

Reference Paper for the 70th Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention

Of Mayors and Ministers: The Emergence of cities (and their networks) as partners in national efforts to integrate refugees in Europe

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Abstract:

This paper traces this evolution of the role of cities over the past five years and their emergence as a transnational political force, as the imperative to integrate refugees gained increasing prominence on policy agendas and budgets at local, national and regional level. Cities across Europe have increasingly demonstrated remarkable solidarity towards refugees and asylum seekers. They have promoted diversity and social cohesion through a range of progressive policies that have fostered trust in local administrations, fair access to shared services, and economic inclusion. While the method of delivering services differs markedly across cities, depending on an individual's legal status, as well as access to resources such as financing, staff, housing, and the role and vibrancy of respective civil societies, there is no question that it is cities which are at the forefront of decision-making most likely to impact refugees and asylum seekers in the medium and long term. The integration of refugees and migrants, therefore, is a prime example of a global issue playing out at the local level. The proximity to populations and the urgency to maintain social cohesion in neighborhoods have forced municipal officials to respond, to adapt and bend policies in pragmatic and innovative ways, and to band together as an emerging transnational political force. While this has not translated into unequivocal success of every local initiative or policy response at municipal level, cities and towns have emerged as crucial agents—with significant *agency*—in the de facto integration of refugees and asylum seekers. The paper looks specifically at several initiatives in Spain and Germany as case studies for how municipalities navigated national legal frameworks, bridged national and local politics and adapted their responses accordingly. These experiences—and lessons learned—suggest that cities—and their networks—will continue to exercise significant authority and influence in defining how Europe includes and integrates refugees and asylum seekers.

Introduction

When mayors in Europe recently proposed a *new pact* between the EU and city leadership to overcome the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis,¹ it continued a growing trend of multi-level governance within the European Union and reflected a broad recognition of the critical importance of cities and urban networks as vital, pragmatic partners—increasingly on par with national governments—that emerged following the arrival of some 1.3 million asylum seekers nearly five years ago. In the proposed Pact, the mayors proposed, inter alia, to directly involve city governments more in the EU recovery programmes and demanded direct access for cities to European funding.

“The (COVID) crisis is putting the European project to the test”, the mayors noted in their statement: “We have seen the instant reflex to respond with national measures, even closing borders. A structured and meaningful involvement of cities can support European unity and solidarity and prevent the relapse into national thinking. We call for a new pact between the EU and city leadership – if we get it right in cities, we will get it right for Europe.”

The new partnership proposed by cities to help manage the COVID recovery fits a pattern witnessed over the past five years. The arrival of significant numbers of asylum seekers in 2015 initially cast a spotlight on EU institutions and member states. The sheer scale of the population movement and the incumbent humanitarian challenges resulted in political upheaval and, for a time, appeared to undermine the solidarity of the European Union. Perhaps not surprisingly, much attention was devoted to the national, rather than the local. How would host countries deliver on longstanding protection obligations? How would national politics play out in regional institutions and fora? Would the political center hold?

But focusing solely on the regional and national risks obscuring the vital, and perhaps preeminent contributions, of host towns and cities in responding to the protection and integration needs of new arrivals. When it comes to refugee integration, the local level matters. Where refugees and asylum seekers go and how they integrate into their new communities depends on the specific characteristics of cities and regions. Local authorities and service providers play a vital role in this integration. While national governments develop quotas and rely on technocratic formulas to apportion and resettle populations, it is mayors and municipal authorities who decide how to institute local housing projects, integrate schools, and foster access to services. This reality was explicitly recognized in the creation of the EU’s Urban Agenda in 2016², in which cities played a key role in defining the action plan for

¹ <https://eurocities.eu/latest/covid-19-recovery-mayors-call-for-a-new-pact-between-the-eu-and-cities/>

² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/urban-development/agenda/. **The Urban Agenda for the EU** is an integrated and coordinated approach to deal with the urban dimension of EU and national policies and legislation. By focusing on concrete priority themes within dedicated Partnerships, the Urban Agenda seeks to **improve the quality of life in urban areas**.

In 2016, [the Pact of Amsterdam](#) agreed upon by the EU Ministers Responsible for Urban Matters on [30 May 2016](#) established the [Urban Agenda for the EU](#). Based on the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the Urban Agenda focuses on the three pillars of EU policy making and implementation: Better regulation, Better funding and Better knowledge. **12 Partnerships** have been defined so far, including [Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees](#), [Housing](#), [Urban Poverty](#) and [Jobs and Skills in the Local Economy](#). Each Partnership involves on a voluntary and equal basis cities, Member States, the Commission and stakeholders such as NGOs or businesses. Together they work on developing and implementing concrete actions to successfully tackle challenges of cities and to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. For more information, please refer to <http://www.urbanagendaforthe.eu/>

refugees and migrants in terms of reception, housing, work, education, and support for vulnerable groups.

Moreover, in contrast to the often-toxic national political rhetoric, cities across Europe have also often demonstrated remarkable solidarity towards refugees and asylum seekers. They have promoted diversity and social cohesion through a range of progressive policies that have fostered trust in local administrations, fair access to shared services, and economic inclusion. While the method of delivering services differs markedly across cities, depending on an individual's legal status³, as well as access to resources such as financing, staff, housing, and the role and vibrancy of respective civil societies, there is no question that it is cities which are at the forefront of decision-making most likely to impact refugees and asylum seekers in the medium and long term. The integration of refugees and migrants, therefore, is a prime example of a global issue playing out at the local level. The proximity to populations and the urgency to maintain social cohesion in neighborhoods have forced municipal officials to respond, to adapt and bend policies in pragmatic and innovative ways, and to band together as an emerging transnational political force. This has not translated into unequivocal success of every local initiative or policy response at municipal level. The point, rather, is that cities and towns have emerged as crucial agents—with significant *agency*—in the de facto integration of refugees and asylum seekers. But much work remains to be done.

This thought piece traces this evolution of the role of cities over the past five years and their emergence as a transnational political force, as the imperative to integrate refugees gained increasing prominence on policy agendas and budgets at local, national and regional level. It relies primarily on Spain and Germany as case studies for how municipalities navigated national legal frameworks, bridged national and local politics and adapted their response accordingly, and emerged as increasingly influential transnational actors.

