeniable that NGOs place a crucial role in integrating newcomers, by facilitating participation in the local community, and therefore these organisations can act as a stepping-stone to full political participation of migrants.

## MINUTES

### Adla Sashati:

- Voting in local elections would help migrants and refugees integrate in countries. But voting is only one form of political expression. There is also organising groups, freedom of expression, etc.: all important for integration.

### Antonella Valmorbida:

- Local democracy is a place for real democracy, peace and development.
- Local politics and policymaking are very important in coming up with solutions to problems. And everyone touched by the problems should be part of the solution.
- Participation means responsibility.
- Migrants are transiting, so it is difficult to get them involved in political activism. This community should interact with local politics through representatives – those who are able to express their interests and needs.
- When migrants settle somewhere, they're no longer migrants. So must facilitate ASAP participants' capacity to be engaged and understand the challenges of the community. We must include them in our struggle – they have huge potential and often huge drive to get involved.
- EU citizens can vote at the local level wherever they move. But non-EU citizens often cannot. But even if voting rights aren't in place, we can still ensure involvement, e.g., with panels, focus groups, etc.

### Drahošlav Štefánek:

- 1951 Geneva Convention does not provide for special political rights for refugees – it says they should be provided the same political rights as other aliens.
- European Convention on Human Rights: voting rights are reserved for nationals only. But the Convention only talks about parliamentary elections, not local elections.

- Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level – adopted in 1992 – provides for rights to vote and stand for election at local level. Can opt out at moment of signature. Only nine member states have ratified the treaty.
- Migrants are often discouraged from participating in the standard political channels.
- For many refugees it is likely that they will become politically active because often they're political refugees. Campaigning for change in countries of origin is often the only way there is hope that they might return home eventually.
- There are other ways to be politically active – joining groups etc. So even if there is no right to vote, refugee status does not mean they cannot express political opinions – same freedom of expression, association and participation.

### Erjona Balani:

- Participation in politics – starting with local politics – is very important because it may be the most dynamic means for the integration of migrants.
- 2010 – Immigration Law 3838 in Greece. Recognised immigrants' right to vote in local elections.
- It was a very promising law, but it was only applied once in local elections, in 2010 (because in 2014 the law was abolished).
- 2010-4 – immigrants weren't active or involved in elections. Because migrants often feel insecure in Greece – fear of discrimination/being scapegoats. This is because there is no legal basis in countries that allows them to feel secure in their political participation. Because the law does not protect them.
- Now, there is still no preparation for people to become active members of society. We have created first- and second-class citizens. The right to vote isn't enough, there are so many other things the Greek state should do to make immigrants a part of society.
- We must empower people not to be afraid to be citizens or to feel like important members of society – government needs to set the right policies to achieve that.

### Antonella Valmorbida:

- We must enable those who have to act as citizens to be part of society. It does not make sense for someone just to vote as soon as they arrive – we need to enable them to have all the information to understand the issues at stake, to prepare people to participate. Otherwise, this undermines democracy, and migrants may feel manipulated.
- With information, people can decide what is good for the community. Clearly, we need to spend energy at the political level to create welcoming citizens. But we also need the resources for exposing everyone (men, women and other) to civic education.



*To Mr. Štefánek: the Council of Europe in my understanding is a political instrument that is always more progressive than the European Union and national governments. Collaboration between Council of Europe and civil society – is there a strategy for including civil society on migrant issue re. civic engagement?*

#### **Drahošlav Štefánek:**

- INGOs Conference of the Council of Europe includes 300 NGOs around Europe. Within this, one group of NGOs specifically deals with migration and one committee is in charge of migration issues.
- Integration should come first, only then can you meaningfully participate in politics.
- Also, it is not just about elections – participation is often driven by local NGO communities helping refugees to integrate. The role of NGOs is crucial in integration.
- Narrative is also important - must make it more positive. Otherwise, the framework won't be open to the integration of migrants.



*There are suggestions of future citizenship for undocumented migrants that is already being trialled in Barcelona. What do you think about this?*

#### **Drahošlav Štefánek:**

- Barcelona is one of the cities that called on its government to relocate migrants from Greece. Also, Portugal is giving legal status for migrants, and there are also good examples in Italy.

#### **Erjona Balani:**

- Often people have been living in a country for years and are raising children who will be the country's next generation. Should have the right to vote in local elections – they are citizens, they just do not have citizenship. Definition of 'citizen' is about participation.

#### **Drahošlav Štefánek:**

- Citizenship is a legal relationship with the state and offers some legal rights and requirements.
- Parliamentary elections are reserved for citizens, local elections are a different story.



*There is a strong connection between right to vote for migrants and representation of local institutions. What is your take on this?*

**Antonella Valmorbida:**

- The issue of mobility must be addressed not marginally, but substantially. It will be a structural issue. Countries like Greece and Italy have a cultural challenge with this – it makes them question their sense of identity.
- Question: how do we make the most out of mobility? If you do not prepare yourself for this new structural setting, you cannot make most of it as everything is reactive. So, we need to change our society to be able to include people and make sure society is changing thanks to them. Migrants bring hope. With this we can make them European citizens – the local level is the most dynamic way of doing this, because it has an apolitical, pragmatic, direct aspect. It is where they can integrate their life, jobs, etc.

**Erjona Balani:**

- Migrants' hope has to be backed up by the law. The local community is the start for immigrants to be integrated in every community in every state. So, we have to back up that particular law for immigrants to be able to participate in local community.



MARCH 5, 2021

## Part 2 – LOCAL GOVERNANCE, MIGRANT INTEGRATION & SOCIAL COHESION

### **Panel 1 - Policies of Segregation – Policies of Integration: Towards a Comprehensive Policy Framework Including Localities**

Discussants:

**Laura Corrado**, EC, Head of Unit of Legal Pathways & Integration

**Melina Daskalaki**, Executive Advisor for Migrants and Refugees at the Municipality of Athens

**Chair: Dr Antonis Karvounis**, Expert on International Partnerships of Local Authorities Europe for Citizens Contact

#### **Summary**

The Commission works for fostering cooperation between local and regional authorities for capacity-building and the promotion of exchanges. Unsurprisingly, funding is a key aspect of the EC's support to the local level and is something that the EC uses to encourage working together. For example, the partnership principle, which now also applies to the Asylum, Migration and Integration fund (AMIF – the most relevant fund for the members of this conference), encourages authorities to work with each other and with civil society actors and organisations, which elicits the involvement of a range of actors, thus ensuring representation of relevant stakeholders and fostering connections. The involvement and cooperation for local actors, particularly regarding integration, is essential.

