

Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity
Autumn Academy 2016
Strategic approaches to Migrant Integration in Europe

St Anne's College, Oxford
5th – 9th September 2016

Summary of Key Themes

The symposium was an opportunity for those responsible for developing and implementing re-settlement and integration policies at EU, national and local level to share knowledge, expertise and ideas, to consider the implications of the latest research evidence and reflect on strategic policy options. A full report on the discussions, with links to presentations, can be accessed [here](#).

The final session drew out some of the key themes that emerged. Opening remarks focused on two dominant themes from discussions throughout the week: the importance of multi-level governance arrangements, and of facilitating the contribution of civil society. Further themes were brought out in the discussion which followed including the need to address the dominant narratives, the importance of a stronger evidence base, devising effective policy interventions and building on the new strengths that have emerged at the local level.

Multilevel governance: challenges and opportunities

- **Multi-level governance – its vital importance and current severe limitations** - emerged as a crucial theme throughout the symposium. There are key players at regional, city and community level whose experiences are not built into policy making at national or EU level. New fora and networks are needed to facilitate consultation, dialogue and negotiation. They should shape priorities as well as implement policies and monitor outcomes. One outcome will be greater consensus on what needs to be done.
- **This is not without challenges** including the implicit hierarchical nature of arrangements in which participants have differing mandates, powers and resources; and differing requirements for accountability. Expectations also need to be managed. Everyone must be clear about why they are around the table and realistic about what they can achieve. Before we call for new forms of multilevel governance we need to look at what already works well and know exactly what we are calling for. The Portuguese model is one from which others could learn.
- **Multilevel governance nevertheless has potential to provide a clear pathway for national states to supply data and information** to, and learn from, the local level. Municipalities and other local actors will then be empowered to more effective interventions, including using data to garner support and inform public opinion. Not all localities have the resources to produce or access this data themselves. This system

would also facilitate policy development from municipalities and neighbourhoods to the national level.

- **There is often cooperation between levels, and with civil society, in implementing policies**, particularly for service delivery, but that has not led to their being heard when national policies are developed. Moreover, dialogue needs to be with those implementing policies in cities, not just those representing cities at a political level.
- **EU policy making is particularly distant from, but relevant to, the local level.** EU policy can seem impractical locally and direct dialogue is needed for each level to inform the other. Some of the most deprived areas will not have capacity to engage at EU level and strategies are needed to ensure their experience is nevertheless taken into account: a balance between direct access and a voice through representatives and networks.
- **A balance then has to be found between municipal autonomy and ensuring delivery of the national plan:** for municipalities to decide how to deliver reflecting local priorities while maintaining consistency and standards of performance.
- **National governments may not have the political will to open up policy making** to include direct input from local government or civil society. They see it as their own mandate and are unwilling to cede any control.
- **The response to the ‘refugee crisis’ can be used as evidence of the pivotal role of cities** and need to learn from them; a lever to make the case for a more effective governance system. The European Parliament could task a rapporteur to make an assessment and provide an evidence base on the ways in which cities and civil society responded to the crisis, as well as on the implications of fragmented EU-national-local policy making arrangements.
- **National and local governments often sub-contract to civil society providers** but do not engage them in discussion on policy development, despite their direct experience of challenges on the ground. Civil society should be empowered to enter into a stronger relationship with decision-makers. Their experience and concerns should be listened to from the beginning and not only relied on in an emergency.
- **There is a need for some professionalization of civil society**, it is argued, for this to work including capacity to take account of government perspectives: a need for civil society to be pragmatic but still hold on to its values. There is some concern within the sector itself about negativity alienating potential partners. There is work to be done to get different actors to meet in the middle and get a better understanding of each other’s perspectives.
- **The importance of the transnational dimension should not be neglected.** Multi-level governance needs to include transnational policies so that people can remain connected to their previous country of residence and the implications of those connections are understood.
- **Avoiding waste is a further argument for having multiple actors around the table** to coordinate well informed interventions because resources for integration are severely constrained. Providers often already know the most efficient means to use resources and where savings can be made.

Evidence base and knowledge exchange

- **Well informed policy means a stronger evidence base** and monitoring of a range of agreed indicators on integration across economic, social and other domains. Even during an era of ‘fact-free politics’, evidence still carries weight. Narratives appeal to emotions but facts are needed to back it up.
- **The outcomes of privately sponsored refugee pathways are just one example**, to inform future policy development.
- **Different kinds of data could be used more strategically** to support intervention strategies. A stronger evidence base would enable integration to become less of a soft area of policy making.
- **Longitudinal studies from arrival over a period of years can provide a rich resource**—albeit difficult to carry out and to establish causal relationships in relation to factors and interventions impacting on outcomes.
- **There is a striking lack of means to share knowledge, learning and ideas across** and between tiers of government and with civil society. A ‘**coalition of the willing**’ is urgently needed among progressive policy makers and actors willing to share learning, brain storm on options and build a broader consensus on strategic interventions. Through regular contact and network development a common perspective on the issue may emerge which would promote more coherent migration management.
- **What form could this take, and who might fund it/make it happen?** The European Commission’s mandate to communicate best practice is one potential means. It is keen to make integration, and the evidence base, more visible to raise the priority level of integration policies and their effectiveness. This is also a primary role for philanthropic foundations.

