

INTEGRATION OF THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS THROUGH URBAN PARTNERSHIPS - **INTEGRA**

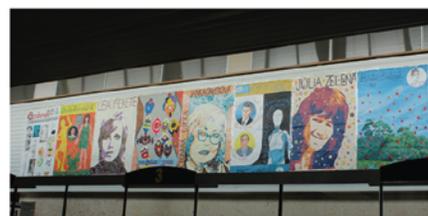


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A WAY FORWARD FOR INTEGRATION OF THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS AT CITY LEVEL

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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The INTEGRA project aims at improving the process of long-term integration of third-country nationals in five cities Sofia (Bulgaria), Osijek (Croatia), Rubano (Italy), Košice (Slovakia) and Prague (Czech Republic) through city-to-city knowledge and experience sharing. The project promotes deeper mutual understanding between migrant communities and the host societies against the rising political discourse of securitization, which paints migrants as a major security threat in Europe.

To achieve this goal, the INTEGRA partners have developed, tested and promoted new models and tools for participatory assessment of city integration performance, in order to support and improve city integration policies. City audits, including policy assessment and mapping exercises were carried out to identify bottlenecks and opportunities for TCN integration. Through citizens' integration labs, partners elaborated City Integration Agendas with future scenarios for each city. The activities and tools facilitated new cooperation models between stakeholders, experts, city administrations and TCN communities in the partner countries.

The possibility to share experiences and engage in peer learning processes has offered a unique opportunity to INTEGRA cities to confront similar challenges. Notwithstanding the existence of clear differences between smaller and metropolitan cities, the INTEGRA project has provided a common framework for dialogue and cooperation between cities in order to improve their capacities to foster the inclusion of third-country nationals. More significantly, INTEGRA has added a new perspective in promoting and enabling cities' international mobilization on migration and integration issues, making its case for valuing local governments as actors whose impact goes well beyond the borders of their local constituencies.

These policy recommendations aim to gather, analyze and summarize the results and knowledge amassed from the INTEGRA project outcomes.

The recommendations have been drafted on the basis of work prepared by experts from the partner organizations with input collected from INTEGRA project outputs, partners and stakeholder networks.

INTRODUCTION

The INTEGRA project steps on several main premises.

- Many regions and cities have long been successfully welcoming and integrating newcomers into their communities. **While new integration policies and allocation of funds happen most of the time at national and EU level, local authorities are the main actors delivering reception and integration services for migrants and refugees.** Therefore, an exchange of experience and discussion of the most efficient practices between cities, regional, national and EU authorities and the third sector is key for a comprehensive strategy that can meet migrants' integration needs more efficiently.
- Cities play a central role in making integration work and shaping national and European integration policies. INTEGRA provides evidence that city authorities need to channel their policy efforts towards a broader cross-cutting approach to social inclusion, participation and equal opportunities of third-country nationals. Therefore, **local governments must be part of a framework of multi-level governance for migrant integration, one that gives them the tools and adequate means needed for action.**
- Successfully managing increasingly diverse city areas and populations in terms of origins, cultural and religious backgrounds can be a **lever for social capital and economic development.** Integration measures need to take a place-based approach, adapted to the characteristics of the host communities as well as to those of third-country nationals themselves.
- In the process of managing TCN integration, big cities are more vocal while interesting experiences of smaller cities and towns are often not visible enough. INTEGRA stresses the need to **invest more resources in local small and medium administrations** in order to build effective coalitions between central/regional government levels, local communities and local civil society, capable to design and successfully implement visions for effective integration.

Within this context, the policy recommendations presented below outline a way forward with regard to integration policies on city/regional level and increased know-how transfer among cities.

