



Mutual Learning Conference on “Innovative approaches to integration and inclusion of migrants”

Thematic Discussion Paper

Innovative or ad hoc? Practices of migrant integration in light of COVID-19

Online, 26 November 2020

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1 Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant effects on mobility and migration trends. Challenges already existent in this area – like access to housing, health, education and employment as well as participation in social life - have exacerbated by the pandemic. Due to several vulnerabilities, migrants and particularly refugees are at a much higher risk of infection than native-born – especially those living in shared accommodation: infection risks can be at least twice as high as that of the native-born, according to the OECD (2020). They are also more affected by job loss, because they tend to work in professions that are severely hit by the crisis as well as in part-time jobs, and thus run higher risks of falling into poverty. The employment rate of non-EU born people in the EU had been steadily on the rise until 2019. It then dropped to 60.8% in the second quarter of 2020 (3.6 pps less than in the second quarter of 2019), corresponding to a decrease in absolute terms of 1.4 million people (from 16.2 million in the second quarter of 2019 to 14.8 million in the second quarter of 2020) and almost 9% in relative terms. It also has to be stated that non-EU migrants are more affected by the pandemic on the labour markets than natives (Eurostat n.y.) A lack of social contacts tends to lead to social isolation and less integration through language learning, especially for the recently arrived. Scapegoating and discrimination have been reported to rise in the Member States, as a consequence of the pandemic.

Due to its economic consequences, the COVID crisis partly undermines even innovative and comprehensive approaches that had been applied in several Member States following the stark influx of asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016. However, some Member States have taken measures, which aim primarily at tackling the most pressing negative impacts of the pandemic. The following elements and trends can be identified:

- regularise undocumented migrants, to extend work permits and visa particularly for those who work in so-called essential jobs, thus underlining their positive social and economic contribution to their receiving countries. These regularisation campaigns aim at guaranteeing migrants access to social services and adequate health care.
- Several countries have also digitalised language learning and school education which, however, can also put children of migrants at a disadvantage. As integration and inclusion take place at the local level, municipalities are at the forefront of applying disaster control measures aiming at counterbalancing health risks, guaranteeing access to housing, education and work.

While these instruments did address the most pressing needs, decisions have mostly been taken on an ad hoc basis and still have to integrate into existing innovative approaches designed in the last five years and ultimately into a coherent and cohesive, integration strategy.

The author of this paper states that there is still no clear definition of what 'innovative' strategies consist of and suggests that those practices should be called innovative when following a holistic whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. These practices therefore 1.) have a sustainable effect on society, 2.) aim at empowering migrants and foster their participation in host societies, 3.) mainstream migration policies (so that they do not only support one group in the host countries but work rather for a comprehensive integration for everyone), 4.) are easily accessible, i.e. either through easy language or offers in different languages and through good information practices and transparency.

Member States and the EU should encourage these innovative practices by sharing knowledge and supporting better cooperation between all the different actors responsible for integration. The EU can support innovative action on the ground through its various funding instruments, as well as the promotion of partnerships and social innovation between public, private and civil society organisations. These activities can

form part of the Commission's envisaged Action Plan on Integration and also of the EU's recovery plans.

2 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread extraordinarily fast across the globe and in the Member States of the European Union (EU), clearly showing that we live in a highly interdependent world. It has also reminded us of the need to find transnational solutions, stressing that "humanity's problems do not stop at borders" (Egeland 2020). This crisis has arrived at a crucial time for migration and integration, too: many Member States had recorded a peak in the influx particularly of refugees, approximately five years ago. Some had already implemented policies that slowly, but effectively reduced participation gaps in the access to services, economic and social life. According to a recent Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020) study, the pandemic now threatens to put these achievements at risk.

Although it seems still early to gauge the full impact of the crisis, we are already witnessing its first consequences for mobility, labour and forced migration. Temporary, repeated and even long-term border closures in most countries have made access to other countries difficult for both migrants and refugees. As of May 2020, more than 200 countries worldwide had imposed border restrictions that prevented migrants, refugees, as well as EU nationals and long-term residents from entering another country (Benton 2020). Stranded migrants and refugees faced homelessness and often stigma in host countries, in transit as well as upon return (IOM 2020). Refugees, in particular, suffered from limited access to protection in other countries (EASO 2020). Due to a loss of work and income, remittances to migrants' countries of origin have decreased significantly, giving reason to suspect that the economic consequences of the pandemic may be even worse than those of the financial crisis in 2007 and 2008 (Skretteberg 2020).

With regard to integration, the virus has undoubtedly intensified pre-existing challenges: migrants are facing increasing difficulties with regard to their access to health, economic participation, nutrition, housing and education (Egeland 2020), as well as equal access to education, vocational training and employment. Furthermore, additional tendencies of discrimination against and 'scapegoating' of migrants have been reported in the Member States (The European Network on Racism 2020), together with a growing spread of disinformation about COVID-19. Therefore, it becomes even more crucial to develop a migrant and refugee-sensitive crisis response and recovery strategy - a strategy from which, however, also other groups of the European societies should benefit ("mainstreaming"). This report aims at giving a first insight into action designed to tackle the negative impact of the pandemic, and highlighting trends and innovative approaches in faster and more sustainable integration and inclusion of migrants.

3 The impact of COVID-19 crisis on migrants in the EU

3.1 Impact on mobility and integration

In order to explore the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on migrant integration, it is necessary to look first at mobility and migration trends. At least three quarters of countries worldwide - home to 91 percent of the global population - have imposed partial or complete border closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and roughly one in two persons has been living under some form of lockdown by late summer 2020 as governments tried to slow the spread of the virus (Reidy 2020).