A large part of the AMIF funding is directed to and managed by national authorities. This means that, even if it is used to support local authorities, the national level is able to decide the specific focus of the funding. Since national-level authorities often have different ideas about integration policies compared to their local-level counterparts, this can be problematic. Luckily, the use of the partnership principle will aid this problem by ensuring coordination with local actors. Project-based funding negatively impacts on the sustainability and continuity of local integration policies due to the lack of guarantee of continued funding. This also creates a culture of circumstantiality when it comes to the work of municipalities in the field of integration. Funding could be made available to municipalities directly in order to increase their operational capacities, instead of giving funding to individual projects. The elaboration of an ongoing, standard policy for social integration of vulnerable people, including migrants and refugees, in the same way that countries have standard policies for education, is necessary. In their policies and funding strategies, Europe and its member states must distinguish between the issue of protecting Europe from mass migration flows and the integration of individuals into its communities.

## MINUTES

### Laura Corrado:

- The European Commission (EC) has launched a new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion.
- EC has invested a lot in recent years in creating strong partnerships with different actors involved in integration and inclusion. Partnerships with local and regional authorities are very important too.
- 13 proposals for how to cooperate with cities and regions. We want to foster cooperation between local and regional authorities via concrete activities to build capacity and promote exchanges.
- Urban Academy: launched as a pilot a few years ago. About integration and the local level.
- Now we want to develop this into a comprehensive capacity-building programme.
- There are also a number of activities about preventing radicalisation.
- Support to local and regional authorities: funding is a key aspect. EC is asked often how effective access to funding can be promoted.
- Partnership Principle – central authorities have to work together with regional authorities, civil society actors etc. in the management of funds now also applies to the Asylum,
- Migration and Integration fund. Also, 50% of the funds have to be allocated to integration – this is a new rule.
- There are also specific objectives now on integration in the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, and a toolkit on how to use these funds for integration.
- We must also involve local communities, not just authorities, in the design and implementation of implementation programmes.
- Mutual Assistance Programme: involving national, regional and local authorities in Greece, Austria and Italy to learn from each other. Also 'Curing the Limbo': to promote social integration at regional and local level with the City of Athens and other partners.

### Melina Daskalaki:

- National level – centrally designed policies must define roles and responsibilities in a national integration system.
- Local governments – play a critical role in management and integration for asylum seekers especially in the implementation of integration policies. They're in closer contact with civil society and have a better understanding of the needs of vulnerable groups and local culture. So, they're critical in the integration process.
- Challenges: lack of interpreters in critical areas such as health, long waiting time for asylum application, difficulties in obtaining social security number, etc.

Labour market is a particular challenge due to high unemployment rates in Greece in recent years, and COVID-19. Also need to challenge anti-migrant discourse and sensitising people to the 'other'. Must promote social inclusion.

- The development of coordination mechanisms at the local level is very important to facilitate the circulation of information and dialogue between communities, other organisations and municipalities.
- Cooperation with communities via the council is also important. This way migrant communities are involved in design, implementation and evaluation of problems where they are important stakeholders.
- CEM – provides services such as psychological support, legal counselling, information on social rights to refugees and migrants, social inclusion activities – e.g., Greek, English and IT courses – and provide volunteering opportunities for refugees.
- There is a focus on refugees themselves as they are becoming integrated into city life through Curing the Limbo initiative.
- So, cities, local authorities and municipalities have more direct exposure to migration, so can play decisive role in welcoming migrants and refugees, providing facilities, offering opportunities, and helping them access services, education and employment. Need international cooperation activities to promote international collaboration on migration.



*Major issue is housing. Housing subsidies have a diverse impact in European countries – sometimes subsidies have no effect on housing cost overburden, other times they have alleviated the situation. What is your opinion on this? Has the Action Plan touched on this issue?*

**Laura Corrado:**

- Access to housing is a key thematic area in Action Plan. Housing impacts other aspects e.g., employment etc.
- Difficult to give one specific solution as it differs across MS. But we encourage MS to consider housing together with other policies fostering integration in a coordinated approach. Subsidies can be helpful but not enough. Number of creative solutions in some MS – e.g., of co-housing (migrants and refugees together with local people).
- Need targeted solutions, cannot have a uniform policy on this issue (migrants have different characteristics/preferences, face different problems, etc.).



*What is the impact of the initiatives by the municipality? Have you measured the reactions of local populations to these initiatives? To what extent do they cooperate with the municipality during their implementation?*

**Melina Daskalaki:**

- We have broad collaboration with civil society, but the local population has never been very eager or willing to collaborate.
- Attica – we face the problem of radicalisation, inherited from the economic crisis years.
- Past 5 years, Athens has showed increased development so some neighbourhoods are very popular and rents are high, while others go down. Mayor has understood this problem very well. He tries to bridge those differences and sooth the problems triggered by degraded neighbourhoods.
- We need to recognise people's problems and feelings otherwise there is a risk of radicalisation.



*The new programming period provides for synergies. How do the synergies make it easier for communities and organisations to have access to EU funds?*

**Laura Corrado:**

- There are no strict thematic divisions in some funds – wanted to ensure flexibility – so they can support broader actions for the whole community, as part of a comprehensive approach to build cohesive societies. It is important that it isn't 'us vs. them'; it is about building societies for everyone.
- Want to ensure MS concretely take into account regional approaches. Coordination is needed on European level and also the national level. We need coordination at programming, implementation and monitoring stages to maximise impact of the funds.



*About AMIF – is there the possibility of access to the funding by local authorities?*

**Laura Corrado:**

- 60% goes through national authorities through share management, but the thematic facility is horizontal, which can support actions that target local and regional authorities.

Also, there are opportunities for co-financing. So, a large part is managed through national authorities, but there are opportunities for other possibilities.



*AMIF goes through national agencies, who sometimes have different ideas to the local level of best integration policies. In many cases they do not reach the local level. Is there a possibility that there will also be direct funding for AMIF to cities? This would create much more innovation, which is a bit blocked now.*

**Laura Corrado:**

- Compared to old asylum and integration fund, more (40%) is managed centrally. Of that, at least 5% must be dedicated to projects targetting local and regional authorities.
- These projects have a higher co-financing rate (up to 90%).
- Now (not in the past), MS will be bound by Partnership Principle in AMIF – now have to involve and coordinate with local and regional authorities, civil society, etc.