Building on the main findings from the project, these recommendations aim to address the gap between potential opportunities and challenges diversity can bring about in terms of access to resources and services, as well as in terms of the multi-level governance of integration policies. The recommendations build upon the partners' input as well as upon relevant existing declarations and commitments including the New York Declaration, 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Urban Agenda for the EU, EU Action Plan on Integration of Third-country nationals and the new initiative of the Committee of the Regions, "Cities and Regions for Integration."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Local Authorities

Drawing upon INTEGRA's methodology, resources and outcomes, project partners strive to promote peer learning, especially linking cities that have more experience with cities and towns that have only recently begun to receive migrants.

Knowledge and experience sharing

- ◆ Developing platforms with shared resources and transferable practices on migration and integration per thematic area (e.g. employment, education) and city context (e.g. for metropolises, small cities, rural communities). In this respect, INTEGRA fully supports and is in line with the new "Cities and Regions for Integration" initiative, aimed at small and medium-sized cities and rural administrations, which are willing to integrate migrants but lack the experience and tools in their existing structures and networks.
- ◆ To capitalize on existing experience and avoid duplication of efforts, local governments, in particular, in larger cities, may consider collaboration with private institutions (NGOs, businesses) to set-up (or support the implementation of existing) strategies and "one-stop-shop" structures / integration centers for TCN.

Governance and leadership

- ◆ In decision-making procedures or when putting together local education, social services and urban planning strategies, TCNs could be invited to participate in joint working groups (or citizens advisory panels), to enable direct communication between various sectors and people of different ethnicities.
- ◆ Support training of municipal staff in matters of diversity, language skills and anti-discrimination policies to enable the city to provide services that are inclusive and non-discriminatory.
- ◆ Cities with proportionately high percentage of foreign nationals should receive support from national governments and public bodies responsible for integration for the establishment of centres / one-stop-shop structures that would offer a wide range of services to migrants and will focus on creating tools for easier TCNs integration.
- ◆ Engagement with the private sector is necessary to facilitate labor market and housing market access for migrants, encouraging potential employers to provide also vocational and language training for the workforce.
- ◆ The role of civil society organizations (CSO) is crucial in helping local communities understand diversity and promote common values.

Public information and communication

- ◆ Local governments can work together with universities and non-profit organizations to conduct public surveys on TCNs integration in order to design and implement information and awareness-raising campaigns on the contribution of migrants to society.
- ◆ Proposed communication and awareness initiatives might include a volunteering component, involving both EU citizens and the third-country nationals; synergies with the "European Solidarity Corps" should be encouraged.

- ◆ Developing cohorts of intercultural mediators (including also migrants) to serve as contact points for information and service provision between public offices and migrant communities.
- ◆ Allocating budgets for engaging diaspora migrant communities and volunteers in information campaigns; design incentives for TCN participants in public consultation bodies (e.g. free access to learning and training offers, reduced time of issuing/extending residence permits, etc.)

Untapped potential of digital technologies

- ◆ Public institutions and cities face a common challenge: they are not able to use the potential of modern technologies fully and efficiently. Given the rapidly progressing and demanding nature of transformative technologies, local governments should be given priority access to sustainable support of smart technological solutions (including ongoing software updates of tech tools when needed), as lack of financial resources to utilize digital instruments are a key obstacle to city administrations, in particular, small ones.
- ◆ Multi-country or multi-city national projects can be encouraged, pooling their resources and expertise, to support innovative development/use of modern technologies for better connectedness, information, and inclusion of both native and migrant citizens in local communities.
- ◆ Private-public partnerships should be encouraged to develop sustainable technological solutions and use of mobile apps for information sharing, service provision, learning and training. TCNs should be recruited in the process as consultants/entrepreneurs/contractors.

Recommendations for National Governments

Include cities more actively in the assessment of national integration policies' impact & development of national-level policy priorities

- ◆ As key players, local authorities should be involved in developing and implementing policy guidelines related to migration issues. Mechanisms must be established to ensure policy coherence and provide city authorities with the necessary role and resources to address local opportunities and challenges of migration and integration.
- ◆ Systematically support local-level initiatives for data collection about migrants and their integration in areas where only central or incomplete data are available.
- ◆ National and local governments should work together towards the creation of common integration indicators at city level, derived from comparative assessments on the impact of integration outcomes in cities (according to the city size, number of TCNs).