With regards to integration, it is certainly important to know who is even able to access the Member States: the access to asylum, the latest data (Statistisches Bundesamt 2020, EASO 2020) show that many asylum seekers did not manage to get access to EU Member States although they had been legally exempted from travel restrictions. In the

first eight months this year, only 295,000 applications for asylum were lodged in the EU+ (EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland), i.e. 31% less than in the same period of 2019. Therefore, the effects of COVID-19 make predictions on migration flows of people seeking international protection for the next months and years extremely complicated (EASO 2020). Even if asylum seekers did get access to Member States, lockdowns in public institutions made it very difficult for them to get into touch with the corresponding authorities (MiGAZIN 2020). Another consequence for the refugee protection regime has been the suspension of international refugee resettlement. Both UNHCR and IOM (in: Sandvid/Garnier 2020) state that they "look forward to resuming full resettlement travel as soon as prudence and logistics permit". Yet until they do so, no refugees will be resettled by a state willing to admit them (Sandvik/Garnier 2020). The United Nations expect that the effects of this crisis on poverty will trigger more migration towards Europe in the future (FAZ 2020). This can certainly have relevance to the future development of integration policies.

As recent OECD data (OECD 2020) show, migrants and particularly refugees have been among the groups most severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the same source, due to different vulnerabilities such as a higher incidence of poverty among them, often overcrowded housing conditions, and a high concentration of migrants in jobs in which physical distancing is difficult, migrants prove to be at a much higher risk of a COVID 19 infection than the native-born. Studies in a number of OECD countries have even found that their infection risk that is at least twice as high as that of the native-born (ibid.).

Migrants are also potentially in a more vulnerable position on the labour market because they generally face less stable employment conditions and, in the case of newly arrived, lower seniority on the job. Studies also suggest that discrimination strongly increases when the labour market does not absorb enough workforce. Also, networks of contacts – of which migrants have often fewer – become more relevant for finding a job.

According to the OECD (2020), it is still early to assess the labour market effects of the pandemic – especially in European countries, where job retention schemes and extra payments have partly cushioned the immediate impact of the lockdowns (ibid.). Moreover, the pandemic is still on-going (in November 2020), which further delays the assessment of its impact. However, experts assume that the crisis will further worsen the situation on EU labour markets, with migrants and refugees being in a most disadvantageous position (Geis-Thöne 2020). Even in Germany that still represents the strongest economy in the EU, the unemployment rate between March and July increased to 5.2% among third-country nationals and to 13.4% among persons from the main refuge countries of origin (persons included that have not yet been recognised as refugees) (Brücker/Hauptmann et al. 2020).

The employment rate of non-EU born people in the EU, too, has been strongly affected by the pandemic. Before the crisis, this indicator (in the age group 20-64) rose steadily until 2019. It then dropped to 60.8% in the second quarter of 2020 (3.6 pps less than in the second quarter of 2019), corresponding to a decrease in absolute terms of 1.4 million people (from 16.2 million in the second quarter of 2019 to 14.8 million in the second quarter of 2020) and almost 9% in relative terms. It also has to be stated that non-EU migrants are more severely affected by the pandemic on the labour markets than natives. Preliminary data points to a stronger impact of the COVID-driven lockdown and recession on the employment rate of non-EU migrants (decrease from 64.4 to 60.8% between the second quarters of 2019 and 2020) than on natives. As a result, the gap increased by more than 2 pps and by around 4 pps or more in countries such as Spain, Belgium and Austria (Eurostat n.y.). (ibid.)

Migrants and refugees have been affected to an above-average degree because they tend to work in those professions that were most hit by the crisis, such as the hospitality sector (ibid. and Vallizadeh 2020). Also, they often work as temporary contract workers

or in casual part-time work (Janke/Bauer 2020, JRC 2020a) and in jobs where social distancing is more difficult. The absence of social safety nets for those employed in the informal economy, working under temporary contracts or living in precarious circumstances adds another layer of insecurity with more and more migrants running the risk to fall into poverty while others have to bear substantial pay cuts (Pennekamp 2020, ILO 2020). Although there is still little evidence on the impact differentiation data by education level, existing OECD (2020) data suggests that the crisis predominantly affects low-skilled migrants. In Italy, for example, foreign residents without educational credentials experienced a decline in the employment rate of more than 10% – this represents twice the decline of those with at least an upper secondary schooling (ibid.). Adriescu (2020) expects that the EU-labour market will stay dominated by inter-EU-migrants rather than by non-EU migrants in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

On the other hand, COVID-19 has shown that migrants often work in so-called 'systemically relevant' or essential professions (comp. EMN/OECD 2020a), i.e. in agriculture and food processing sectors, energy supply, transport, sales and retails, and particularly in the health sector. This fact has increased public awareness of their important social and economic contributions: so the migrant workforce acts as an integral part in keeping basic and necessary functions of European societies working amidst periods of forced closure. Around 31% of the employed working-age individuals in the EU perform key functions such as teaching (14.5%), skilled agricultural work (11.9%), science and engineering (11.1%), personal care (10.3%) and cleaners and helpers - persons employed on a low-skilled basis in firms (9.9%) (JRC 2020). On average, 13% of all key workers are migrants (both EU and non-EU born), although in some specific sectors the share of migrants is even much higher. For instance, up to a third of all cleaners and domestic helpers are foreign born. According to the quoted JRC study, the share of migrant workers – especially non-EU migrants – is particularly high in key low-skilled jobs, such as personal care workers in health and social care services, drivers, transport and warehouse workers as well as food processing workers (ibid.).