The power of narratives

- **The rise of populist politics has intensified the need for progressive narratives which, like those used by populists, appeal to emotions.** The ground swell of support for refugees has demonstrated the scale on which people retain humanitarian values and respect for the dignity of each individual. A means to articulate those values in national media debates needs to be found. However, narratives need to be backed up by robust evidence to build a different consensus.
- **Narrative is not enough – there is also a need to find new ways to communicate**, learning from successful models, such as the equal marriage campaign in Ireland, focusing on human stories with facts in the background. This humanised the circumstances, allowing people to relate to each other’s experiences. Connecting with people’s values is where the hard work needs to be done.
- **There is work to be done to interrogate the myths of integration**, at national and local level; and to replace divisive notions of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ migrants with a focus on meeting needs and enabling full and equal contributions to the labour market and society.
- **New approaches must take account of the ‘native losers’**, the uneven distribution of impacts of migration and sense of relative deprivation. As Rob Ford suggested earlier in the week we need to understand the tinder, the spark and the flame. Migration dynamics cannot be wished away but neither can electoral politics.

- **Narratives should account for and appreciate the full diversity of the world that we live in, not only of migrants** – of class, gender, age, race, faith and disability.
- **It is not only the message that counts but also the messenger.** Citizens can be wary of narratives from national governments or Brussels which can be seen as propaganda. The action has to come from those who are closer to citizens and conveyed at a more concrete level. It is most effective if it comes from civil society.

More effective policy interventions

- **The ‘external shocks’ Europe has experienced in relation to finance, political instability fuelling the refugee crisis, and terrorism, have provided a more unfavourable context for integration,** as Joaquin Arango outlined earlier in the week, and this therefore necessitates new approaches.
- **The refugee crisis has nevertheless provided a political opportunity to win the argument for more effective policy interventions.** It has demonstrated the limitations of current policy and governance arrangements, highlighted the absolute reliance on municipalities and civil society, and brought many new actors into the field.
- **A key goal should be mainstreaming** – patching integration into every policy agenda; to move from projects to integration as a systemic policy priority. Clear leadership and coordination is nevertheless needed (not mainstreaming away to invisibility). Policy will also need to take account of the vulnerabilities of those such as children and women who need additional and specific support.
- **The principles underpinning the intercultural paradigm - equality, diversity and interaction – form a sound base** for evaluating new approaches and responses to issues that arise. They are well tested at the local level and proved a workable yardstick for policy makers.

Build on what is happening at the local level

- **A major trend across Europe is the growth of volunteerism** in response to refugees and to the far right. There is an appetite to contribute, a ‘goodwill revolution’, and this now needs some level of structure (there are many who want to help but do not know how) and a sharing of learning on what works in the short and long term. The private sponsorship scheme is just one way to capitalise on the willingness to contribute.
- **Notwithstanding the importance of including civil society voices in policy making, civil society organisations must not get too drawn in.** They must still do the work on the ground, not lose touch with everyday needs and speak that language or they will lose the trust of local people.
- **The refugee crisis has highlighted that both the immediate response and long term measures are primarily at the local level.** In many ways we have seen a decentralisation of responsibility. This has proven effective and there should be ways to ensure it continues so as not to lose skills and capacities.
- **People are often fearful and change is hard. Local level actions are the opportunity to have challenging conversations,** build new narratives and strengthen resilience of individuals and communities. Strong leadership and the courage to take a stand against the far right is needed.

- **Community leaders from across civil society groups and from business should be included.** They can be the partners that can do much of the delivery. Local action may not change the national story but will change communities one by one.
- **Interaction between all groups in society is crucial.** Youth policies are pivotal. Young people should be engaged through civic consciousness programmes, intercultural dialogue and activism networks. Partnership in common endeavour builds trust and understanding.
- **‘Welcoming America’ has shown it is possible to build coalitions of the willing from the bottom up:** key actors from across public, private and voluntary sectors can work together *and* take the lead in their own sector. This can be highly effective in achieving the ‘tipping point’ where public opinion changes and can in turn lead to law and policy reform.
- **Local organisations can pilot new approaches** too controversial or uncertain to be introduced first at the national level.
- **Refugees and migrants should themselves be involved in all debates and activities.** Their leadership should be recognised and contribution highlighted. Their acquisition of citizenship should be celebrated at the local level.
- **There is a need to shift from the integration of migrants to a focus on how we all live together in a diverse society,** as at the national level, across all identities.
- **Foundations have a key role to play in resourcing civil society** to fulfil roles the state will not or cannot support, in building networks and in ensuring means of shared learning. There is an appetite for learning on best practice, in the public sector and civil society, which needs to be met. There is also a need for training and capacity building in NGOs because of the highly complex political environments in which they are working.

The symposium discussions, in essence, suggest that the component parts of a strategic approach to integration – ideas, evidence, expertise, motivation at all levels of governance and civil society, a level of resources and of consensus on priorities – are all present; but key players and interventions are fragmented, operating in siloes within countries and across Europe - at a time when the goal of inclusive societies faces an unprecedented barrier in populist politics. No single step will change that but rather a range of initiatives from new modes of multi-level governance that recognise the centrality of municipalities, a stronger evidence base and powerful narratives to strengthen the capacity of civil society; initiatives identified throughout the week and highlighted in this report.

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