*Other issue is the operational funding of organisations which plan on multi-annual basis. Issue about organisations who are very close to migrant communities to know about their operational funds and to what extent the new programme period can cover demands for constant funding for these organisations.*

**Laura Corrado:**

- We cannot really provide grants directly under AMIF, so must focus on the projects.
- From the Commission's point of view, we are willing to support as much as possible the local and regional levels. Want to push dialogue with all organisations to see how we can further improve it in the future.



*Perhaps Daskalaki can reflect on the issue of the funding and questions already raised.*

### Melina Daskalaki:

- Problem that always occurs: funding is on a project basis.
- National authorities and the EU need to think of migration and refugee issue as an issue of social inclusion and integration in general – a social issue. It is about dealing with the problem, not with specific populations of different origins.
- Europe needs to build an ongoing policy for the future for social inclusion issues.
- Project-based funding does not guarantee sustainability so all efforts remain held back – you cannot plan a policy if you do not know if you'll get funding in a year or two.
- There is a standard policy for education; the same is needed for the social integration and inclusion of all kinds of vulnerable people.
- How to protect European area from massive migration and refugee flows is a separate issue to integration. We need separate policies.

### Laura Corrado:

- Sustainability is very important, and this has to come from national programmes. It is the responsibility of MS to use different funds to foster inclusion in a global and holistic way.



*Talking about the project-based approach being bad. The issue of sustainability touches the internal organisation of municipality first, structures of municipality, the issue of the relationship between municipality and local population. Local democracy tools play a role here to cultivate relationships of trust between organisation, municipality and population. So, a project-based approach will have a sustainable impact only in this way.*

### Melina Daskalaki:

- The project-based approach has a negative impact on the structure of permanent services of municipalities. If we work circumstantially with projects, it will not create an internal institutional culture in this field.
- The problem we have is finding the people needed to build capacity. We must have a steady policy and build an internal capacity for that policy, and in addition, be more agile and adaptive, also with some projects outside the institution.



*To Ms Corrado: is there the provision for smaller municipalities to be supported through capacity-building or a simpler application procedure for financing by AMIF?*

*It is clear that capacities of smaller communities/institutions to provide human resources for the funding application etc. is quite unrealistic.*

**Laura Corrado:**

- My advice would be to really work with organisations that can support smaller organisations and develop partnerships within and across MS.
- Happy to further discuss how to help.



*(in chat) What planning the Municipality of Athens has and if you are going to ask for cooperation in funding programme?*

**Melina Daskalaki:**

- We have already asked for money and signed a memorandum with the Ministry for financing the new Leonas project, which will be a transit facility for people that come out from camps who do not have proper access to housing/haven't finished the bureaucratic procedures and end up camping in Athens' open spaces – problem we faced in 2015-6 and we almost faced last summer when people left island camps.
- We are working with the Ministry on integration plans, regarding ideas and experience about what works besides the obvious (Greek language). Need training for skills for low-skilled jobs. We cannot implement programmes like that without the financing of national money (from EU) or directly from EU.



**MARCH 5, 2021**

**Part 2 – LOCAL GOVERNANCE, MIGRANT INTEGRATION & SOCIAL COHESION**

## **Panel 2: The Era of Covid-19 in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities for Social Cohesion**

Discussants:

**Michele Levoy**, Director of the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)

**Sasha Marschang**, Acting Secretary General at European Public Health Alliance

**Antigone Lyberaki**, General Manager of Solidarity Now

Chair: **Manos Moschopoulos**, Senior Program Officer at the Open Society Initiative for Europe

### **Summary**

Vulnerable and marginalised groups, including refugees, are particularly affected by the pandemic and the measures undertaken to stop its spread. Yet despite this, migrants continue to find themselves at the bottom of the priority list in the Covid-19 response by both national governments and the EU. This leaves civil society actors to fill the gaps left by their national governments, which includes tasks such as providing health services and spreading information about the virus. Thus, it is imperative that these actors receive protection against Covid-19 and also included in policy design regarding vulnerable people, since they appear to be the only people with knowledge about and contact with these groups.

Intersectionality and coherence are crucial factors in the elaboration and implementation of policies on the pandemic, but also separate to the health crisis. In this regard, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum lacks coherence when compared to other EU plans and policies by decreasing its focus on human rights in favour of a logic of deterrence. For example, the New Pact's indirect call for racial profiling and pervasive emphasis on detention is inconsistent with both the EU's Action Plan Against Racism and international recommendations to protect migrant children from being detained. In times of Covid-19, the EU's continual use of return procedures to tackle irregular migration goes against public health recommendations, for example to put on pause international travel. Thus, although there are positive developments in some aspects of EU policy in terms of the protection of human rights, the fact that this does not extend to the Union's migration policy leads to a lack of overall coherence in its approach. Given that more often than not, the struggles of vulnerable people are intersectional in nature, this lack of consistency is problematic.

Subsidiarity is particularly important when responding to the struggles of marginalised groups, both within and outside the context of the pandemic. Local and civil-society actors are well-placed in theory and effective in practice in supporting these groups, and therefore much can be done to facilitate this work and consequently improve the situation of vulnerable local and migrant groups. Bringing city-level actors together, both within cities (this includes the need for municipalities to align their approach to those of local NGOs, for example) and between them (to share expertise and come up with solutions to challenges) has proved very fruitful. National-level governments must support and endorse city-level programmes that have proven to be very effective, for example in the Netherlands. Dutch cities developed projects on return orientation which were subsequently supported by their national government, facilitating their implementation. Education is a solution both for local and national policies. It is clear that the pandemic has the potential to harm social cohesion further by increasing the fear of the 'other', by limiting options for interaction between different groups and encouraging individuals to use vulnerable groups as scapegoats to be blamed for the spread of the violence. To tackle this issue, European societies need education about and exposure to vulnerable groups – including migrants – from a young age in order to challenge stereotypes and encourage empathy.

In spite of the problems and difficulties of vulnerable groups due to Covid-19, the pandemic can act as an opportunity to create a more cohesive and empathetic EU policy and society, partly by emphasising the strengths of the local level in protecting vulnerable people including migrants in all of its future strategies.