As a side-effect of job loss, the possibilities to speak the host country's language are reduced, and this can also have a negative effect on the education of migrant children (Geis-Thöne 2020). Additionally, in most EU Member States, the virus has led to school closures and distance learning. While rapid digitalisation in the educational field is certainly one of the few positive developments in reaction to the crisis, reducing the risk of infections particularly for persons who live in precarious surroundings, it increased disadvantages children of migrants (OECD 2020), thus deepening once more the often mentioned gap between native-born and migrant parents in education. The latter tend to have fewer resources – language knowledge, access to computers and internet connections, a quiet place at home and possibilities to help them in their homework.

Finally, the European Network on Racism (2020) affirms that the COVID-19 crisis has led to more structural racism, despite fundamental rights obligations and equality laws at EU and international levels. Disproportionate numbers of deaths with the virus have occurred within ethnic (in the terminology of the European Network on Racism: 'racialised') communities in some areas, resulting in those already racially discriminated face even more precarious lives. In addition, scapegoating has been used against minorities believed to be the cause of the disease (comp. also Euronews 2020). According to one study, Roma communities are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 because they are often squeezed into settlements while cut off from healthcare and sanitation (Müller/Tair et al. 2020). Even more so, while support services for victims of discrimination were closed during the shutdowns, the police forces in many countries were given more power to control social behaviour "especially in areas where many ethnic groups live" (European Network on Racism). According to the same source, some governments and authorities have even been enforcing discriminatory policies. At least for Germany, migrants and refugees state that social cohesion is lowering (Follmer/Brand/Unzicker 2020).

A lack of social contacts beyond refugee camps leads to social isolation of refugees and means less integration through language learning. Many volunteers could not physically help refugees anymore, so that many initiatives had to rely on online offers (Lauble 2020). Since March 2020, hundreds of asylum-seekers in several Member States have been in quarantine. Bozorgmehr, Hintermeier and Razum (2020) affirm for the German case that the risk of contagion in these shared accommodations is around 17% higher than elsewhere, due to lacking hygiene-related products, missing information and relatively low compliance with physical distancing, which is difficult to realise there.

Taking into account, too, that the share of migrants in the total EU population is growing, widening opportunity gaps in the mentioned fields ultimately, can constitute also a threat to social cohesion (OECD 2020). To respond to these challenges is therefore crucial.

3.2 National responses

The above-mentioned consequences of the crisis show that a coherent, migrant- and refugee-sensitive strategy has to be developed on the different levels of government in Europe and in various political fields. Collaborative action in crisis management and recovery planning has already led to innovative solutions (Guterres 2020). No definition of 'innovative', however, is given here, nor are there any comprehensive empirical data to be found beyond anecdotal evidence which is listed on the EU integration website and the OECD High Level Forum (2020).

There are, however, different databases in Germany that provide lists of good practices both in Germany and abroad with the aim of mutual learning, such as that of the Bertelsmann Foundation that focusses particularly on newcomers and refugees, or publications like that of Kriemann (2016). There are also multiple compendia on good practice examples from German ministries, the Länder and especially from the municipal level, where so many refugees have been integrated in the last five year. This is why rather than reinventing the wheel, criteria for the definition of 'innovative practices' should be developed and a more comprehensive study to be realised on these innovative practices in the Member States should be realised.

Innovative practices, according to the suggestion of the author of this study, could be defined as those measures and instruments realised in the Member States that aim at holistic approaches and integrated services, following a whole-of-government as well as a whole-of society approach, which have 1. a sustainable effect on society, 2. aim at empowering migrants and foster their participation in host societies, 3. mainstream migration policies so that they do not only support one group in the host countries but work rather for a comprehensive integration for everyone, that are 4. to be easily accessible, i.e. either through easy language or offers in different languages and through good information practices and transparency.

Pre-COVID-19 practices realised on the national level often point at the following policies: encounters between migrants and host society, language learning, political participation, volunteering and coordination of volunteers, educational and vocational training, access to housing and health services.

On the national level, the National Integration Plan (NAP-I) in Germany (Integrationsbeauftragte 2020) can be highlighted as fulfilling these criteria. It pools the existing integration measures for all the migration groups living in the country, realised by all the political levels as well as by welfare organisations and municipalities, and it aims at further developing them.

This is certainly an innovative model with a comprehensive and holistic approach whose aim it is to mainstream integration practices, making them sustainable and transparent. NAP-I distinguishes five phases: 1. a pre-integration phase comprising information campaigns in the countries of origin and transit, a promotional strategy in order to gain skilled workers, pre-integration offers and language courses in countries of origin as well as migration- and developmental policies; 2. a first integration phase, including language learning offers, advisory services, recognition of diplomas and job trainings in order to facilitate access to the job market, access to education and vocational training; 3. participation phase: integration into the labour market, access to education on the long run, civic participation and volunteering as an integral part of participation, integration on the local level, addressing particular challenges on the countryside; 4. making diversity work and ensuring unity: through sports, health, municipal development and housing policies, culture and media policies; 5. ensuring social cohesion: through political education, participation in political parties and councils, intercultural opening of public institutions, anti-discrimination measures and measures against group-focused enmity, campaigning for citizenship, fostering diversity in the economy.

