



**Local & Regional
Europe**

CEMR Resolution on The Role of Local and Regional Governments in the New EU Migration and Asylum Framework

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CEMR RESOLUTION ON THE ROLE OF LRGs IN THE NEW EU MIGRATION AND ASYLUM FRAMEWORK

We, Mayors and elected representatives of Europe's local and regional governments, assembled at the Policy Committee of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) in January 2022, declare our consent and support to the objectives stated in the New Pact on Asylum and Migration and pledge for a renewed attention to the challenges and issues linked to migrant and refugee integration at the local level.

Taking into consideration the different pieces of legislation concerning migrant and refugee integration, notably the New Pact on Asylum and Migration¹, the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion² and the work Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) are doing on the Lampedusa Charter process (2021).

Recalling the [CEMR Resolution of 2015](#) in which **We**, Towns, Cities, Counties and Regions of Europe pledged for a united, adequate and integrated response to the refugee crisis, in line with our European values of solidarity and respect for human rights, and involving all levels of governance.

Building on the CEMR consultation with the European Commission for the New Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion in September 2020.

Knowing that integration is not conceivable without local and regional governments providing social and health care services, decent housing, youth and children welfare and schooling, and building resilient and strong communities.

Referring to these numerous tasks of local and regional authorities concerning migrants and refugees we welcome the Commission's proposal for a New Pact on Asylum and Migration.

Deeply convinced that more solidarity between Member States is necessary we call for a system that takes into account the different roles of the Member States when it comes to the welcoming of migrant and refugees and in so doing develop fairer approach at EU level.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/migration-and-asylum-package-new-pact-migration-and-asylum-documents-adopted-23-september-2020_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2178

Expressing our willingness to further develop a more structured approach based on a concrete multilevel governance on the base of structural and periodic consultations, we welcome the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion structure that highlights the deep interconnection of the local and national European governments in the matter of inclusion of migrants and refugees alike.

Recalling the particular vulnerability of isolated minors, women and LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, migrants and refugees to gender-based violence.

Reminding that we have started to analyse the needs, collect and share data and good practices among our members, promoted public awareness and solidarity which triggered exchanges and debates at top political level between our elected members and within the European Parliament and the European Commission in collaboration with other stakeholders. We continue to take part in all the most relevant discussion arena bringing the point of view of LRGs, in particular in the dialogue with Member States and the European Commission opened within the Urban Agenda for the EU, Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees and in the continuation of this work within the Ljubljana Agreement.

We declare as follows :

- **We welcome** the current efforts made by the European institutions, in the issuing of the New Pact on Asylum and Migration and the Action Plan and the commitment to ensure a fairer sharing of responsibilities among Member States. However, Local and Regional Governments need more support to be able to provide effective responses for long-term integration. Local authorities play a key role in a good reception and inclusion policy; they bear a significant integration burden and need support for this effort and the challenges they face.
- **We support** the solidarity and responsibility sharing mechanism. The Commission's proposal is a compromise which would include more relocation security and thus predictability, as well as more support among the member states, to keep Europe as a community of solidarity for which we need an equal distribution of responsibilities. In this framework, the particular attention in supporting children and the vulnerable with an intertwined approach between the New Pact, the Action Plan and the Security Union Strategy is deemed highly important. The local governments can help with the early identification of potential victims of trafficking if they are properly trained and supported.
- **We reaffirm** the need to improve the partnership principle between all levels of governance, as well as the coordination efforts between the EU, national, regional and local governments together with their national representative associations and civil society. In particular, we pledge for more in-depth data collection on the impact of the current and future measures on the local society in those countries with EU external borders.
- In order to prevent the potential failure of the European Union and to avoid the erection of border fences in Europe, we strongly support the proposal of the Commission for an efficient strengthening, management and safeguarding of the external European borders. Even though, this is a necessary prerequisite for the effective functioning of the Schengen Agreement, we recognise the need of appropriate and dignified reception centres to host asylum seekers during the screening procedure. To this extent we welcome the new screening procedure as it ensures that asylum seekers undergo identity and security checks before they are allocated to member states, regional and local governments. Nevertheless, we claim for even faster and more tailor-made procedures for minors and for a respect of human rights and of the rule of law throughout the entire procedures. Equally we welcome the new mandatory fast track asylum procedure at the European external borders which applies for asylum seekers from countries with a low

recognition rate as long as human rights, rule of law and the principle of non-refoulement³ are respected. To this end, Frontex must be strengthened by providing correspondingly more funds from the EU budget. Even if this is a necessary prerequisite for the effective functioning of the Schengen Agreement, we cannot make the mistake of considering the issue of migration as a problem of borders only. We will not stop migratory flows with walls and barbed wire, and we must not do so; we are Europe. What we need is more courage and more farsightedness as the founding fathers and mothers of the Union had. We place respect for human rights and dignity at the heart of our action.

- We recognise the need for adequate reception centres to accommodate asylum seekers during a very rapid screening procedure for identity and security checks. In procedures that ensure guaranteed arrival routes and a European rescue mission at sea.

In order for migration flows to have a sustainable impact on European contexts, the instrument of cultural mediation must be strengthened in the practices of reception, integration and inclusion of migrants and refugees. The cultural mediator is an essential figure in the conflict's prevention, in the management of the coexistence dynamics and in the correct application of fundamental rights, because it's a bridge between the services of local authorities and foreign users. For this reason, it's important to recognize cultural mediation as an essential tool, able to promote the successful integration of migrants in the host contexts. The consolidation of cultural mediation in the reception and integration paths carried out by many Italian local authorities is an example of best practices that could be made structural and extended to similar European contexts.