Integration in Europe: concepts, definitions and trends

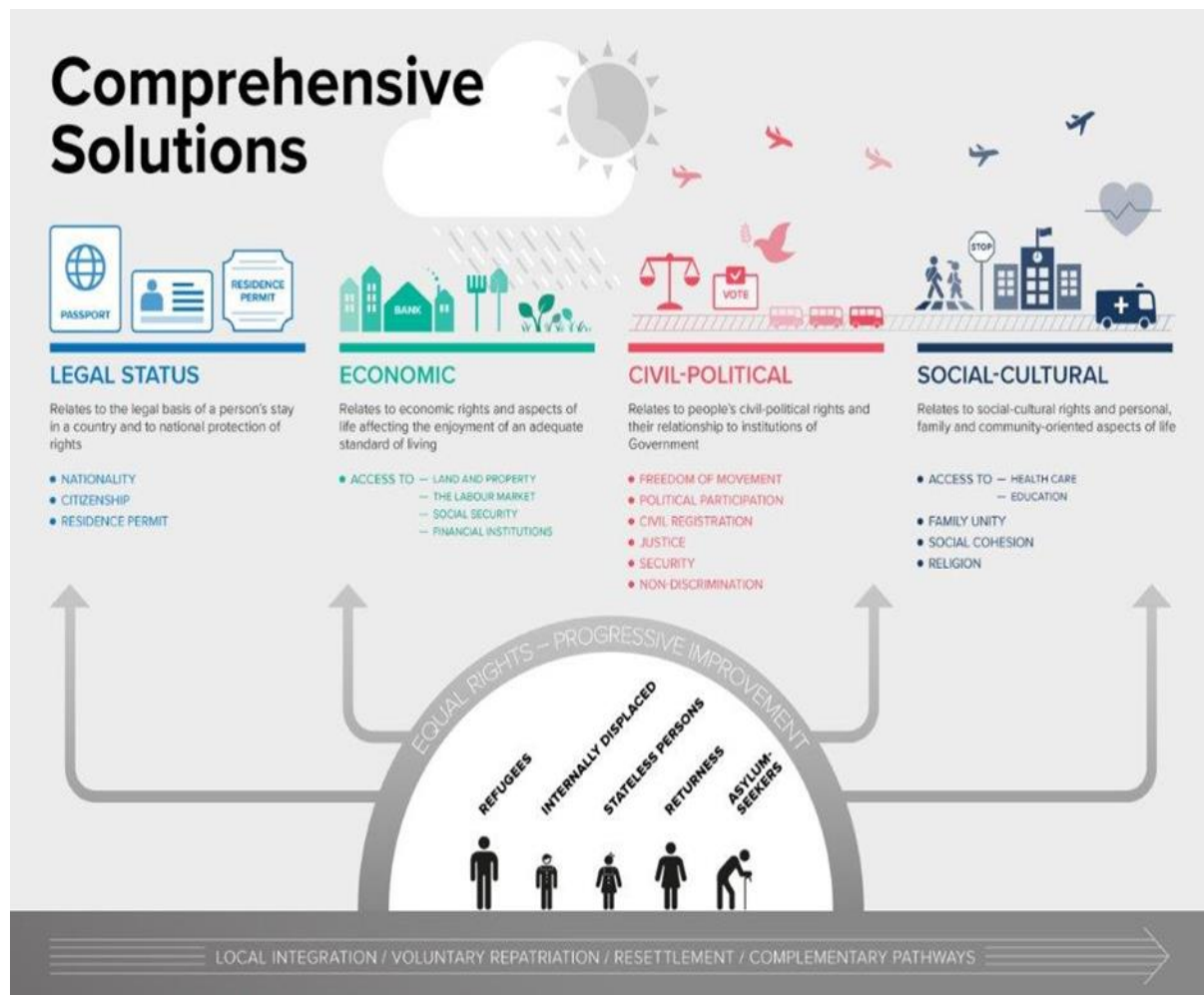
The notion of integration itself remains a highly contested, contentious and messy concept—in Europe, and elsewhere. As Castles et al note, “there is no single generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated.”⁴ Twenty years later, there is still no single, universally accepted definition of integration used by all involved actors. That said, it is generally accepted to comprise distinct socio-economic, cultural and legal aspects.

UNHCR continues to rely on ExCom Conclusion No. 104, which defines integration as “a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process leading to full and equal membership in society. This includes preparedness by refugee communities to adapt to host societies without giving up cultural identity, and the receiving communities and institutions equally ready to welcome refugees and meet the

³ There are differences in the autonomy of cities across countries and even within countries. In some cases, only the national government may decide on programmes and funding, while in others cities have their own budgets and/or may define how to implement national funding. Also, there are differences according to the legal status of POC. While for asylum seekers there are specialized programmes, often excluding them from mainstream assistance, recognized refugees often have access similar to nationals. Differences also exist for subsidiary protection holders (often restricted access) and stateless persons, where the panorama is very diverse and often depends on the type of residence permit, in the absence of SSD.

⁴

needs of a diverse population. The process is complex and gradual, comprising legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions.”



Most theories define successful integration for newcomers as equitable access to opportunities and resources, participation in the community and society, and feelings of security and belonging in their new homes. Integration may be grouped into the following four key areas:

- Foundational: refugee status, access to rights, and citizenship;
- Functional: access to housing, health, social protection, decent work, financial services and education on par with nationals;
- Social: social connections and bonds within the host community, social bridges, networks, social links;
- Facilitation: language, training, counseling, cultural knowledge, safety, and stability.

The quality of integration policies for beneficiaries of international protection varies widely across European countries, in spite of the standards set by EU⁵ and international law. Europe is far from providing a level playing field, and refugees and asylum seekers are not given the same fair and reasonable chance to integrate across the continent. With incomplete and low-quality integration policies in place across the EU, countries create – intendedly or unintendedly – different opportunities for refugees to achieve a better life in Europe. Crucially, any European debate on responsibility-

⁵ Including, inter alia, [European Pillar on Social Rights](#), [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#), [EU Treaties](#).

sharing in the asylum field needs to take into account the blatant discrepancies in what Member States do to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers.⁶ Refugees in Greece, for example, are well aware of the huge differentials in benefits afforded in Greece, versus Germany or Sweden⁷. Sovereign states across Europe have diverse views regarding the integration of refugees, and vastly different standards and barriers to access to social protection systems. Along with family reunification considerations, this fact contributes significantly to the phenomenon of ‘asylum-shopping’ within Europe. In 2020, the EU launched its Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 to draw attention to gaps in services, prioritize funding, and mitigate the tendency of refugees and asylum seekers to move onward.⁸

These findings find support in a range of other analyses and studies. For instance, the Sirius (Skills and Integration of Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Applicants in European Labour Markets) research initiative documents significant variations among states in terms of how they address legal, administrative and cultural barriers to integration. In northern European States, for instance, the research found a tendency toward ‘top down’, bureaucracy-led approaches, while Southern European countries were more ‘bottom up’ and driven by the local.⁹

Collaboration and joint policy delivery with civil society and local and regional levels of governments has remained, by and large, a missed opportunity in many countries. The National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM)¹⁰ project finds that across six dimensions (in the 14 countries participating in the study), indicators assess whether central governments actively support stakeholders and provide them with means so that they are better able to assist beneficiaries of international protection. Concerning support for the local and regional levels of government, education and social security represent the dimensions where governments are most supportive, with six countries identified as providing means. In the housing, employment, vocational training and health dimensions, the numbers drop to three or four countries each. With regard to NGOs receiving active central government support for the assistance they provide to refugees and asylum-seekers, the overall picture is somewhat brighter. In vocational training-, social security- and health-related tasks, nine or ten of the assessed governments support civil society. In the areas of housing, employment and education, four to six countries actively support civil society in their efforts. However, often these means are provided in an on-off manner, and local NGOs and service providers lack a stable, long-term framework for receiving government support.¹¹

More recently, the European Commission explicitly recognized the importance of local and regional action in the *New Pact on Migration and Asylum*, launched at the end of September 2020. In it, the Pact highlights the importance of integration and inclusion, and specifically references the key roles of local and regional actors. A key element of the Pact will be the creation of a **new Action Plan on integration and inclusion**, as part of the broader EU agenda to promote social inclusion and cohesion.