While the NAP-I is an example of a comprehensive approach considered innovative here, many more ad-hoc national responses to the crisis itself can be found in the different political fields. All across Europe, a positive approach can be identified in some aspects of employment, especially concerning labour-intensive, low-wage sectors such as agriculture and in meat processing and packing (ODI 2020) and the regularisation of irregular staying migrants. Portugal provides an example of good practice. In July 2020, it decided to grant people with a pending residence application a temporary residence permit during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this measure, tens of thousands of migrants are now able 'to access health care, social services, unemployment benefits and the labour market on the same footing as Portuguese citizens.' (Picum 2020, EMN/OECD 2020). Italy, too, temporarily regularised undocumented migrants in agriculture, domestic work and social care (Aljazeera 2020). Greece extended work permits and visas and created a pathway for employing irregular migrants. Germany as well as Finland actively recruited seasonal agricultural workers from abroad (NYTimes 2020); Finland also allowed asylum seekers to work (Valtineuvosto 2020). In addition, Germany relaxed employment bans for asylum seekers as a means to fill agricultural shortages with government data showing almost 160,000 refugees ready and willing to work (Forbes 2020). The UK, too, allowed temporary migrants to access public funds (Independent 2020). In Spain, third-country workers whose permit was about to expire and those regularly staying aged between 18 and 21 could get a permit (OSF 2020). Fruit companies in Huelva, Spain, too, housed Moroccan strawberry pickers who had been trapped as their country had not allowed repatriation due to COVID-19. Normally, employers of seasonal fruit pickers provide them with accommodation during the harvest. Due to COVID-19, the firms allowed workers to stay on and took on the cost (Deutsche Welle 2020, ODI 2020). In the highly skilled sector of the labour market, as another positive trend, several EU Member States allowed migrant doctors to work: Spain allowed more than 2,000 Venezuelan doctors awaiting credential evaluation to

practise (El Nacional 2020). France, too, authorised refugees with non-EU medical certifications to practice (Acceuil 2020), as well as Ireland (Irish Times 2020). In Germany, where the recognition of qualifications is partially the responsibility of the Länder, three federal states (Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saxony) called for foreign doctors to help during the pandemic (The Guardian 2020).

Regarding education and language learning policies, the first lockdown in spring 2020 disrupted many running language and integration courses (OECD 2020). Most countries were forced to end their courses as restrictions were imposed, though several States then started again with in-person courses after a certain period. "While some countries had online language course options available prior to the pandemic, such programmes had not been scaled to reach every eligible migrant. Several countries halted their integration programmes altogether. Across the OECD, volunteer organisations with language and integration missions also paused their operations." (ibid.). Germany invested EUR 40 million and approved nearly 7,000 online classrooms to avoid a disruption of courses due to the suspension of government services with 38 % of the eligible migrants participating in these new courses. France, too, provided 15-24 hours of distance learning per week to those migrants who had already begun French courses under their integration contract. Portugal could rely on the pre-existing online platform 'Plataforma de Português'. Estonia likewise had an established range of e-courses for native speakers of English and Russian.

All in all, it is still early to gauge the short- and long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the integration of migrants and refugees in Europe, as there is very little data allowing for real predictions.

4 Innovative approaches in European cities

However, "while many nations have reacted with unilateral rather than multilateral strategies to the COVID-19 crisis, both challenging and putting a strain on international solidarity and responsibility sharing, a growing number of local authorities all over the world are developing local and transnational cooperation with a wide range of actors to ensure that no migrant or refugee is left behind in response and recovery efforts." (ibid.). Thus, United Cities for Local Government (UCLG) have gathered around a 'Live Learning Experience' and adopted the 'Decalogue for the Post-COVID-19 Era' at the launch of the C40 'Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force' and the Mayors Migration Council's 'Inclusive COVID-19 Recovery for All' strategy (ibid.).

During the COVID-19 crisis, cities face rising social challenges and difficulty of supporting vulnerable groups. The integration models in response to the 2015/16 migration influx came under a lot of pressure with the tough economic situation (Patuzzi 2020). Still, since 2015/16 new approaches to integration have been developed and networks have been built that ad hoc post-pandemic related strategies can now rely on. Many of these activities have been designed and implemented on the local level and/or supported by civil society actors. This is why their engagement and exchange should be encouraged and supported by both the Member States and the EU. Referring to the criteria for innovation listed above and taking into account that integration is a cross-cutting policy, it is of high importance to invest in integrated systems that comprise the different integration policies (health, housing, work, education), the (private and public) actors involved, and the distinct political levels. Looking at the empirical evidence to be found in the EU, one certainly needs to appreciate the important contribution of European cities.

While cities and municipalities did develop more sustainable solutions pre-COVID-19, most of their reactions to the crisis itself were ad hoc reactions rather than long-term, sustainable and participatory projects that good practices should include. They did, however, address the crucial and most urgent necessities in order to buffer the negative

impact of the pandemic. These include the provision of health information (in different languages) and access to adequate health facilities (with a particular focus on vulnerable migrants), supporting migrants in getting access to food and shelter, as well as to open new possibilities to use increasingly digitalised educational systems and job markets.

Many European cities quickly reacted to the pandemic distributing information on COVID-19 in multiple languages offering telephone hotlines, WhatsApp channels, published flyers and websites, like Berlin (comp.: Cities for Global health 2020, MMC 2020, Council of Europe, Intercultural Cities, C40 Knowledge, Eurocities), Nuremberg, Zurich, Gdansk, Athens or Leeds.