## MINUTES

### Sasha Marschang:

- Explaining the experiences of vulnerable groups in COVID. Marginalised groups are particularly affected by COVID: it is a very intersectional issue.
- Regarding migration, there is a big clash between what we in public health are saying and what the European Migration Agenda is saying (focused on returns etc.). Migrants especially aren't served very well by European public health policies.
- There are huge opportunities now for organisations taking an intersectional approach to call for intersectional policy structures at European and national levels.
- Ordinary people must be involved in these structures e.g., protecting refugees from being deported, as well as city-level initiatives.
- COVID – fear of the other is growing again because we do not really see anyone anymore.

## Michele Levoy:

- We must see whether we're including undocumented migrants in COVID recovery.
- Multi-Annual Funding Framework (MFF) – 2021-7 budget for EU. Does include some instruments – support services to marginalised people (possibly includes undocumented migrants). There are a few funds for things like this, which can help support inclusion measures that promote better access to healthcare.
- But the scope of these funds will be defined by MS' operational programmes. Here civil society can play and has played a role, where governments allow it.
- So, funding is theoretically possible. But possibly overshadowed by how the EU sees irregular migration: must look at language used.
- EC proposals are always trying to find balance between MS – weighted down by the MS who are very hostile to migrants on their territory.
- Return has become predominant EU focus in addressing irregular migration (Frontex).
- Several concerns for the human rights of migrants in the new Pact: more and longer detentions (on arrival, 5 days of detention with very little access to info and healthcare – screening regulation); people who are presumed to have arrived irregularly in the EU can be detained without judicial review etc. – increased risk of racial profiling. How is this in line with new EU action plan against racism, which aims to avoid profiling?
- Also, detention would be the norm once pre-entry screening completed. Children aged 12-18 with their families aren't excluded from this procedure. Now international recommendations say children should never be detained for immigration purposes – EU is going against everything established in past 10 years on international level.
- Default option cannot always be return. There are many other options, and many people cannot be returned.
- We recommend separating asylum and return procedures. Also, before issuing return, we should look into whether there are other options. If you invest in trying to help people find resolution for their case and invest in legal aid, most of the time you can find an agreeable resolution.
- With the Pact, civil society might be at greater risk of harassment, criminalisation and restricted access to border issue. Shrinking space for solidarity. Individual organisations are often targeted for their work in migration. Recommend that MS at the border allow NGOs to access borders in order to provide services. Must send the message that humanitarian actions shouldn't be criminalised.
- Migration policy framework overshadows any positive developments in EU policymaking.
- The solution is intersectional.

## Antigone Lyberaki:

- Consequences of the pandemic are very unequal and divisive.
- Social cohesion is at risk due to the pandemic. And marginalised people more vulnerable to society. Collectively – we are as strong as the weakest among us.

- But when we are campaigning for asylum seekers, we are seen as campaigning for luxury goods, as if there are more important things on the list.
- Xenophobic values are resetting policy priorities where the most vulnerable find themselves at bottom of list. True at national but also at sub-national level.
- So as civil society actors we try to fill gaps in basic information and basic services. And also try to develop more inclusive narrative on migrants and refugees. So, Solidarity Now adjusts its communication and action plan to respond to health crisis – facilitate access to vital information about the pandemic.
- Frontline NGO workers should be included not only in protection against COVID but also policy design regarding vulnerable people.
- Overlap of three crises offers an opportunity to address old and new inequalities, both horizontal and vertical in nature.
- Need a more inclusive approach, with universal access to basic services at centre of any policy. Situation of undocumented migrants must also be taken into account in policy.
- Global events e.g., pandemic offer the opportunity for more solidarity.



*Over the past year, the reaction to pandemic at national and sub-national level can potentially harm social cohesion – what can we learn from that so that when we go back to normal, we do not risk being in societies where social cohesion is threatened or non-existent?*

#### **Sasha Marschang:**

- If there were some mechanisms available at the local level where the interests of local actors are really taken into account in combination with their social needs and economic contribution that they could make, it would already be very helpful.
- There is a rise of stigma and discrimination to members of vulnerable groups – they're perceived to be spreading the virus/making things worse. We need a welcoming culture.
- Problematic because when refugees are linked with 'bad' things (well before COVID, e.g., linked with terrorism), this idea of a welcoming culture erodes quickly.
- Policy coherence is the issue. No policy coherence is no good for social cohesion.

#### **Michele Levoy:**

- In 5 or 6 MS, at the start of the pandemic people were released from detention centres in order to attempt to slow the spread. But in some cases, they were released from detention to the streets.
- Release still seen as positive. But short-lived – continued detention afterwards.
- A number of MS also extended residence permits in first lockdown. Also, some weren't carrying out any returns. Portugal offered a specific regularisation programme.

- Regularisation is usually avoided at EU level but this brought it back on agenda. Italy – regularisation of agricultural workers in lockdown period.
- So, some national-level policies gained resurgence and visibility – important at EU level.
- Victims of Crime Strategy (came out last year) recognised that undocumented migrants were particularly vulnerable to domestic violence. Huge step in the right direction.
- A lot of the promise isn't in migration, but in other areas. But there must be coherence.
- Also, vaccine rollouts – almost 10 MS explicitly including undocumented migrants. Others implicitly. But we must ensure that the personal data of undocumented migrants won't be transferred to the migration system.

### Antigone Lyberaki:

- Important events unleash strange attitudes. It is unsurprising that pandemic brings to fore fears and judgements and discrimination.
- What we can do about it: develop a more holistic, positive narrative that defends the interests of vulnerable people, capable of capturing the minds and hearts of ordinary people. Not about high policy levels – politicians are just following pressure from the ground.



*Vulnerable groups face unique impacts e.g., labour exploitation and lack of access to healthcare. This panel starts from the hypothesis that decentralising some of these decisions would provide the answer that we're looking for. What opportunities do you see for decentralisation happening on a local or European level?*

### Antigone Lyberaki:

- Greece isn't the best example to get lessons about the potential of sub-national policies because it has a very contradictory framework. There is a very strong tradition of central state decisions at policy level. There is some devolution of power with no budget to support it. So, Greece is still at a very infantile stage of the decentralisation model.
- Our work cannot proceed/conclude successfully without the support and trust of the social environment within which vulnerable people find themselves e.g., towns, cities. Need alignment of some priorities with local authorities.

### Michele Levoy:

- Cities learn from each other and there is lots of expertise potentially able to be shared when you bring city-level actors together. Also, can give visibility to an issue by having authoritative publications that highlight it.

- Because local-level actors have to deal with the reality of the social inclusion of undocumented migrants, they can come up with solutions that sometimes can reorientate policy and funding. One example: Netherlands. Some projects on return orientation were developed by cities, and the national level supported them.