⁶ Alexander Wolffhart, Carmine Conti, Thomas Huddleston. “The European Benchmark for Integration: A comparative Analysis of the National Integration Evaluation Mechanism in 14 EU countries.” NIEM. June 2019. Brussels

⁷ In Greece, refugees need to leave reception centers upon recognition, with many becoming homeless due to lack of support. In Germany or Spain, recognized refugees access social protection schemes on a similar level as nationals, in addition to specialized integration counseling and support (language, training, employment, education, housing, etc.)

⁸ Regional action plans (e.g. [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021 – 2027](#)), dedicated funds from the EU, [platforms](#) and initiatives to exchange good practices, etc.

⁹ “Migrant Labour Market Integration Programmes: in short policy lessons from the Sirius Research Project.”

¹⁰ National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM) website: <http://www.forintegration.eu/>

¹¹ Ibid

It will provide strategic guidance and set out concrete actions, – including financial support on the EU level - to foster the inclusion of migrants and refugees, bringing together relevant stakeholders and recognising that regional and local actors have a key part to play.¹²

Demographic change in Europe and the popular perception of refugees, migrants & asylum seekers

The policy response to integration has largely been shaped by events of 2015/16, when some 1.3 million asylum seekers¹³ and migrants arrived in Europe, and wrought political havoc and tested the EU's commitment to basic human rights norms.¹⁴ Moreover, 'the EU focused almost exclusively on policies designed to contain refugees and migrants prior to their arrival on European shores, at the expense of addressing the reception and protection needs of those arriving from situations of conflict, persecution and human rights abuse. There has also been a failure at the national and EU levels to address the longer-term integration needs of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe.'¹⁵

That the 2015/16 influx was often termed a 'refugee crisis' itself posed challenges for the development of sound policies to guide integration and the willingness of host societies to welcome and include new arrivals. The designation of the influx as a crisis is in itself misleading. The population of Europe totals some 741 million inhabitants, with 446 million people residing within the EU bloc. The arrival of 1.3 million refugees was certainly dramatic and posed unique humanitarian and protection challenges, but its designation as a 'crisis' is misleading—and carried serious consequences.

First, Europe needs people of working-age to maintain its social systems as its workforce ages. The possibility of migration and asylum as a response to the problem of Europe's fast aging population gained prominence during the influx of asylum seekers in 2015. Many then argued that new migration could be a critical component necessary to maintain European economies and social systems. "Unless we want to gradually turn into an aging continent, we need new blood," Spain's then-Foreign Minister now EU Foreign Minister, noted in 2018. However, recent analyses caution against the impact of migration as a panacea for what the Financial Times referred to as Europe's demographic time bomb. The labor force dependency ratio, i.e. the proportion of people who are not self-supporting relative to productive workers, is the key determinant.¹⁶ Within Europe, experts increasingly cite policy reforms to keep people working longer (in relation to extended life expectancy), to boost labor participation rates of women through family-friendly policies, and the training and retrenchment of the workforce for increased automation and artificial elements—rather than migration, as keys to managing demographic changes.¹⁷ That said, studies have shown that education-selective migration,

¹² The Pact makes a very clear distinction between the different groups. The new [Action Plan on integration and inclusion](#) on the other hand hardly specifically mentions refugees and asylum seekers (only for two specific actions on housing and for skills assessments), while in general including them in the broader group of third country nationals and those with a migrant background. The plan only applies to those *with a right to stay*, thus irregular migrants are excluded.

¹³ 1.3 million people applied for Asylum. Source EASO

¹⁴ Barbelescu 2017

¹⁵ Crawley et al. 2016

¹⁶ The age average of refugees is lower than that of nationals, thus if enabled to access employment and self-employment, they would contribute to a higher employment rate. The cited article however argues that this would only lead to changes in the short term, as refugees would stay in the country and thus enhance the number of retirees in the long term. On the other hand, on average, refugees have a higher number of children than the national population, thus support lowering the population aging process. Again, for the children to become productive, investments in their education and equal access to opportunities are needed. Finally, the number of refugees in comparison to the national population and migrants in general is quite low (even in Turkey, which has the highest relative and absolute number of refugees in Europe, POC represent on only ca. 5% of the population, in Germany, the next highest number it is ca. 2 %), thus the impact is limited.

¹⁷ Nicholas Gailey. "Europe is destined to Age—but not suffer the consequences" Foreign Policy. January 24, 2020.

if accompanied by high integration, can improve economic dependency ratios. Conversely, high immigration volumes combined with low integration results in increased economic dependency.¹⁸

Unpacking this a bit through a protection-centric lens, the demographic argument outlined above applies to migration, and the need for sound migration policy, more generally rather than the specific impact of asylum seekers in 2015/16. The asylum seekers were indeed a mixed population with varying degrees of education, skills and capacities, language abilities, and cultural characteristics that would complicate the formulation of coherent integration policies and influence the long-term integration prospects of the new arrivals. Moreover, differing reception conditions, duration of asylum procedures and integration support of asylum seekers also hindered the development of coherent integration policies at a regional level. Given this, significant investments would be needed in education, vocational and language training, housing, access to services, and cultural orientation. The larger point, however, is that while high, the numbers did not, or should not have, amounted to an insurmountable crisis. Europe had both the capacity and the demographic space to absorb the new arrivals, and respect international norms and obligations. Moreover, the numbers of new arrivals in Europe, while having spiked dramatically in 2015 and 2016, should not obscure the fact that the majority of the world's nearly 70 million forcibly displaced people remain hosted in relatively poorer parts of the world, often states neighboring conflict. While in Lebanon, 1 in 7 persons is a refugee, in Europe, only 1,4% of the population are forcibly displaced people.