In the city of Barcelona, residence and work permits have been provided for migrants to help them facing the health, social and economic crisis. A procedure for fast regularisation of all migrants with pending residence and work authorisations has been launched there.

Access to medical and other support services

The city of Gdansk also offers free medical care concerning the virus to all citizens and foreigners, regardless of their origin, citizenship and whether they have insurance or not. The Leeds City council set up a network to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on 'communities of interest' (minority communities like refugees, asylum seekers, people with disabilities, LGBT). "The council is working with health/care networks, volunteer hubs and complaints departments to identify the practical and financial needs of communities of interest and aim to capture stories to help measure the impact of the city's response to COVID-19. It is hoped the lessons learned will have a long-term impact for communities in Leeds." The city of London offers free testing for anyone legally or illegally resident in the UK, and the same is true for Manchester and other British municipalities. Different Italian and Spanish cities have outreached in particular to irregularly-staying migrants, such as in Forlì, Milan, Cartagena, Madrid or Manresa in order to ensure equal access to health services and provide complementary services. Nice, too, engages in the distribution of medicine and food with the help of volunteers. Psychological phone counselling also has been introduced in cities like Düsseldorf.

Access to shelter and food was also provided in multiple cities, such as Düsseldorf, Milan, Granollers (Spain), Madrid, Nice, Paris, and Lisbon, sometimes with special accommodation facilities for vulnerable persons or persons in emergencies (Bristol) or in need to isolate (London, Milan).

Local digital inclusion

Making sure that (vulnerable) migrants have access to the internet is part of the strategy in Madrid, Manresa (Spain), in Leeds or Milan. The latter engaged in collecting donations of computers and tablets, thus ensuring internet access and access to computers for unaccompanied migrant children. Additionally, it developed an online platform with classes, educational material, professional training and up to date information for migrants and refugee adults.

Cartagena listed a compilation of job offers for families that might be interested, e.g. migrant minors and women. Nice engaged in providing childcare and free public transport for health workers and other essential workers.

As the analysis in the first half of this paper has shown, the fight against hate speech, discrimination and violence and the support of a more appreciative, evidence-based discourse on migrants' economic and social achievements are increasingly important integration measures that should further be addressed by the different levels of government.

Member States should make sure that these ad hoc practices can be linked to pre-COVID-19 innovative measures, be continually financed (remembering that integration is 'a marathon, not a sprint'), and included in sustainable, empowering, mainstreaming, accessible and transparent whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches.

5 Discussion and learning

Innovative practices that serve as good or even best practices are often referred to, but rarely defined. However, the following criteria impact on the success of practices: sustainability, empowerment and participation, two-way communication, mainstreaming, low-threshold access in a whole-of-government as well as whole-of-society approach. In the above-mentioned practices in both the Member States and the municipalities, these criteria have not yet been fully applied, since action taken was rather ad hoc, addressing the most pressing demands. In order to integrate into a more coherent and inclusive strategy, this should interconnect the different layers of government as well as the different groups in civil society, volunteers and private enterprises.

An approach mindful that integration is a 'marathon, not a sprint' will ensure that economic constraints do not put action for integration at local, subnational and national/European levels at risk and will employ European and national funds and programmes to support and coordinate innovative action at all levels and promote knowledge-sharing among them.

This sharing of knowledge should also be encouraged in the new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion to be launched by the Commission by the end of 2020 whose purpose will be to support integration mainstreaming, a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society-approach. The EU should also target and foster innovative activities on the ground through its new Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF) as well as its funds and programmes like Recovery and Resilience, EU4 Health, rescEU in order to tackle the negative impacts in the Member States. Furthermore, the EU should support capacity building, through the exchange of good practices and training, especially for those Member States lagging behind in counterbalancing the negative effects of COVID-19. The EU can also further enhance cooperation between all the different actors responsible for integration (e.g. EU, national and local authorities, civil and business). Promoting common EU policies and measures on integration and promoting partnerships and social innovation between public, private and civil society organisations.

Member States, too, should empower local governments to implement and further develop innovative policies and measures. It is important to stress that it is on the local and regional levels where integration actually takes place. Municipalities are at the forefront of developing innovative approaches to counteract the effects of the pandemic. Therefore, local, regional and national authorities should work towards greater coordination. Through exchange of experiences, best practices and knowledge EU countries can increase their unity in responding to similar challenges (Lace 2018: 8).

Civil society organisations, neighbourhood initiatives, migrants' self-organisations and volunteers, too, play essential roles in integration processes as do employers and social enterprises (Lace 2018: 156). Their often innovative ideas in supporting migrants and refugees can be fostered in the above-mentioned programmes as well as through platforms to support their exchange and regular consultation to make use of their experience and knowledge.

With regard to contents and policies it is necessary (OECD 2020): to foster research and monitoring of the situation of migrants regarding health, employment, and education in order to better identify the issues and the appropriate policy responses. To alleviate the impact on migrants' health, Member States should ensure migrants' access to testing

and treatment and make sure that housing and employment conditions for migrants are COVID-19-secure. Member States and subnational entities should also guarantee that the gap between migrant children and native-born children in distance learning should be narrowed; access to digitalisation is to be fostered.

It is also of the highest importance to raise awareness of discrimination and to reinforce anti-discrimination measures. In this area, the role of narratives and discourses is not to be underestimated, particularly when describing the social and economic contributions of migrants to their host societies. With regards to social cohesion, it is important to make sure that native-born and migrants interact. This can also be facilitated using digital means. Raising awareness and highlighting positive stories on integration through campaigns and other communication tools is likely to foster social cohesion.