### Sasha Marschang:

- The national level needs to endorse city-level programmes.
- Also must be careful that they do not become marketing tools – it is easy to market your city as diverse, but there needs also to be substance to it.
- Even when you have well-intentioned projects undertaken by local actors, we need a structure in the national system to accommodate the results/prolong the projects. Otherwise, the projects end, money is spent, and that is the end.



*Is it useful to challenge toxic policies re migration as an example of self-harm? Second question – was the hotspot approach basically an attempt to enact degradation by design onto the frontline states, as opposed to a policy gap?*

### Antigone Lyberaki:

- There was no conspiracy behind the bad policies intentionally degrading reception conditions to put blame on frontline states.
- But definitely a tacit agreement to create a deterrent for those thinking about coming. We need to win over ordinary people.

### Michele Levoy:

- It takes a lot of time and energy to challenge engrained assumptions in the institutions that create policies. Need years of work – the challenges are huge. We have to be concerted and unpack segments in a very focused way. Even this is still a challenge.

### Sasha Marschang:

- Also, there is a problem of education in Europe – fear of the other etc. goes back to the fact that we do not have real encounters with difference from an early age.
- A lot can be done with education. If we achieve that (people leaving school with an understanding of migration), we have hope for a truly open society.

**MARCH 5, 2021**

**Part 2 – LOCAL GOVERNANCE, MIGRANT INTEGRATION & SOCIAL COHESION**

### **Panel 3: Migrants and marginalised groups in local contexts: Towards an intersectional framework embracing diversity**

Discussants:

**Nancy Papathanasiou**, PhD – Scientific Coordinator Orlando LGBT+

**Tasos Smetopoulos** – Founder & Coordinator at Steps

**Katerina Pournara** – Lawyer, HumanRights360

**Maja Løvbjerg Hansen**, Danish Street Lawyers, Copenhagen

Chair: **Eleni Takou**, Deputy Director and Head of Advocacy at HumanRights360

#### **Summary**

Marginalised communities and/or vulnerable communities and individuals at risk, found themselves amongst the ones hit hardest during the pandemic. With inadequate - if not non-existing - state and governmental provision for people living and/or working on the streets during the multiple lockdowns in European cities, we observe the transition from 'marginalised' to 'dispossessed'. Therefore, growing portions of the overall population are left without sufficient knowledge of the regulations in effect along with severely restricted access to basic health services.

Inspired by the paradigm of Danish Street Lawyering, similar initiatives emerged in Greece during 2020 seeking to provide basic legal guidance to sexworkers, migrants, homeless and people without formal documentation. Acknowledging the challenges of delivering inclusive services, Human Rights 360 and STEPS managed to design and implement a street work service for all while acting as mediators between people living and/or working on the streets and legal authorities in both local and national level.

Overall, the pandemic has brought out a series of pressing urbanization and societal issues. Among them, the 'othering' of underprivileged individuals and/or communities and the necessity of initiatives lead from these individuals and/or communities themselves. Given how they are the only agents of their experience, new approaches are needed to discuss more concretely and advocate for populations with differentiated degrees of privilege within the same communities.

## MINUTES

### Nancy Papathanasiou:

- The first thing one has to address when working with LGBT+ individuals is intersectionality.
- When we talk about multiple identities, we usually come across conflicting and/or overlapping identities and needs. In that case, how can we design inclusive services?
- At the moment, the overall picture of the public services available is disheartening; they seem to have been designed to exclude / to keep away the users and in several cases, it appears that they create a hostile environment (bullying).
- Multiple vulnerable individuals and groups (migrants, sexworkers, LGBT+, refugees, etc.) carry more than one of these identities.
- When asked whether we can design inclusive services for all, for now the answer is negative. That is because we are still unaware of how to think in terms of a fully inclusive society overall.
- However, we can talk about differentiated services for individuals and groups with shared characteristics (intersecting populations).
- No group or population is 100% homogeneous but they come together based on their similarities and shared characteristics/ qualities (intersections).
- Orlando LGBT+ follows an approach based on community psychology; meaning that it is not enough for an expert to provide the tools to address communal challenges. It is of crucial importance to involve the actual community in developing the tools as they are the (only) ones to have the expertise of their experience.
- A common challenge that needs to be acknowledged is that there is not the time or the resources or the funding to actually work and connect with these communities; we also do not share the same spaces. Therefore, it is very unlikely that we will come together and educate (and/or understand) one another.
- Some of the practices and/or services that are considered to have a positive impact on communities emerge from the communities themselves. However, we need to keep in mind that not all the communities have the same degree of access in the same resources.
- Another common misconception is that the less represented communities are seen as a distinct chunk of the society. However, following the intersectional approach, it seems that there are several intersecting points between well and less represented groups. This can be the basis of developing a new approach.
- Resilience is not an inherent characteristic; it is more of the end result of a process during which positive qualities are nurtured and encouraged. The individuals that seek out help in most cases have already become to some extent psychologically resilient; they have already made it so far. So, we tend to work with the people that have survived instead of the ones that did not make it (observer's selection effect).

That leads us to believe that we should try to pinpoint those mechanisms that allowed these individuals and/or communities to survive and then match them to the available services.

- Finally, it is important to have in mind that we might be able to recognise trauma but we are usually not in a position to recognise to which parts of a person and/ or a community it has been most scarring.

### **Tasos Smetopoulos:**

- It appears that there has been a transition from 'marginalised' to 'disposed' – intensified during and post-covid. The 'disposed' individuals and/or groups have been pushed aside to a point that they cannot receive any kind of assistance (amongst them there are sexworkers, (substance) users, migrants, natives, etc.)
- Especially during covid, these individuals and/ or communities were the ones left alone while the rest of the population was in lockdown. That meaning, that there were no services (soup kitchens, street work groups, public assistance/ services, access to hygiene products, masks, gloves, tests, etc.) available. More importantly, with the ease of measures and the gradual lift of the lockdown, they were heavily stigmatised as the ones transmitting the virus and not complying with the measures.
- During the past few years, these individuals/communities have been instrumentalised in several cases; mostly to facilitate urban policies (i.e gentrification).
- Based on that exploitation of individuals/communities living on the streets, STEPS started the first initiative of street lawyering in Athens in collaboration with Human Rights 360 (inspired by the Danish model of street lawyering)

### **Maja Løvbjerg Hansen:**

- Danish Street Lawyers includes 8 lawyers and one social worker. We do street lawyering outreach + services – always changing. We cannot fixate on the target group or services. It will always change over time as the street is always changing.
- But our target group includes people who use drugs, are homeless, sell sexual services, migrants who live in or off the street (who are dependent on work in the streets).
- We offer legal services to people who are criminalised in the orderly welfare system – everyone has a social security number, for example. But migrants have so few opportunities as they do not have this number (and need it everywhere, so, many possibilities disappear).
- Migrants come with one goal of getting a social security number, as this is the key to enter Danish society.
- With COVID especially and also increasing flows of migrants, there is a parallel between legal issues concerning drug use, sex work and migration: intersectional.
- Despite very ordered welfare system with many rights, the system will find a way to create obstacles to these rights because of stigmas over people who use drugs/sell sex.
- So even if we win a case, someone else will soon come with the same problem because the system finds ways to set boundaries for people even in informal ways.
- Pretty much the same disadvantages for migrants as for the other two groups.