- We also agree with the Commission's view that an improved return policy is essential for a functioning European asylum system. Currently, only about one third of persons who have received a return order leave the EU. In cooperation with third countries Member states should facilitate the effective return, readmission and reintegration of migrants without asylum rights in their home countries. To support this cooperation our networks working closely with sister organisations in these countries such as the members of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) can contribute significantly. We think it is necessary and useful, in order to encourage and facilitate the reintegration in the countries of origin of migrants who prefer to go back, to create an instrument for the management of returns by establishing cooperation between European and extra-European Local Authorities. A decentralised cooperation aiming at migrants' reintegration in their home countries

³ referring to the corresponding Article 33 of the Geneva Refugee Convention, 1951 and Protocol, 1967

- Beyond funding mechanisms, **we call** for further development of the partnership principle and co-decision spirit between the EU, national, local and regional governments within the different existing institutional structures of decision-making in this field.

Contribution of Local and Regional Governments

- **We express** our desire to further develop capacity-building, peer-review learning and to exchange best practices between different tiers of government, in close cooperation with civil society and migrant and refugees' organisations, in order to obtain an effective response not only to crisis but also for a comprehensive management of the entire integration process
- We should continue assessing the different legislative material, financial and human resources and institutional mechanisms at EU level, in order to understand how they could be better used to improve their usefulness for local and regional governments and people on the ground.
- **We welcome** the recognition of the key role of local and regional governments in receiving guidance and giving long-term support to both newcomers and EU citizens with a migrant background, stated in the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.
- **We aim** for a greater commitment to integrate and anchor the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda and the EU social pillars in the design of better inclusion and social policies in Europe's territories.
- **We encourage** European, national, regional and local governments to boost efforts to improve communication to citizens on the changing situation, so as to build a positive narrative and to ensure support for and ownership of the appropriate responses necessary to address inclusion and integration at all levels.
- **We call** upon all Local and Regional Governments to cooperate together with their peers in first arrival, transit and final destination areas and exchange their experience in the field of integration of migrants and refugees through the CEMR thanks to projects such as "IncluCities" whose results will be widely shared with all CEMR members and regional networks such as the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS). An extended

exchange of information via the common European database Eurodac as a political information base is desirable overall and is also meaningful in the context of faster procedure implementation.

- **We remind** Europe's decision-makers that numerous local governments are cooperating with their peers in partner countries and representative national, European and global associations, via networks such as PLATFORMA, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through programmes of decentralised cooperation with municipalities and regions of origin countries.
- **We pledge** for an integration and inclusion process that takes into account and protects against multiple discrimination and disadvantages based, in addition to gender, on the perception of race, colour, cultural and ethnic background, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age, sexual orientation and identity or socio-economic status as well as physical abilities. We rely on the *European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life*⁴, on its core principles and specific areas of action, to guide gender-sensitive integration.
- We welcome coordinated actions by local and regional governments, supported by the EU and central governments, to promote diversity and greater social cohesion in municipal life through outreach to refugee and migrant women and men; including by persons with a migration background and diaspora organisations.

Funding requirements

- **We welcome** the new Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF 2021-2027) as a new, clear and effective channel for Local and Regional Governments to reinforce and boost their actions and projects for the integration and inclusion of Third Country Nationals.
- **We are willing** to maintain and boost a constant and open dialogue, through all the available platforms, with the European Commission and other funding institution in Europe to inform with accountable and reliable data the orientation of funds and calls. The CEMR Task Force on Migration and Integration is an active contributor to the Inclusion Partnership as we deem

⁴ http://www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf

extremely important the participation to structured and permanent communication channels between LRGs of any kind, national and the European level.

- **We experienced** the importance of the link between the inclusion process and the request of a more sustainable development. The new key policy objectives of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) are in line with the expectation of the LRGs.

Challenges

- The concept of **return sponsorship** foreseen by the Commission will have to prove itself. In this regard, the execution of sovereign rights by supportive Member States, the transfer of responsibility in case of absconding of migrants and the required support by EU agencies complicate the feasibility and practicability. In addition, the conditions under which Member States implement readmission or sponsorships of return, as well as other contributions to solidarity, require further explanation and monitoring.
- The current situations developed in Afghanistan and Belarus will be likely to put to the test the new solidarity mechanism in the respect of human rights and principle of non-refoulement. The same will occur to future crisis that will originate from climate change displacement and natural disasters that are more and more often considered as one of the main push factors in the next years (IOM, 2019).⁵
- We will meet these major challenges in the best and most successful way if Local Governments are the key players and if wide-ranging and ambitious inclusion programmes are supported and sustained.

⁵ <https://governingbodies.iom.int/system/files/en/council/110/C-110-INF-1%20-%20IOM%20Strategic%20Vision.pdf>

Contact

Maria Grazia Montella
Officer - Integration & Migration, IncluCities
MariaGrazia.Montella@ccre-cemr.org

About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the broadest organisation of local and regional governments in Europe. Its members are over 60 national associations of municipalities and regions from 40 European countries. Together these associations represent some 100 000 local and regional governments.

CEMR's objectives are twofold: to influence European legislation on behalf of local and regional authorities and to provide a platform for exchange between its member associations and their elected officials and experts.

Moreover, CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the worldwide organisation of local government.

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