In order to gain a better overview of innovative practices in the different Member States, it is recommendable to realise a comprehensive study to be supported by the European Commission.

6 Conclusions

The virus has undoubtedly intensified pre-existing challenges to integration: more than before, migrants and refugees are now facing additional difficulties in their access to health, housing and education, to vocational training and employment. Also, rising discrimination against and 'scapegoating' of migrants have been reported in many Member States.

This paper has shown that migrants and refugees' infection risk is even twice as high than that of the native-born, and it is particularly high for people living in shared accommodation. Measures taken by Member States or on the subnational level in order to slow down the infections include quarantines in the shelters, where social distancing is often very complicated. The access to language learning, education and vocational training has been hampered by (temporary) school closures, and migrant children were put at disadvantage because of poorer access to digital learning and support by volunteers. The paper has also pointed to the above-average risk of migrants and particularly of refugees to lose their jobs, with refugees' unemployment rate, for instance in Germany, rising to 13.2% in the first months of 2020. Throughout the EU, the employment rate of non-EU migrants has witnessed a decrease from 64.4 to 60.8% between the second quarters of 2019 and 2020. This is the case because migrants tend to work in those professions that have been most affected by the crisis, have often only temporary contracts, work in part-time jobs and /or jobs in which distancing is more difficult. These tendencies are worrying, because they put advances made in integration throughout the last five years at risk.

The share of migrants in European populations is growing and – due to demographic necessities that remain after COVID-19 - must continue to grow. In the interest of social cohesion in the EU and its Member States it is therefore of utmost importance to design a coherent integration strategy. It is suggested to design this strategy across levels and layers of government and social groups (whole-of government and whole-of-society approach), which addresses these challenges while benefiting the whole population ('mainstreaming'), using techniques that guarantee sustainability, empower migrants and support their social participation and that are transparent and easily accessible. Since integration needs a long-term strategy, eventual budget cuts due to the pandemic should not put integration policies at risk, but should be counterbalanced in the respective recovery and integration funds.

In many cases, actions designed and implemented in order to tackle the hardships of the COVID-19 crisis in the Member States and at local level did address the most urgent

needs in the above-mentioned areas. These interventions, however, have yet to meet the standards set in good practices, such as sustainability, empowerment and participation, two-way communication, mainstreaming, and easy access. Therefore, it is advisable that the EU and the Member States:

- support innovative action through sharing of ideas and experiences, funding and knowledge and experience transfer;
- coordinate action across layers of government;
- initiate collaboration with actors from civil society and private organisations;
- promote research and monitoring on good practices;

Guaranteeing access to health, housing, food, education and employment for all is the most pressing need. Yet it is equally vital not to neglect the fight against hate speech, discrimination and scapegoating, which the COVID-19 crisis appears to be exacerbating and which require urgent counter-measures.

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8 Annex

Innovative approaches to integration and inclusion in light of COVID-19 analysed for this paper: Cities

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8.1 Berlin, Germany

Cities for Global health (2020). Berlin.
<https://www.citiesforglobalhealth.org/initiatives/gov/40>

Berlin made available information in the form of info sheets, podcasts and videos in Arabic, English, Farsi, French, Kurdish, Romania, Russian, Turkish and Vietnamese in order to **provide refugees with information**.

8.2 Düsseldorf, Germany

C40 Knowledge: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Equity-and-inclusion-in-cities-COVID-19-responses-examples-from-around-the-world?language=en_US

Provision of **food packages and shelters for low-income families and vulnerable groups**

Extension of **accommodation facilities, shelters and protection services for women and children in need**, especially victims of domestic violence

Psychological counselling via telephone hotlines

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide:
https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

The initiative 'Refugees welcome in Düsseldorf' **donated 50 bags of sweets** to celebrate the Muslim festival of breaking the fast at the end of Ramadan **to refugees in quarantine**

8.3 Nuremberg, Germany

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide:
https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

Shares **Covid information via 'Integreat', a mobile guide for refugees and migrants**. It is a mobile guide used by over 60 municipalities in Germany. The contents are tailored to local needs and contain local information in multiple languages (German, English, French, Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Amharic)

8.4 Stuttgart, Germany

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide:
https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

Shares **COVID information in nine languages on their website**. The website includes **video clips from refugees for refugees**, explaining hygiene and behavioural measures needed to contain the spread of the virus.

8.5 Zurich, Switzerland

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide:
https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

Provides **multilingual services to support refugees and migrants** on a centralised internet platform. It offers information on the pandemic including access to support, city contacts and general information. Additionally the city has been offering telephone hotlines, WhatsApp channels and published flyers in multiple languages.

Offers a non-bureaucratic and quick **financial support point of contact for migrants without legal status**.

8.6 Gdansk, Poland

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide:
https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

Provides **information on COVID** in seven languages

Offers **free medical care** in the case of coronavirus to all citizens and foreigners, **regardless of origin, citizenship and whether they have insurance or not**

8.7 Bristol, UK

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide:
https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

Bristol City Council called to hoteliers, B&Bs, Airbnb owner and student housing providers to come forward to **offer accommodation for homeless people** during Corona. More than 300 people, including migrants, have been taken into emergency accommodation. The City set up the '**One City Taskforce**' (representatives from Local government + civil society actors) to identify the needs and longer-term pathways for everyone in emergency accommodation, **including migrants and asylum seekers**.