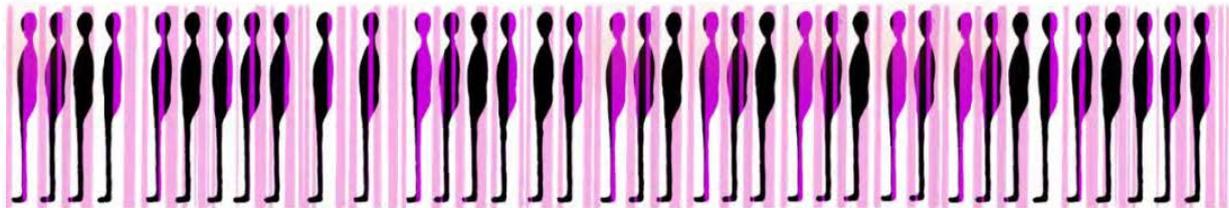
- We also want these groups to stand in solidarity with each other – do not see a lot of this between groups.
- Wording has really changed during COVID. We've always talked about working for 'people with vulnerabilities'. During COVID – that term changed in 24h. The health crisis addressed elderly and those with physical diseases as people with vulnerabilities. Government said – 'we will take care of everyone with vulnerabilities'. But clearly our people were no longer the people with vulnerabilities.
- Increase in migrants on the street in Denmark, so the fear of migrants has dribbled onto homeless Danish people too. So, there has been an increased criminalisation of rough sleeping. Idea that 'we're really sorry that criminalisation hit Danish people, but we had to do it to hit the migrants'. Same idea for COVID, using it as an excuse.
- We started testing people on our own e.g., for migrants who had no CPR number. Because the government said it would test but if migrants test positive, we will send them to a detention centre and deport them. So obviously nobody wanted to get tested.
- We thought the harsh reality of COVID would trump migration policies. But in reality, that was not the case. So, our organisation had to do a parallel system to everything (for every step of the way with COVID). The government just ends up giving ad hoc help/support/ agreement, rather than when they actually need it.

(comment in chat): COVID, rather than being a waking call has ended up excluding more and more people.

#### **Katerina Pournara:**

- Street lawyering in Athens emerged as an initiative during the summer of 2020 in collaboration with Human Rights 360 and STEPS. The idea was inspired by the Danish Street Lawyering running already from the 90s.
- This is a service aimed to be as inclusive as it gets; legal advice is offered to anyone living in the streets (drug users, sexworkers, migrants, individuals without any kind of documentation, etc).
- The majority of the target group face legal issues given that they do not have a permanent address to be contacted by authorities. This usually results in long-term pending issues that aggravate their reluctance and fear towards authorities. More importantly, the lack of a permanent home address increases the possibility to lose and/or not be able to maintain any legal documentation required for their identification and any state subsidy.
- During the pandemic, the existing challenges for individuals and/or communities living on the streets are intensified. Especially with regards to their health and their access to health services, it is safe to assume that they find themselves amongst the most vulnerable groups.
- It is important to also keep in mind that there is no provision for these individuals and/ or communities for tests and hygiene products despite their vulnerability.
- Access to health services was never granted to these communities. For example, HIV tests results take way too long while most doctors and carers have been moved to covid reference hospitals.

- Also, people living in the streets are unaware of any legislative changes and/or new measures. Taking this into consideration, street lawyering attempts to also take a stance on the more practical side of law and prevent issuing fines to people living in the streets.
- Despite that people living in the streets are legally entitled to the minimum state subsidy given their vulnerability, there is no provision for priority vaccination and/or any kind of access to health services.
- Also, we need to keep in mind that most of the social services and/or structures offering places to spend the night are not accepting of everyone (i.e people with non-regulated mental health issues, users, etc.).
- Overall, street lawyering is based on two core axis (a) one-to-one legal advice (b) open dialogue (advocacy) with the authorities. While street lawyers cannot and do not aim to replace/ cover for the public and state authority deficiencies, they do seek to facilitate the mediation between people living in the streets and bodies of authority.



MARCH 5, 2021

FROM THE SEA TO THE CITY

## Panel 4 - From the Sea to the City

Discussants:

**Eleonora de Majo**, City Councillor at the City of Naples

**Federico Alagna**, University of Bologna, Department of Political and Social Sciences; former deputy-mayor for culture in the city of Messina, Sicily

Matthias Mertens, Europe Must Act

**Marie Naass**, Sea-Watch

**Xavi Ferrer**, Barcelona en Comú

Chair: **Dr. Malisa Zobel**, Head of Municipal Development and Integration Initiative at HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform

### Summary

Firstly, the local level is where large, abstract challenges become concrete and have an impact on individuals. This not only increases the need to find solutions to these challenges, but also allows actors to discuss actual, practical responses rather than ideological topics which often polarise people with differing political standpoints. This also allows those working at the local level to experience small victories: something which often gets lost or feels unattainable at the national and supranational level. Small victories are important because they motivate people who may otherwise distance themselves from complex and often difficult topics to get involved and become part of the search for sustainable solutions. Top-down decision making has failed to address the migrant question. The current situation on the Aegean islands is a good example of this failure. Thus, bottom-up, local-level approaches are a powerful alternative to this.

Solidarity between European local-level actors and organisations is crucial. For example, civil society can work effectively with municipalities since they are united by a common opponent: the current migration policies in place in their nations and in Europe. This teamwork can have an impact on national and supra-national policies, particularly when pressure is placed on national governments to implement more human rights-focused policies. Fostering networks between organisations and cities over Europe is also key. These entities often have shared goals and similar approaches, and therefore sharing ideas, communicating frequently and working alongside each other can allow local organisations to be more knowledgeable and come up with more solutions to challenges they face.