At the same time, however, a crisis narrative developed around the flow of arrivals that would carry long-term consequences on popular perceptions and the subsequent willingness of states and local communities to welcome asylum seekers and migrants. Even before the tragic photograph of Alan Kurdi carried to shore, a crisis narrative was taking root in Europe against a backdrop of chaotic and often deadly arrivals met with a broad institutional failure to ensure that their needs—for basic necessities, for legal and political rights. A series of events, including the Islamic State attack in Paris in November 2015 followed by the sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve, contributed to a growing climate of xenophobia and fear aided and abetted by the media. As Daniel Trilling pointed out in the *Guardian*, "the fragmented and contradictory media coverage of the crisis left room for questions to go unanswered and myths to circulate: who are these people and what do they want from us? Why don't they stop in the first safe country they reach? Why don't the men stay behind and fight? How can we make room for everyone? Are they bringing their problems to our shores? Do they threaten our culture and values?"¹⁹ Stereotypes generated in the media, often suggesting refugees were linked to trafficking or criminal enterprises, illegality, or simply those seeking to take advantage of Europe's generous social safety nets, had profoundly distorting effects on the actual problems related to cultural adaption and social integration in communities across Europe.²⁰

A Pew Research Center survey of attitudes in Europe taken in 2016 found significant percentages of the populations in countries surveyed felt that refugees increased the likelihood of domestic terrorism and impose burdens on their countries, that negative views about refugees were closely tied to

¹⁸ Guillaume Marios, Alain Belanger, and Wolfgang Lutz. "Population aging, migration, and productivity in Europe." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. March 2020.

¹⁹ "How the Media contributed to the migrant crisis" Daniel Trilling. *The Guardian*. 01 August 2019.

²⁰ Sylwia Miazga. "Stereotypes of refugees as presented in the media and the reality of problems linked with cultural adaptation and social integration of the immigrant children." *Social Communication. Special Issue (2018)* pp. 30-37.

negative views about Muslims more generally, and that few Europeans viewed growing diversity as making their countries better.

That said, popular support for taking in asylum seekers and refugees in Europe remains somewhat uneven, but relatively strong—even in frontline states. According to the Pew Research Center’s 2018 Global attitudes survey, roughly three quarters of the population surveyed in Spain, the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom supported taking in refugees from countries where people are fleeing violence and war. Similarly, high percentages were recorded in Germany and Sweden, which witnessed disproportionately high numbers of people seeking in asylum in 2015 and 2016.²¹

How do we then make sense of these contradictory threads?

The same survey found a majority of Europeans across all countries surveyed strongly disapproved of the EU’s handling of the issue.²² While the EU has had an enormous impact on the integration of refugees in Europe through the stable legal framework of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).²³ A series of protection-oriented directives build on the standards set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention, and set a series of standards that shape and facilitate the integration process, starting from the reception phase to the full legal, socio-economic and socio-cultural integration of refugees in host societies. However, despite this process of harmonization, states are still left to decide on their own how to implement policies.²⁴ Moreover, there is relatively little direct instruction within the framework regarding how states should pursue integration.²⁵

As the Migration Policy Group points out, the emergence and strengthening of exclusionary, anti-migrant narratives has threatened to undermine national—and now the EU’s—stable legal framework and level of ambition to promote refugee integration. The negative political discourse induced a surprisingly coordinated race-to-the-bottom at national level.²⁶ Put another way, the European public remains, by and large, in favor of the right to seek asylum and to extend protection to those fleeing war and conflict elsewhere. However, perceptions of mismanagement and inefficiency of the existing system, coupled with a tendency of new arrivals without valid claims of protection to nevertheless use asylum procedures to facilitate entry into the EU, has undermined public trust in the European institutions of asylum management, rather than the principles themselves.

Cities on the frontline

²¹ Jacob Pushter. European opinions of the refugee crisis in 5 carts. Factank. 16 September 2016

²² Phillip Connor. “A majority of Europeans favor taking in refugees, but most disapprove of the EU’s handling of the issue.” Factank. 19 September 2018

²³ The CEAS provides common minimum standards for the treatment of all asylum seekers and refugees. It consists of a legal framework covering all aspects of the asylum process with specific directives on the asylum procedures, reception conditions and rights (residence permits, access to work, education, social welfare, etc.)

²⁴ some standards are specific for asylum seekers and the asylum process, while others apply to those granted international protection. Access to primary and secondary education and basic health is granted to asylum seekers, while the full legal access to the mainstream services is only guaranteed for recognized refugees (e.g. employment, social protection, health). Challenges regarding effective access to employment, education (especially under the COVID-19 situation), housing, social welfare and healthcare have been identified in most countries. In some countries (e.g. Greece), pushbacks have been reported, in some reception conditions are critical (e.g. Greece, Malta, Hungary), in some, the asylum procedures have been questioned. However, all EU countries are obliged to implement the directions and the EC has infringement procedures in place, including through the court of Justice of the EU.

²⁵ Timothy Peace and Nasar Meer. “Refugee integration in Europe since the ‘crisis’” European University Institute Working Papers. RSCAS 2019/31

²⁶ Judit Tanczos “Lost in Transition? The European Standards behind refugee integration.” Migration Policy Group. Brussels.

“Cities and nations differ markedly in how they approach the issue of refugees and transnational migration. Nation-states wrestle with general, existential questions: what does it mean to be a German, or a Swede, or to have a German or a Swedish border, in the new global order? Cities, by contrast, must grapple with existential issues: how to house, educate, train, and integrate individuals from different education backgrounds and cultures, who are often in direct need of health care and special services, while maintaining public order and safety

While nation-states develop quotas and use technocratic formulas to determine how to allocate people across communities, it is cities who must decide how to locate a housing project or integrate a local school in the intimate context of a neighborhood. And while European states might presume that the influx will help them address the labor market challenges created by a rising share of elderly workers and low fertility rates, cities will be the ones to ensure that refugees actually have or learn the language and work skills needed by different firms and sectors.”²⁷

A growing number of scholars and practitioners have recognized the importance of cities as key sources of power and agency. This is particularly the case in Europe. While regional bodies, such as the European Union, and individual states will continue to deal with the sovereign issues of border management, admissions procedures, and other national policies governing the care and integration of refugees, there is a growing evidence to suggest that cities contest certain national policies, rely on different means to make them work in practice, or translate them into more politically-palatable approaches at local level.²⁸ As highlighted in the above quote, refugees and asylum seekers require particular support from local governments in terms of education, language training, access to health care and other social services. Cities have been forced to deal practically with new arrivals—and often to bend policies and practice in ways suited to local circumstances. And while states continue to bear the burden of funding integration—often through lump sum payments or block grants—the varied local contexts and challenges are not taken into account.²⁹ This has left cities wide scope for adaptation and innovation.

While national inclusion and integration policies remain crucial determinants, cities and towns have emerged as the primary spaces in which social membership in a given society is defined. In other words, “cities are spaces where the very meaning, content and extent of citizenship are being made and transformed.”³⁰ In large measure, cities determine the rules by which refugees must abide, which forms of personal identification is issued, how access to services will be determined. Crucially, while national regimes clearly regulate and define conditions for regular residence, the widespread existence of irregular residence has tended to force cities to find practical ways to extend de facto citizenship, without it being granted in law. Ambiguities in national policies often result in policy gaps that play out predominantly at local level—again, this has prompted cities to find pragmatic ways to close these gaps.³¹ As Garces-Mascarenas and Chauvin note, “the incorporation of irregular

²⁷ Bruce Katz and Luise Noring. “METROPOLITAN REVOLUTION. In Europe, integrating refugees falls to cities.” Brookings Institution. 2016. Available under: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/metropolitan-revolution/2016/06/13/in-europe-integrating-refugees-falls-to-cities/>

²⁸ Glorius, B and Doornik, J (Eds) 2016. Refugee migration and local demarcations: New insight into European Localities. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(4).