8.8 Leeds, UK

Council of Europe. Intercultural Cities: COVID-19 Special Page: [https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/covid-19-special-page#{%2262433518%22:\[0\]}](https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/covid-19-special-page#{%2262433518%22:[0]})

Leeds City council set up a **network to monitor the impact of Covid-19 on 'communities of interest'** (minority communities like refugees, asylum seekers, people with disabilities, LGBT community). *"The council are working with health/care networks, volunteer hubs and complaints departments to identify the practical and financial needs of communities of interest and aim to capture stories to help measure the impact of the city's response to Covid-19. **It is hoped the lessons learned will have a long-term impact for communities in Leeds.**"*

To **avoid asylum seekers being displaced and facing homelessness**, the UK government confirmed they will not ask anyone to leave their accommodation over the next three months [not sure what the starting point is], even if a person's asylum claim or appeal has been decided. Leeds City Council in addition has provided **temporary accommodation for refused asylum seekers that are homeless** and have no recourse to public funds. They ensured that all destitute asylum seekers are in accommodation with access to **health needs and essentials**.

Leeds City Council funds third sector organisations to **make sure vulnerable migrants have access to internet**.

The Migration team of Leeds adapted a virtual/ online drop-in, which is attended by an average of 15 migrant community networkers each week. Guest speakers have attended that meeting to **share COVID information**. Additionally, the **Migrant Information Hub has been created and translated to more than 40 languages**.

8.9 London, UK

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide: https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

Offers **free testing for anyone living in the UK**, with or without permission.

Secured 300 **hotel rooms for homeless people to self-isolate**.

8.10 Forlì, Italy

Council of Europe. Intercultural Cities: COVID-19 Special Page: [https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/covid-19-special-page#{%2262433518%22:\[0\]}](https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/covid-19-special-page#{%2262433518%22:[0]})

Addressing the problem of irregularly residing migrants, who, before the Corona crisis, have often worked in the black market, civil society associations made an appeal to the institutions in order to start a process of legislation of migrants without a residence permit. The aim is

*"to **improve the conditions of irregular migrants** and through this the conditions of society;*

*to **improve sanitary conditions for the migrant population**, including better monitoring and ability to avoid the spread of the pandemic;*

*to **hinder the emergence of irregular work**, and bring forward the contribution of migrant workers in the essential fields of the economy."*

8.11 Milan, Italy

MMC (2020): Milan, Italy. Inclusive City COVID-19 Response & Recovery: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/mmc-city-spotlight/milan-italy>

"[...]The City of Milan worked to build Covid-19 response and recovery plans inclusive of all residents regardless of status[...]". This included ensuring "equal access to services for all, including migrants and refugees while also providing complementary services to address the needs of particular communities."

The city created the Network Milano Aiuta (Milan Helps) to **provide information** on available services, and mobilise volunteers, donations and private sector support for those in need. A part of it was setting up eleven **food distribution** hubs, where fresh fruit and vegetables are collected and redistributed to other food hubs preparing food aid packages. *"Between March and June, Milan collected 600 tons of donated food and distributed 1.6million meals to the most vulnerable residents – reaching some 20,000 people with meals and providing another 15,800 with free food vouchers."*

To **ensure internet access and access to computers** for unaccompanied migrant children, Milan collected donations of computers and tablets. Additionally, they developed an **online platform** with classes, educational material, professional training and up to date information for migrants and refugee adults.

Milan provided **COVID-19 monitoring shelters** for homeless people and unaccompanied migrant youth, partnering with the non-profit EMERGENCY. *"Through this joint "Welcome Project", emergency teams of healthcare and logistics experts conduct daily monitoring in over 50 shelters in Milan. They work to ensure proper social distancing practices and sanitation services, train shelter staff, and monitor the health status of both guests and shelter staff."*

Milan's 'Help Center Central Station' (CASC) mapped services available to homeless people, migrants and asylum seekers and surveyed their urgent health needs. This allowed the city to adapt, plan and network their service delivery, which helped limiting the spread of the virus. It also allowed them to continue offering services (free food, shelters for self-isolation, psychological services, public sanitation stations).

C40 Knowledge. Case Studies and Best Practice Examples: Stay-at-home measures and phase-out in Milan: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Stay-at-home-measures-and-phase-out-in-Milan?language=en_US

The city of Milan launched a Mutual Aid Fund (Fondo di Mutuo Soccorso) that will be used to meet the health, social and economic needs of citizens, in particular the most vulnerable.

In cooperation between the Municipality and civil society organisations, seven food hubs have been set up to **provide food for the poorest families** every day. A volunteer network has been activated to **provide support for the most vulnerable** and empty buildings are used to **shelter people without home** that need to be isolated.

Right at the beginning of the outbreak, Mayor Giuseppe Sala and the city government organised their response on three levels: *"(1) emergency management, (2) support for people under 'stay-at-home' measures, and (3) a task force working on post-COVID-19 recovery."* In all their different actions, the city handled the emergency through **coordination and collaboration with local partners and authorities**.

Provide information: there is an Infoline for vulnerable and at-risk individuals to receive information and enrol for free meals, food and grocery and medicine home delivery.

Food and housing: Milan is delivering food packages every day from eight delivery hubs, provides shelter for homeless people or people who can't isolate from their families at home or minors whose parents are in hospital or quarantined; the Municipality is providing food vouchers to families who became unable to feed themselves due to unemployment caused by the pandemic.

Digitise work and social activities: new online formats for routine, shaping work, events, meetings and initiatives; schools plan lesson streaming / radio lessons etc.; it offers virtual mapping of shops that deliver groceries, a sign up for volunteers, virtual meetings of the city government.