In this way, despite the lack of harmony between EU states, the local level can still demonstrate that Europe shows solidarity. Although solidarity is key, the awareness that local contexts often differ hugely throughout Europe must not be cast aside. Communication can increase awareness of this fact and enable local actors to understand better conditions and perceptions on the ground in different local contexts, which will enable people throughout the continent to discern their fellow Europeans' views on and actions towards the migrant question. This variation in local contexts means that the concept of the European 'model' is unfeasible. Instead, we need a nuanced approach to the migrant question which allows for trial and error and reflects the local situation on the ground.

One field in which all local actors can work in a similar way is in creating counter-narratives to the one that Europe and its nations are currently adopting. Europe's frequent rejection of any positive policies which support migrants, justified by the argument that they will be 'pull factors' which cause more migrants to come to Europe, must be countered. Deterrence is not the only feasible approach to the migrant question, and the local level is well-placed in this case to highlight the viable alternatives to Europe's current approach. Thus, there are multiple approaches that can be taken by local-level municipalities and organisations in response to Europe's migrant question, which are likely to be more effective and more conscious of migrants' human rights than national or supranational governments.

## MINUTES

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*Federico, how did you start working at this nexus between cities and civil society and what is your relationship to this? And why do you think the local level is so important in the struggle for fundamental rights, esp. the question of migration and asylum?*

### Federico Alagna:

-I realised through experience that the local level is confronted with huge challenges at times. Local level is where big challenges become concrete and have an impact on everyday life. Where you have local institutions and civil society actors trying to provide answers that in most cases government actors aren't able or willing to give.

- The feeling that rights are jeopardised by actions/inaction of governments is the point where mutual support between local institutions and civil society actors can be very important. With the migrant crisis and with COVID, productive dialogue between these actors can be very effective.



*Xavi – how is the local level important, why is it important and how do you relate to this nexus between activism, civil societies and cities?*

**Xavi Ferrer:**

- Started contacting other organisations/people and realised there are three things that most of the most impactful organisations shared in common: working locally; global approach (they did not use localism as something that made them nationalist etc.); idea of confluence – going beyond traditional boundaries between those in formal politics and those outside these institutions.
- The idea of ignoring big ideological things that could divide people and cause disputes and speaking instead about specific concrete things happening at the local level – that means boundaries disappear.
- Importance of localism – closer to ‘normal’ people who live problems/see conflict. It is much easier to see power and privilege at this level. Also, the local level avoids theoretical debates that aren’t useful – you cannot change anything on that level, it does not connect to people’s lives. This allows a focus on concrete goals. Third reason: small victories are essential. Most people must see that getting organised works. Small victories show that. The local level is where we can actually have victories.



*Marie, please explain a bit the connection of the organisation to the city and the local level.*

**Marie Naass:**

- Civil society mobilised firstly to save those dying in the Med and secondly to show that there is a European community who does not agree with the EU’s policies re migration. So, the political nature of Search and Rescue (SaR) was evident from the start.
- Initially, there was not much organised exchange at the local level. But the work was very much rooted in local structures.
- The need to have organised ties came later. Two reasons: especially in 2018 when we saw that the xenophobic atmosphere (of society and politicians) was escalating. Clear that another narrative was urgently needed, and it was very important to join forces. Then the operational perspective of SaR organisations due to the incident in 2018 when for the first time a civil SaR vessel was not allowed to enter ports. Huge need to really engage with the local level because the national level implemented policies which weren’t feasible for us anymore.



*Matthias, give the listeners an idea of what Europe Must Act does and how it came about.*

### **Matthias Mertens:**

- Started by grassroots organisations active on Aegean islands in March 2020.
- Here, the local level is hugely affected by policies. Basic services come under pressure with the massive arrival of people to the islands.
- People here are not being heard by national governments. No sustainable solutions, just mass containment on the islands.
- Europe Must Act aims to give people the ability in their local community to get active and work together to get local municipalities to take action. About small victories.
- The local level is where we can get out of the political gridlock that we've seen over the past 5-6 years. Current situation of mass containment isn't sustainable. Sustainable solution would require relocation from islands across EU MS. States do not want this.
- So, this is why we are looking at cities to call for solidarity among municipalities – need European solidarity. There is no solidarity among states so hopefully by mobilising people we can have solidarity at the municipal level.



*Federico, having worked in local government at critical time, how important do you think it is that we foster closer collaboration between civil society and cities?*

### **Federico Alagna:**

- Institutions are different from civil society movements – awareness of this difference is important. They do not share the same logic and same goals. But it is important to have mutual understanding.
- In migration policies (especially external migration policies), local institutions formally have a very small role to play. So, usually what they do is based on political involvement rather than institutional tasks. Generally, with these policies there are success stories in terms of cooperation between civil society and local governments. National governments are the ones that make decisions so it is more about putting pressure on the government and also doing what the upper levels of government fail to do.
- Local institutions and civil society share a common enemy: the policies that we see today.



*How much impact is there of cities taking a stance that is different from the government, particularly a welcoming, pro-refugee stance?*

**Marie Naass:**

- This stance does change advocacy work, perceptions, and public narratives.
- There are concrete examples of this. The city of Berlin is suing the national government and trying to make it possible to relocate people from Greek islands to Germany.

**Matthias Mertens:**

- Aegean islands – a very good example of how top-down decision-making can go horribly wrong – do not take reality into account.
- Local level allows you to bypass a lot of the polarisation that exists on the migration topic because you can speak about concrete, practical problems and solutions instead of theories.



*How can we build these strong networks, and eventually bring about a Europe that has a different migration policy?*

**Matthias Mertens:**

- Grassroots organisations in cities across Europe share the same values.
- Strengthening collaborations is hard work, there is no one simple answer.

**Xavi Ferrer:**

- We should do what we are doing now: the conference. Formal networks are important. Often things done in one place influence things in another place: spreading small ideas is very useful.
- Something that we generally miss is strategic debates among people doing similar things but that sometimes do not talk to each other or align efforts. It is about what we could do if we unite forces. Must unite people who are doing things not by creating another structure but by putting them in touch.

### Marie Naass:

- We need to improve building bridges – learning from each other and adapting our own policies accordingly.
- We can create more understanding of specificities within different local contexts. Especially important in formulating demands or just to understand what is going on in a place and understand the atmosphere (and perceptions) at the local level.