²⁹ OECD. (2017). “Who bears the cost of integrating refugees?” Paris.

³⁰ E.F Isin (2000). “Introduction: Democracy, citizenship and the city.” In E.F. Isin (Ed) *Democracy, citizenship, and the city*. Abingdon: Routledge

³¹ Hollingfield, J.F, Martin, P.L & Orrenius, PM (2014) “The dilemmas of Migration Control” in *Controlling Immigration: A global Perspective*. Stanford, CA. Stanford University Press.

immigrants takes place mostly at local level: it is precisely there...where the practices of street-level bureaucrats, the support of non-governmental organizations and the development and implementation of particular local policies counteract the exclusionary effects of immigration policies.”³²

For example, a recent report by the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants and EUROCITIES highlights how cities mitigate the impact of restrictive national policies regarding access to healthcare services. Where national governments limit access to public health systems, by requiring residence status in order to receive care, cities have been able to navigate around such restrictions through local legislation or direct funding of service providers.³³ In short, local economic realities, community safety and cohesion often drive such innovations.

The Emergence of city networks as key transnational actors

Within the EU, city networks have emerged as key transnational political actors—with significant influence. In 2015, for example, EUROCITIES, a network of over 200 cities in 38 countries³⁴, was at the forefront of efforts to promote greater solidarity within the EU in terms promoting a fair relocation formula to ensure that the burdens and responsibilities of hosting refugees were more evenly shared among member states and within Europe’s towns and cities. In the lead-up to the 2016 Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, that foreshadowed the policy debates in the EU in the coming four years and laid out progressive policy positions, EUROCITIES aimed at correcting the inefficiencies and unfairness embedded into the CEAS and Dublin regulations. For instance, the network put forward a recommendation for a revised allocation model, stating:

“The Dublin III regulation should be revised. This regulation puts pressure on the external border regions of the EU, where the majority of asylum seekers enter the EU and where local authorities are often the least able to offer a large number of asylum seekers adequate support and protection.”³⁵

With regard to new EU directive for the allocation of refugees as part of CEAS, the group noted that “without the involvement of local and regional governments there can be no practical implementation of the agreements concluded at the EU and national levels.” While the advocacy of city networks arguably fell short in achieving all of their policy goals, their growing influence is evident in the 2016 Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals and the EU Urban Agenda,³⁶ and buy in for their approaches is clearly growing. By 2020, the EU’s Public Consultations on Integration explicitly referenced the importance of local contributions in developing the forthcoming Action Plan

The emerging transnational role of city networks extends far beyond the EU. In this, cities have also emerged as key areas of resistance and subversion—and have organized themselves accordingly. Warsaw, Budapest, Prague and Bratislava all have young and progressive mayors who have formed an unofficial alliance to fight for the rule of law, relying on a rights-based, people centered approach, in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. They all share a similar vision of what a modern, European city should be: tolerant, open, environmentally aware. Another thing they

³² Garcés-Mascareñas, B., & Chauvin. 2016. “Undocumented migrants: Between inclusion and exclusion.” In V. Mamadough & A. van Wageningen (Eds) *Urban Europe: Fifty tales of the city*. Amsterdam. Amsterdam University Press.

³³ Smith and Levoy, M. 2017. *Cities of rights, Ensuring Health Care for Undocumented Residents*. Brussels. PICUM.

³⁴ Eurocities is a formal entity, founded in 1986. For more information, please refer to: <https://eurocities.eu/about-us/>.

³⁵ EUROCITIES (2025) Statement on asylum in cities. ,

³⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/urban-development/agenda/

have in common is an often tense relationship with their central governments, which are running the countries through the lens of left- or right-wing populism. As Warsaw's mayor, Rafal Trzaskowski, noted, "The populism we're dealing with in many countries is leading us to cooperate with each other. On the one hand, the pact is a symbol — which is not unimportant in politics — but it's also about concrete solutions, which we want to implement."³⁷

The emergence of city networks—beyond EUROCITIES—and including Solidarity Cities³⁸, the Mayors Migration Council³⁹, the Council of Europe's Intercultural cities programme have emerged as key platforms for the sharing of good practice, within Europe and far beyond. Cities and local civil societies can learn from each other through the sharing of good practices and lessons learned, while data on refugee inclusion can help to provide local, regional, national and international policy makers and practitioners with better evidence for the design of appropriate integration policies.

UNHCR has, over the course of three years, gradually strengthened relationships with mayors, city administrations and city networks, primarily through efforts undertaken as part of DER's Cities #withRefugees Initiative.⁴⁰ The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) affirmed in 2018 by the UN General Assembly, sets out a vision for more predictable, equitable, comprehensive and timely refugee responses, which UNHCR is implementing in close collaboration with a host of traditional and newer partners. The Compact recognizes local authorities, including in urban settings, as frontline actors and notes opportunities for the engagement of city networks.⁴¹

In parallel, efforts were undertaken to anchor city implementation of the GCR in international refugee and migrant policy fora, including the Intergovernmental Conference to adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, but also UNHCR's annual High Commissioner's Dialogue on protection challenges (2018).⁴² During the Dialogue on protection challenges in urban contexts, the High Commissioner committed to strengthening UNHCR's engagement with cities and city networks, with a view to facilitating their contribution to relevant global processes and strengthening operational engagement with mayors and city administrations to enhance protection for displaced

³⁷ <https://www.dw.com/en/little-visegrad-a-pact-of-european-capitals/a-51206578>

³⁸ Solidarity Cities is an initiative on the management of the refugee crisis proposed by the Mayor of Athens and launched in the framework of the EUROCITIES network. It aims to constitute the framework under which all cities actions and initiatives are presented highlighting the political leadership of cities in addressing this challenge. For more details, please refer to: <https://solidaritycities.eu/about>

³⁹ The Mayor Migration Council was created by mayors for mayors. It empowers and enables cities with access, capacity, knowledge, and connections to engage in migration diplomacy and policymaking at the international, regional, and national level. For more details, please refer to <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/>.

⁴⁰ Since 2018, 242 city officials in over 50 countries have signed onto the [Cities #WithRefugees solidarity statement](#). The Cities #WithRefugees initiative is providing UNHCR country offices with the opportunity to engage with city leaders directly to work together to make it easier for all newcomers to thrive. The initiative has also featured in two mayoral declarations in Bristol, UK and Marrakech Morocco in which hundreds of mayors committed to combat xenophobia, work towards refugee inclusion and implement the Global Compact on Refugees. A third declaration was adopted at the Turkey Municipal Forum in November 2019 references the important role of mayors in combatting xenophobia. Work continues with city network partners to promote the initiative and explore ways that mayors can become advocates for refugees. The Cities of Light story series highlights the steps cities are taking to help refugees, and the impact they have on the lives of the forcibly displaced.