Multi-level governance is required to address the challenge of integration

- ◆ National authorities should develop and organize regular surveys for monitoring the impact of migration on social cohesion and well-being on small territorial scale, related to different categories of migrants (short-term TCN, highly skilled TCN, students, etc.). Monitoring outcomes can be used to differentiate national funding instruments and facilitate easier access to financial resources for local/regional administrations.

- ◆ Encourage capacity building and topical network-building among national/regional authorities, in particular on integration tools, to allow transfer of knowledge and expertise between more and less advanced countries (esp. in regional contexts, border regions/cities.)
- ◆ National institutions responsible for integration can support the development of scalable CSO initiatives implemented for/with TCNs.

Engagement of stakeholders and citizens in leveraging public opinion and political support

- ◆ The engagement of diverse stakeholders, TCNs and citizens in the design and implementation of integration policies, apart from being able to improve their effectiveness, can also be useful in countering discriminatory narratives and reinforcing political support for integration initiatives.
- ◆ Streamline national level information and awareness raising campaigns to promote the migrants contribution to society with on-the-ground actions initiated by civil society and local authorities.
- ◆ Engage with and empower the voice of diaspora communities in the EU in providing information and raising awareness to counter irregular migration and to inform potential migrants about the opportunities of legal migration in EU countries.

Working more directly with agencies/authorities managing funding (including EU funds) at central/regional levels of government in order to receive contributions for cities' integration strategies

- ◆ National governments can put co-financing schemes in place aimed at local/regional levels of government. This would help to ensure commitment to shared projects and actions between partner municipalities, pooling resources with neighboring cities/countries.
- ◆ Ensure that whenever extra responsibilities are allocated to local authorities, these are met with sufficient financial and human resources.

Develop mechanisms at regional/national level supporting Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to connect to immigrant talent and aid integration in the local labor market

- ◆ Collaboration between national governments, industry leaders, local and regional authorities, educators and integration agencies is critical to ensure opportunities are not missed to fully leverage immigrant talent in meeting the demands for continued economic growth. Cities can work with regional and national authorities and seek out third party allies who know industry and sector needs and can assist in finding qualified TCN job seekers, and support their inclusion into the workplace.
- ◆ Promoting networks (local/regional/national/EU) of social enterprises working with TCNs.
- ◆ Facilitate qualifications and skills recognition to enable the incorporation of TCNs in the labor market, along with the introduction of new skills and opportunities in local economies, to ensure the prevention of migrants' exploitation.

Ensure security and safety of migrants

- ◆ National authorities (including law enforcement, judiciary) should assist local governments in developing and introducing measures aimed at improving the early and proactive identification of vulnerable groups among third country nationals or victims of trafficking in human beings, including enabling them to understand and have access to their rights.
- ◆ National and local governments should collaborate to develop suitable funding schemes and measures to support urban planning and regeneration of local neighborhoods with dense migrant populations.

Recommendations for European Organizations and EU Policy Bodies

The EU Action Plan on integration of third-country nationals (June 2016, COM(2016) 377) establishes a framework for action and concrete initiatives to support Member States in the integration of the 20 million non-EU nationals residing legally in the EU. The actions suggested by the Action Plan are divided across seven policy priorities, namely: pre-departure and pre-arrival measures; education; labor market and vocational training; access to basic services; active participation and social inclusion; as well as tools for coordination, funding and monitoring of policies. As stressed by the Action Plan, the role of local and regional authorities in the integration process is crucial as most of integration measures are implemented at local level.

Furthermore, the EU's role in promoting integration policies consists in providing a space for exchange of good practices by gathering and sharing useful information (European website on integration, Migration data portal), or setting up and supporting various networks (e.g. [European Integration Network](#), [European Migration Forum](#), [EU Urban Agenda Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees](#), Intercultural cities, Eurocities, Integrating cities, Employers for integration).