### Federico Alagna:

- All local contexts are different so we cannot just copy other local strategies, but can get ideas, discuss, etc.



*How would things work considering differences between cities? It seems hard to imagine a unified and coherent action on the European level with all these differences.*

### Federico Alagna:

- No, I cannot see a unified answer. But the point is, regardless of specific context, it is important to see how this connection between municipalities and civil society can be made.
- We need to thoroughly investigate the local context.
- We cannot have a 'model' – we need to experiment on the ground and with trial and error.



*Following on from this, in Central Europe there is a very hostile situation. How can we bridge these kinds of differences?*

### Xavi Ferrer:

- We need to open up real participation. This isn't something the state wants because real participation means conflict. But we must change local culture and then things follow.



*About pushbacks by Frontex. Frontex is the elephant in the room.*

### **Xavi Ferrer:**

- Frontex is too big for us (as small organisations and municipalities) to destroy. We do not have the money and resources that Frontex has.

### **Final remarks:**

#### **Marie Naass:**

- We must create counter-narratives to work against the argument that anything positive that is done will be a pull factor.

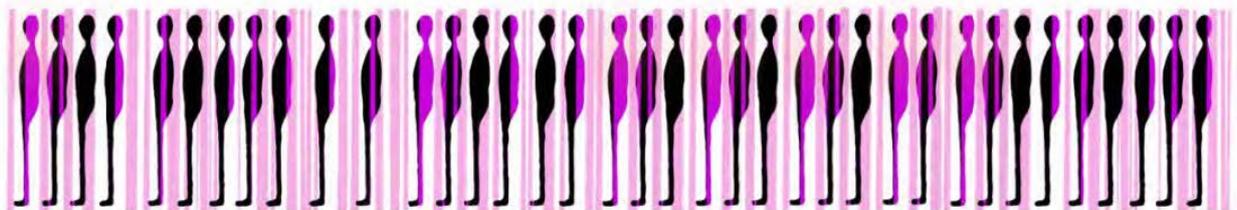
#### **Federico Alagna:**

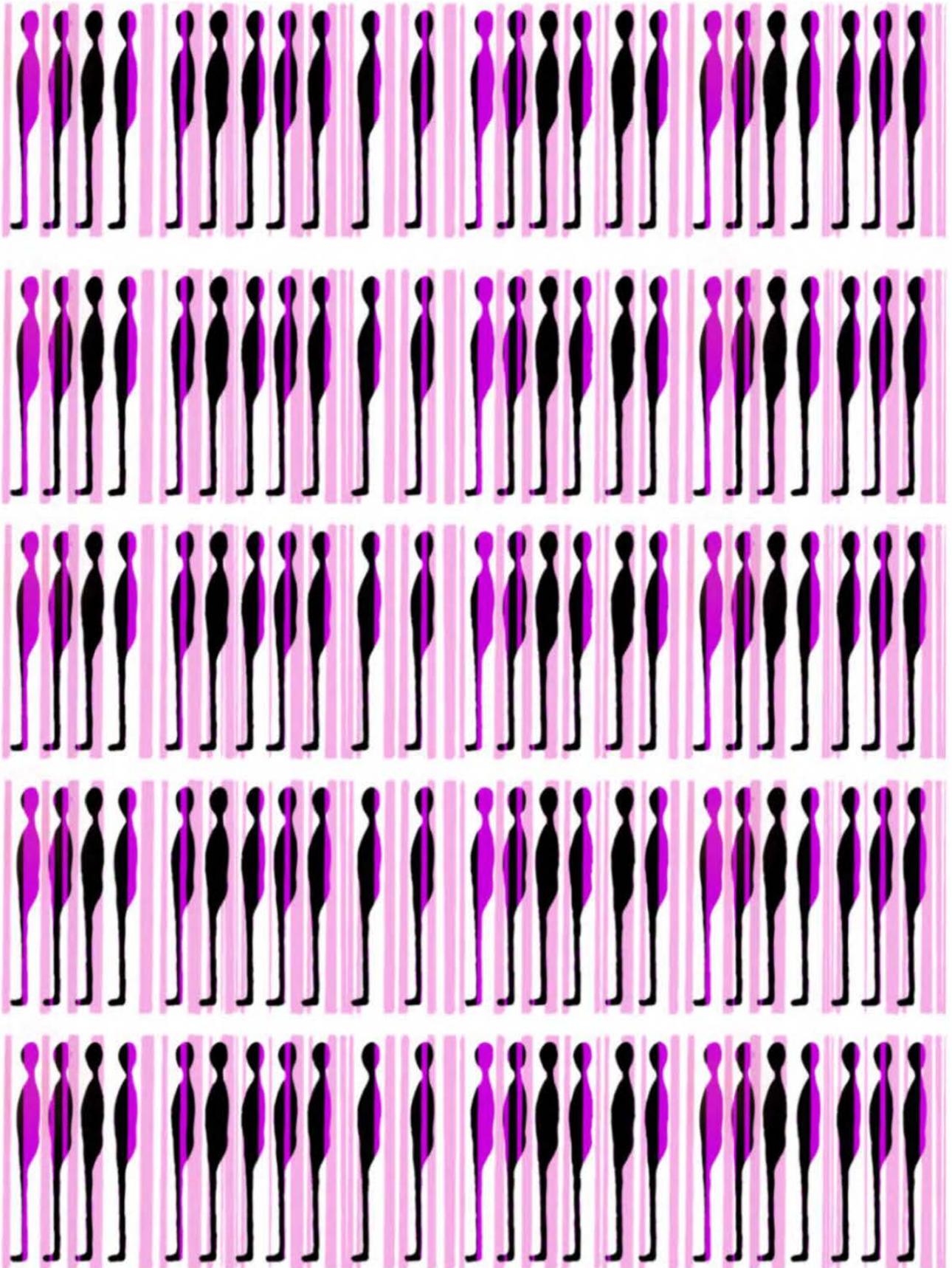
- The great thing about these debates is contamination between different perspectives/ approaches. Really important. It helps shift perspectives, understand better and in a wider context what you do.

#### **Matthias Mertens:**

- Importance of strengthening connections between different networks/organisations and claiming our space. And making the case for viable alternatives – there is a different way. We do not need to get stuck in the idea of these push/pull factors.

This is one of the seven conferences planned across Europe focusing on different aspects of EU migration policies. The conferences are co-funded by the Europe for Citizens programme of the European Union.





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