⁴¹ Global Compact on Refugees (2018), United Nations, New York, paragraphs 37 and 38

⁴² See the Marrakech Mayors Declaration adopted in the context of the 5th Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development on 8 December 2018 in Marrakech, Morocco. The Declaration can be accessed here: https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/marrakech_mayors_declaration.pdf

populations in urban settings. In addition, he noted that UNHCR would undertake to update the 2009 urban policy, in line with relevant global and UNHCR-internal policy developments.⁴³

Cities as incubators of good practice: Practical Examples from Germany and Spain

By the end of 2019, Germany hosted the third largest number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide, almost 1.5 million, with Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers constituting the largest groups (42%). The country was also among the largest recipients of new individual applications after the United States of America and Peru, with 142,500 new asylum-seekers claims submitted, however this has been the lowest number in six years. The refugee population in Germany has been influenced by the important refugee arrival to Europe in 2015 and 2016, when more than one million people applied for asylum, many of whom were recognized as refugees or granted complementary forms of protection.⁴⁴

By the end of 2019, there were about 195,000 persons of concern of UNHCR in Spain, including over 57,000 recognized refugees. 118,300 new asylum-seekers claims have been submitted in 2019, thus Spain was the fifth largest recipient of new individual applications.⁴⁵ By May 2020, Spain had overtaken Germany as the top destination for asylum seekers in Europe, largely due to new arrivals from Venezuela.⁴⁶ Both countries have solid legal frameworks in support of integration.

In Germany, Refugees have the legal right to work and, in principle, they also have the right to freedom of movement.⁴⁷ Asylum seekers may generally access to the labour market 3 months after making an asylum application. However, asylum seekers are barred from access to employment as long as they are under obligation to stay in initial reception centres. The maximum period for this stay is 6 months for most asylum seekers⁴⁸, but: (a) asylum seekers from so-called "safe countries of origin" are obliged to stay in initial reception centres for the whole duration of their asylum procedures;⁴⁹ and (b) Federal States may impose a 24-month obligation to stay in initial reception centres since July 2017 this option is currently only used by two states (Bavaria and Saxony).⁵⁰

Recognized refugees have the right to access land and natural resources for livelihoods and to own or lease property. They have the right to own a business and access to basic bank accounts for savings

⁴³ The Division of Resilience and Solutions will be leading on the review of the urban policy in 2020.

⁴⁴ UNHCR Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2019.

⁴⁵ UNHCR Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2019.

⁴⁶ "Spain eclipses Germany as top destination for asylum-seekers—report" 20 May 2020. Deutsche Welle.

⁴⁷ However, it is crucial to note that freedom of movement is restricted to some extent due to a residence rule in the German Residence Act (§ 12a par. 1). This regulation is called "Wohnsitzauflage" in German. It sets out that refugees as well as persons granted subsidiary protection or an initial temporary residence permit are obliged to take up their habitual residence for a period of three years as from recognition or issuance of the temporary residence permit in that Land (federal state) to which they have been allocated for the purposes of their asylum procedure or in the context of their admission process. Nevertheless, there are certain conditions under which the residence rule can be revoked, i.e. if employment of at least 15 hours per week subject to social insurance contributions or vocational training are taken up; acceptance to a higher education institution; or to prevent hardship (as stipulated in the Residence Act, §12a par. 5)

⁴⁸ In 2019, asylum procedures took 6.1 months on average. However, for asylum-seekers from "safe countries of origin", it is usually shorter, e.g. 2.3 months for Serbia and 2 months for North Macedonia.

⁴⁹ "A [...] study focusing on Germany carried out by Marbach *et al* (2018) provides [...] evidence of the long-term negative consequences, both for the receiving state as well as migrants themselves, of these employment bans which considerably slowed down the economic integration of refugees and reduced their motivation to integrate early on after arrival. Even once they have the right to work, asylum seekers and refugees face huge administrative obstacles before actually gaining employment linked to the structure of the benefits they receive, a lack of long-term residence permits, a need to implement tests before offering jobs and assignment to specific regions of residence. The latter issue reveals a 'mismatch between the geography of labour market demand and the territorial distribution keys of refugees and asylum seekers'."

⁵⁰ UNHCR Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2019.

and money transfers Refugees' access to credit provided by banks or specialized microfinance institutions is very limited. Refugees have access to government services, e.g. public education, TVET programmes, public health services, national social protection/safety net system. Socio-economic rights and access to mainstream services for asylum seekers are restricted. It is at the discretion of the responsible authorities to permit any economic activity including self-employment. Basic social assistance and health care is provided through a specialized scheme for asylum seekers. There are some minor restrictions on education for asylum-seekers. In principle, the right and the obligation to attend school extends to all children who reside in Germany, regardless of their status. However, since the education system is within the responsibility of the Federal States, there are some important distinctions in laws and practices.

More recent data for Germany show that while only some 40 per cent of the working-age refugee population were employed by the third quarter of 2019, the integration of refugees in the labour market is progressing faster than expected compared to previous arrivals of refugees⁵¹, according to the Institute for Labour Market and Occupational Research (IAB). The study also revealed that 49% of refugees who came to Germany since 2013 were able to find steady employment within five years of arriving. The success has been attributed to Germany's efforts with integration and German language courses which are improving refugees' chances of finding work. However, gender imbalance and the quality of employment are still issues: About 12% are under-employed, for example in so-called "mini-jobs" that pay a maximum of 450 Euros a month. Besides, only 29% of these employed refugees were women, while 57% were men. The family constellations, childcare and traditional gender roles seem to have an important influence, based on the results of the study.⁵²

Subemployment is another challenge. According to a study carried out by McKinsey in 2016-2017, over 60% of refugees had semi-skilled jobs, often in restaurants or warehouses, although more than 12% had tertiary education and over 50% higher secondary education. For refugees to fill labour gaps, more efforts would thus be required on training, matching and placement.⁵³

Spain also has a solid legal framework on local integration.⁵⁴ As per the first comparative evaluation report of the National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM) points out, Spain, together with the Netherlands, are the only countries in the study that ensure the same level of international protection to both refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection regarding residency. The permit lasts five years and is renewed upon simple application. Besides, fees are lower than 10% of the minimum social assistance.⁵⁵ While the average duration of asylum procedures currently exceeds 12 months⁵⁶, there is no delay in starting the integration process, as Spain together with Latvia, is among the countries providing the highest standards in early integration in the different areas, including for asylum seekers.

⁵¹ https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/arbeitsmarktforscher-zufrieden-integration-von-fluechtlingen-geht-ein-jahr-schneller-als-gedacht_id_11000535.html

⁵² <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/arbeitsmarkt-fluechtlinge-103.html>

⁵³ MC Kinsey Global Institute. Europe's Refugees: Refocusing on integration. p. 8.

⁵⁴ In terms of new asylum applications in Europe in 2019, Spain is on the third position with 118,300 (after Germany with 142,500 and France with 123,900). In terms of total numbers of beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers, Spain is at the sixth position (this does not include IDPs and stateless).

⁵⁵ MPG, p. 35, f.