Most recently, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) launched the "Cities and Regions for Integration" initiative. The action (#Regions4Integration) complements a range of existing networks and projects by local and regional governments associations in Europe. As the EU's political assembly of local and regional governments, the CoR seeks to build a coalition together with four leading European associations of cities and regions – the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and Eurocities - to contribute to shaping the EU's migration agenda and ensure the local and regional perspective is better taken into account in the future.

The INTEGRA approach and objectives are fully in line with the priorities stated by CoR and the European associations; the project impact relates to **further promoting transnational cooperation on integration issues through municipal networks, city-to-city exchange and peer dialogues** as tools for knowledge sharing, mentoring, and capacity and institution building.

Evidence-based integration policy and strategy development

- ◆ INTEGRA joins the recent conclusions of the Working Group Urban Agenda for the EU (Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees Partnership)¹ **in recommending further streamlining the efforts at EU level for data gathering and evidence-based policy making, monitoring and assessment.** The specific recommendations focus on improving urban strategies and policies for migrant integration with better collection, access and analysis of data on mobility of TCNs and other tools for evidence-based policy-making. As the city audits conducted within INTEGRA have confirmed, data on TCN integration and common EU indicators on migrant integration on urban/regional level is often scarce and fragmented.
- ◆ INTEGRA recommends creating new mechanisms at national and EU level aimed at improving the knowledge base for cities' integration policies, including better tools for data gathering, multi-level communication among data providers and data-users (through partnerships between local authorities, CSOs, and private companies).
- ◆ Assisting city authorities in developing integration indicators on city/regional level to monitor and assess integration achievement of various groups of TCN, develop forecast scenarios and long-term policies in key integration areas (education, employment, social services, political and cultural participation, regional growth).
- ◆ Availability of comparable data sets on cities of similar size, with similar migrant populations or similar migration histories will enable local and regional authorities to assess needs for intervention and to plan for certain categories of support, drawing upon successful models of integration at national, regional or EU levels.

Developing and implementing a territorial approach to migrant integration

The current focus on refugee integration, largely driven by the urgent needs in countries such as Germany, Italy or Spain, has diverted attention from other pressing issues. Those are, for example, related to the large numbers of economic migrants coming to countries in Central and Eastern Europe; however, the host countries lack adequate integration policies and sufficient resources to provide satisfactory housing, education or healthcare services to the migrants. The incoming foreign nationals are mostly from Ukraine, Moldova and the former Soviet Union, and they require different responses and measures than the integration of refugees and migrants from other parts of the world.

- ◆ EU integration policies should be therefore more context-sensitive and flexible in capacity to respond to various challenges taking into account differences in the composition of incoming foreign nationals in terms of their countries of origins, motivations, as well as public attitudes in the host societies.

Employment

In relation to priority three of the EU Action Plan, **employment**, we recommend the development of methods to help accept diversity. It is important not only to focus on creating jobs, but to also introduce a multicultural way of thinking in private businesses and state

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/inclusion-migrants-and-refugees/better-data-better-policies-recommendations-urban-agenda-partnership>

institutions. This can be done by demonstrating the benefits, among them economic ones, that diversity creates in an organization.

- ◆ Simplifying the process of renewing residence permits (as well as work and study permits), shorten the waiting times and reducing the bureaucracy involved. If EU directives were applied, it should allow for more flexible ways of issuing and renewing residence permits, in order to cut down on red tape.
- ◆ Local governments can work with local businesses to create forward-looking more liberal and global strategies oriented to a culturally diverse work-force.