⁵⁶ Migration Policy Group (MPG)/Institute of Public Affairs (2020): The European benchmark for refugee integration: A comparative analysis of the National Integration Evaluation Mechanism in 14 EU countries. Evaluation 1: Comprehensive Report. Alexander Wolffhardt, Carmine Conte and Thomas Huddleston. Brussels/Warsaw. p. 19

This includes access to vocational training, job matching and social security.⁵⁷ There are also good legal practices for naturalization in comparison to other EU countries.⁵⁸

The legal and policy framework on social security are comparably good. While more could be done on mainstreaming the inclusion of refugees in social protection and strengthening coordination with regional and local authorities and welfare bodies on social security, Spain is more advanced than many other countries, especially considering the engagement of expert NGOs to assist refugees. According to the authorities, conditions to access social security are the same as for nationals.⁵⁹

Refugees have the legal right to work and to freedom of movement, for instance to access markets. Asylum seekers can legally work after 6 months since they applied for asylum. However, in practice they face several difficulties to work legally because their documents as asylum seekers are provisional and not well known by the private sector. Refugees have the right to access land and natural resources for livelihoods and the right to own or lease property. They have the right to own a business and access to credit provided by specialized microfinance institutions. They may also access basic bank accounts for savings and money transfers.⁶⁰ By law, economic opportunities are accessible by refugees similar to opportunities accessible by nationals.⁶¹ While Spain's employment performance has improved since the end of the economic crisis, short-term contracts have increased over time and foreigners face poorer labour conditions. This weaker position is partially linked to lower qualification.

In both Germany and Spain, the existence of favorable frameworks is insufficient to guarantee successful integration and inclusion, which remain elusive for many in both locations. The major difference between the two countries is the breadth and source of funding for integration initiatives. In Spain, integration programmes are dependent largely on AMIF (Asylum, Migration, Integration Fund) funding provided by the EU. In Germany, the state has funded a massive integration programme over the course of the past five years. As such, there is far more available data in the case of the latter, as well as academic and public interest in determining whether the investment has yielded dividends.

Some four years after German Chancellor opened its borders to asylum seekers⁶², a significant number of the approximately 1.2 million who requested asylum between 2015 and 2016 remain out of the workforce, though roughly 70% were granted protection. Many are taking the required integration and language courses, yet nearly 200,000 are registered as unemployed. But after spending billions, Germany is beginning to reap some gains. The number who are either working or participating in a job training program has been growing and stood at some 400,000 by the end of 2018. Of those, some 44,000 were enrolled in apprenticeships, according to German Business Groups.⁶³ More recent data for Germany show that while only some 40 per cent of the working-age refugee population were employed by the third quarter of 2019, the integration of refugees in the labour market is progressing faster than expected compared to previous arrivals of refugees, according to the Institute for Labour

⁵⁷ MPG, pp. 17, 74, 75 and 90.

⁵⁸ MPG, p. 46.

⁵⁹ MPG, pp. 85 ff.

⁶⁰ UNHCR Livelihoods Survey 2019.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Merkel let them enter Germany even though other EU member states were officially responsible for them under the Dublin Regulation, which stipulates that asylum-seekers must be registered in the first safe EU country they enter. Instead, Germany allowed people to cross the border first and have their asylum claims checked later. For more details, refer to <https://www.dw.com/en/five-years-on-how-germanys-refugee-policy-has-fared/a-54660166>

⁶³ "Angela Merkel welcomed refugees to Germany. They're starting to help the economy" Griffe Witte and Luisa Beck. The Washington Post. 5 May 2019.

Market and Occupational Research (IAB).⁶⁴ The study also revealed that 49% of refugees of working-age who came to Germany since 2013 were able to find steady employment within five years of arriving. The success has been attributed to Germany's efforts with integration and German language courses which are improving refugees' chances of finding work. However, gender imbalance and the quality of employment are still issues: About 12% are under-employed, for example in so-called "mini-jobs" that pay a maximum of 450 Euros a month. Besides, only 29% of these employed refugees were women, while 57% were men. The family constellations, childcare and traditional gender roles seem to have an important influence, based on the results of the study.⁶⁵

The Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry has founded a network for its members who would like to or already have experience in hiring asylum-seekers and refugees. The network "Businesses integrating refugees" bundles information and provides practical guidance on a number of topics related to refugee employment, including how to prepare staff and line managers, and how they can support newcomers. The network also offers step-by-step guidance on diversity management and provides material on intercultural communication as well as "check-lists" on how to organise the first workday. In addition, the network provides short information sheets outlining successful strategies used by network members on how to make the workplace more inclusive. As of July 2020, around 2 500 German businesses are part of this network.⁶⁶

In both countries, cities have served as first responders and incubators of innovation. In the case of Germany, the initiatives often have strong links to a line ministry in Berlin, whereas the initiatives in Spain are more often 'bottom up' in character.

Focus on Barcelona

- While employment is not a municipal competence, Barcelona has historically voluntarily developed important labour market integration policies for unemployed and vulnerable residents, including migrants. *Barcelona Activa* plays a key role in developing vocational training, entrepreneurship workshops and matching skills with private sector demand. However, persistent gaps between migrant and native-born suggest that more needs to be done to ease paths into employment and secure long-term and stable professions. Further collaboration between the migration one-stop-shop (SAIER) and *Barcelona Activa* could enhance migrant labour market inclusion.⁶⁷
- 'The NGO Refugee Aid Commission CEAR has developed a placement agency "Agencia de Colocación de CEAR" for BIPs to promote their language learning, improve their employability and enhance their autonomy. Within this framework and drawing upon its alliances with companies, CEAR plays a key role in labour intermediation by matching asylum seekers and BIPs' characteristics and needs with companies' requirements in terms of labour demand.'⁶⁸

⁶⁴ <http://doku.iab.de/kurzber/2020/kb0420.pdf>

⁶⁵ <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/arbeitsmarkt-fluechtlinge-103.html>

⁶⁶ OECD/UNHCR 2018. Engaging with employers in the hiring of refugees, p. 13. See also <https://bit.ly/2FX9hXC> (in German).

⁶⁷ OECD (2018). Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Barcelona, p. 12

⁶⁸ MPG, p. 74.

- The Barcelona City Council's development agency launched an inclusive entrepreneurship model in 2004, to make entrepreneurship a realistic option for everyone. Closely involving expert stakeholders, Barcelona Activa's model is "universal", "tailor-made", "blended" and "integrated": it targets everyone willing to be an entrepreneur. Its tools and services are adapted for the most vulnerable population, which may not benefit from conventional entrepreneurship services. It combines online and on-site tools and services, enabling people with time and mobility limitations to create their personalized itinerary to start-up. For people who are not ready to start a company, it offers the possibility of training and coaching. The model has supported 18,000 new companies, creating 32,000 jobs.⁶⁹
- To respond to the needs of newcomers, the Education Consortium of Barcelona (joint body of the regional and municipal level) developed and have financed "Welcome classes" since 2007 in schools with high concentrations of foreign pupils. Implemented in public schools, the welcome classes host foreign pupils only some hours per day, offering them a tailor-made programme; the rest of the day the kids are integrated into regular classes. The programme lasts for two or three years, depending on the difficulties of the student, and is complemented with psychological support as well as interaction with families to help them understand the local school system.⁷⁰
- The government provides support for skills recognition procedures and offers alternative assessment methods, including tests or interviews in case documentation from the country of origin is not available.⁷¹ Trade unions, at the regional and local levels, also complement and improve the support offered by, for example, assisting refugees in the recertification of qualifications, which is long and arduous in Spain. A good initiative in this respect is the skills recognition support offered by the Catalan trade union AMIC-UGT in coordination with the regional and local administration.⁷²
- *Fostering proximity and creating spaces to bring communities together:* The municipality considers that the integration process is one of mutual adaptation happening through interaction among different groups. Creating opportunities for this interaction is at the heart of Barcelona's intercultural approach to migrant integration. For instance, the municipality supports intercultural activities through financing of civil society initiatives at the neighbourhood level. Further, public libraries are seen as spaces where interactions among different groups could take place. Attractive libraries are also located in the most disadvantaged areas (e.g. Ciudad Meridiana) and organise activities geared to appeal to the interests of migrant groups (e.g. IT courses to Moroccan women, after-school programmes for children, etc.). They aim to attract different participants and create opportunities to foster interaction among neighbours. Other municipal spaces such as the Espai Avinyó regularly

⁶⁹ UNHCR, UNCTAD, IOM (2018), Policy guide on entrepreneurship for migrants and refugees, p. 26.

⁷⁰ OECD (2018). Working together for local integration of migrants and refugees, p. 180.

⁷¹ MPG, p. 62.

⁷² Bertelsmann Stiftung (2016). From Refugees to Workers. Volume II. Literature Review and Country Case Studies. p. 120.

organise intercultural activities (conferences, exhibitions, meetings and concerts about migration and diversity).

- *Participation of migrant residents:* Barcelona has a local consultative body, the Municipal Council of Migration, to encourage migrants' presence in the local political sphere and to consult their position in the policy-making process on migrant integration matters enhancing long-term commitment and integration within the city. It is chaired by the Municipal Commissioner of Migration and a representative of a migrant association. Representatives of migrant associations jointly produced a working plan with strategic goals for the 2019 horizon with the municipality and suggested initiatives to achieve them.
- *Regular coordination with non-state organisations:* The municipality works in close collaboration with non-governmental organisations, migrant and neighbourhood associations. Not only are NGOs embedded in municipal structures such as the SAIER but they are also consulted in setting the priorities for integration policies and coordinating their implementation. Platforms such as the Network of Welcome and Support for Migrants, which bring together the municipality and non-governmental actors to enhance coordination and information sharing, have been identified as a best practice for other cities.⁷³

German cities on the cutting edge of innovation and inclusion

- Berlin has learned from past experience and has recently developed a support system for newcomers, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from moment zero until settling in. Multiple entry points were installed to ensure consistent presence and provide easy access to information about legal aspects, housing, education and work matters as well as everyday life. These include the installation of fixed venues like Welcome Center Berlin or Welcome-to-Work Offices in large refugee accommodations, but also mobile services such as the Berlin mobile education counselling service (*Berliner Bildungsberatung MoBiBe*) as well as the Integration Guides, who individually accompany newly-arrived migrants as well as migrants who have resided in the city for a longer time but still require assistance. The guides act in close cooperation with public services and this close interaction has proven to be a success.⁷⁴
- Berlin perceives itself as a city of diversity that has challenges but also benefits. This is clearly stated in communications with its citizens. The municipality implemented an advertising campaign to encourage the foreign-born to undertake the necessary steps towards naturalisation. In addition, it supported a campaign targeting employers encouraging them to hire refugees, publishing billboards with the slogan "Refugee is not a job". In the information material produced for refugees and asylum seekers since 2015, the Mayor welcomes them in the name of the city of Berlin, wishing they can find their place there.⁷⁵

⁷³ OECD (2018). Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Barcelona, pp. 14, f.

⁷⁴ OECD (2018). WORKING TOGETHER FOR LOCAL INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN BERLIN. p. 15.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 15.

- According to its Integration and Participation Act, all of Berlin’s institutions must ensure advanced training in intercultural competences for their employees and consider this a relevant skill in recruiting. Developments are monitored and have to be reported back to the legislative political entity, i.e., the city’s parliament.⁷⁶
- To centralise services and enhance co-operation among different service providers, the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia has introduced Integration Points for asylum-seekers and refugees. These one-stop-shops seek to speed up labour market integration by streamlining services and bringing together different actors under the same roof, including public employment services, youth welfare offices, social welfare offices, local immigration authorities and municipal services. Depending on the local context, Integration Points may also include specialised services for the recognition of foreign qualifications and civil society initiatives.⁷⁷
- Dortmund city authorities created *NordHand*, a cooperative credit union, in 2006 to provide microloans to small and micro-business owners (particularly migrants) who struggle to access credit through mainstream banking services.⁷⁸
- Many local organisations and initiatives try to support refugees in finding apartments. One initiative operating for the whole of Germany, “[Living Together Welcome](#)” (*Zusammenleben willkommen*, formerly “*Refugees Welcome/Flüchtlinge willkommen*”) runs an online platform providing assistance for people who want to share a flat with asylum seekers and refugees.⁷⁹ In Berlin, refugees capable of work receive assistance through local Job centers or Social Welfare Offices, which amount the same allocations (housing and living) as nationals.⁸⁰

Conclusion

Cities and towns across Europe are demanding a voice in key policy debates on the future of migration and asylum and a seat at the table in negotiations. Long viewed as part of the supporting architecture of nation states, they have effectively organized into powerful transnational networks increasingly driving reform agendas in Europe and beyond. Equally important, perhaps, is the fact that cities have driven innovation—particularly in the socio-economic inclusion of new refugees and in helping define the exercise of de facto citizenship, often around State-set policies and restrictions. Because of their proximity and the local pressures from hosts, municipal authorities tend to know their refugees—which makes their plight impossible to ignore, even if state policies augur against inclusion. In this regard, cities have come to see refugees as crucial social capital, as assets for economic development, and agents of social change and diversity. This is reflected in the forward leaning policy positions—which highlight inclusion and respect for basic rights—often in contravention of national policies and toxic political discourse. If they succeed in their advocacy for an equitable economic recovery from

⁷⁶ OECD (2018). WORKING TOGETHER FOR LOCAL INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN BERLIN. p. 14.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 13.

⁷⁸ UNHCR, UNCTAD, IOM (2018), Policy guide on entrepreneurship for migrants and refugees, part 2 p. 73.

⁷⁹ <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/content-international-protection/housing>.

⁸⁰ OECD (2018). Working together for local integration of migrants and refugees, pp. 165 ff.

Covid and the realization of the broad aspirations of the EU's Action Plan for the integration of Migrants and Refugees, municipalities will have truly succeeded in leading from behind.