Social inclusion and participation

- ◆ In relation to priority five of the Action Plan, **Active participation and social inclusion**, INTEGRA partners believe that more funds should be invested in projects and programmes (e.g. training for city administrations/social workers/social services providers) on fighting hate speech and preventing intersectional discrimination against TCNs.
- ◆ Engage the public mediators (national and municipal ombudspersons) in joint efforts of public institutions and civil society aimed to include migrants in public consultative processes and creating migrant fora to address relevant integration matters.
- ◆ EC programs like AMIF, ESF, Europe for Citizens (actions Town Twinning, Network of Towns) can allocate funding for annual large-scale public information campaigns on migrant inclusion.

Technical assistance and responsibility-sharing between the Member States

- ◆ Enhancing cooperation and partnerships among local authorities from Member States: connecting local and regional authorities having none or little experience on integration and local and regional authorities having experience through the development of funding instruments and measures (through EC funding programs such as AMIF, ESF, or sharing multi-language information materials, etc.)
- ◆ Allocating budgets for scalable technical assistance projects on integration between members of regional, national, EU associations and networks of local governments.

New funding instruments for TCN in the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of the EU

In order to create appropriate funding opportunities for integration policies at city level and to ensure meaningful support to local actors where national funding mechanisms are insufficient, we recommend the following:

- ◆ Setting-up coordination mechanisms between the new EU funds to be established (European Social Fund + and Asylum and Migration Fund) in the area of integration to guarantee that no groups or fields of action are left out from the funding schemes and to avoid duplication of efforts at the EU and national level. At the EU level the fields of competence of the two funds and the coordination procedures in the funds' administrations must be clearly formulated. At the national level, synergies in the funds' implementation can be achieved by establishing rules for the coordination of their activities (shared oversight, thematic approach, clear distinction between early and long-term integration measures).

- ◆ Involving civil society organisations in the process of planning, monitoring and evaluation of integration funds. Design mechanisms for CSOs to participate as beneficiaries of funding but also in the funds' administration. An adequate share of funds managed centrally by the Commission should be available to support local actions by CSOs (for national or transnational actions).
- ◆ Greater share of funds allocated to TCN integration: We recommend allocating 30% of the ESF+ for inclusion (25% was proposed by the Commission and 27% in the EU Parliament report), ensuring that TCNs will be an eligible group at the national level. Furthermore, we propose earmarking a clear amount of money to be allocated for integration policies in the AMF national programmes.

Strengthening existing networks by actively reaching out to potential partners

The EU Action Plan states that “the EU should play a stronger role in coordinating and liaising between the different actors and stakeholders in the field of immigrant integration.” EU and national bodies should more actively reach out to actors and regions not involved into existing networks and increase their commitment in the area of integration. A comprehensive communication strategy needs to be developed with measures for engagement aimed at the opponents of immigration and those not willing to get involved.

WAY FORWARD

The INTEGRA project will support the implementation of the proposed measures and recommendations.

This will be done by:

Widely disseminating the project documents and resources to EU, national, and regional level networks of local government associations, such as the Committee of the Regions, the Urban Innovation Agenda for Europe on the topic Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, EURO CITIES Working group on Migration and Integration.

Promoting the role of cities as agents in migrant inclusion through empowerment of local governments, sharing local practices, experiences and *know-how*.

Further developing the knowledge and city data gathered on local migration contexts in INTEGRA to provide a solid evidence-base to future local actions.

Supporting and piloting actions that can be catalysts for institutional and policy changes in the partner cities.

Plan

Factor in migrant population in city plans and incorporate migrant voices in inclusive urban planning (through citizen panels, review boards, and coordination with community-based organizations.)



Communicate

Facilitate integration through education and communication strategies. Partner with media for balanced coverage and evidence-based information campaigns.



Collaborate with Stakeholders

Enhance access and representation of migrants in community initiatives and planning, establish partnerships with the private sector and NGOs to support integration.



Lead Integration

Build political consensus & public support for migrant inclusion and integration as a priority, and strengthen institutional capacity through diversity training and intercultural skills development for local government.

Collect Data

To ensure policy coherence at national and local level, institutionalize data collection and establish a dedicated co-ordination structure responsible for integration.