Ensure effective communication through daily social media updates, transparency and the possibility to reply to the Mayors messages

Phasing-out the lockdown by e.g. setting up a local fund to support those most impacted: call for donations to contribute to a **mutual aid fund to support vulnerable people** and small/medium enterprises. (Stand April €10 million private sector & individuals + 3 million by the City Council)

8.12 Barcelona, Spain

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide:
https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

The city opened **200 tourist apartments to accommodate vulnerable families** whose homes do not meet the conditions to endure confinement. It used a **pavilion for homeless people**, which can accommodate 150 people and opened three centres to reinforce the equipment for homeless people.

Council of Europe. Intercultural Cities: COVID-19 Special Page:
[https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/covid-19-special-page#{%2262433518%22:\[0\]}](https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/covid-19-special-page#{%2262433518%22:[0]})

Residence and work permits have been provided for migrants to help them facing the health, social and economic crisis. A procedure for **fast regularisation of all migrants with pending residence and work authorisations** has been launched.

Economic aids have been allocated, including **for migrants in irregular situations**.

The city has **recognised migrants' labour rights**, particularly in the field of domestic work and caregiving.

8.13 Cartagena, Spain

Council of Europe. Intercultural Cities: COVID-19 Special Page:
[https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/covid-19-special-page#{%2262433518%22:\[0\]}](https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/covid-19-special-page#{%2262433518%22:[0]})

Provision of **distribution of food and hygiene products as well as specific advice in situations of difficulty** for migrant families, especially undocumented migrants.

Compilation of job offers for families that might be interested, e.g. migrant minors and women have been encouraged to participate in the projects of the Immigration Unit.

8.14 Granollers, Spain

Cities for Global Health (2020). Granollers:
<https://www.citiesforglobalhealth.org/initiatives/gov/486>

Granollers initiated an action plan in order to provide socio-economic initiatives to mitigate COVID-19 consequences. It offers increased **help to people in vulnerable**

situations and migrants by e.g. providing for school supplies, meals or psychological support.

The city is supporting and **promoting voluntary help** (e.g. shopping for vulnerable people, refurbishment of shelter for homeless people, distributing prepaid cards for beneficiaries of scholarship dining.)

The municipality converted a Municipal Sports Pavilion into a **shelter for homeless people** where **hygienic conditions, food supplies and health support** are guaranteed. They collaborated with the Red Cross and El Xiprer (a local charity that provides help to vulnerable people)

8.15 Madrid, Spain

C40 Knowledge: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Equity-and-inclusion-in-cities-COVID-19-responses-examples-from-around-the-world?language=en_US

Public-private partnerships: Food provision for families in need and provision of equipment for homeless shelters. Collaboration with the foodbank, the World Central Kitchen and the municipal fire department in order to distribute meals to vulnerable families with alternative accommodation. → **Distribution of 7.000 daily meals to vulnerable people in the city**

Asylum seekers and homeless people without symptoms are accommodated in **hotels and hostels**; while the people with symptoms are being sheltered in existing asylum seeker centres and homeless centres.

Support services to victims of gender based violence

Daily communication of the mayor via social media

Eurocities, COVID News: Madrid – Pact for wellbeing and recovery: <https://covidnews.eurocities.eu/> / pdf: https://covidnews.eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Madrid_City_Council_Agreements_COVID-19.pdf

Action plan to deal with the corona pandemic and lay the foundations for recovery – including measures targeting vulnerable groups (pp. 26 – 37)

Families caring for dependents, single-parent families, families experiencing violence

Senior citizens

Childhood and youth:

confinement has deepened the inequality in education, therefore **supporting children in vulnerable families** and **offering access to technologies and skills** is required in order to prevent school failure and social exclusion;

Madrid is carrying out studies focusing on the specific needs of children and adolescents → Local Plan for Childhood and Adolescence in Madrid (PLIAM);

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide:
https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

Set up a **hotel and a hostel to serve asylum seekers and homeless people without symptoms**. Those with symptoms are transferred to asylum seeker and homeless centres.

8.16 Manresa, Spain

Cities for Global Health (2020). Manresa: <https://www.citiesforglobalhealth.org/initiatives/gov/535>

The Manresa City Council **distributed computers, tablets and internet connections to students from families belonging to vulnerable groups** so that all students can follow class.

In order to **reach people who are in situations of vulnerability**, the City has called on all citizens to inform Social Services of situations of people in need of food, medicine or else. Around twenty volunteers are carrying out food and medicine distribution tasks.

In cooperation with the water supply company Aigues de Manresa, the City has begun to install solidarity water meters for vulnerable people to **ensure that vulnerable families have access to running drinking water**. This also **includes people who do not have a permit to stay**.

8.17 Nice, France

C40 Knowledge: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Equity-and-inclusion-in-cities-COVID-19-responses-examples-from-around-the-world?language=en_US

Meeting the needs of frontline communities, among others health workers, other essential service workers and their families, homeless, victims of domestic violence, low-income families.

For health workers and other essential workers: provision of childcare and free public transport.

Distribution of medicine and food with the help of volunteers. Up to 2.000 meals are prepared and distributed every day to those in need.

Regional telephone hotline for psychological support

Providing shelter for homeless people in schools, hotels and hostels, where meals are also offered.

8.18 Paris, France

C40 Knowledge: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Equity-and-inclusion-in-cities-COVID-19-responses-examples-from-around-the-world?language=en_US

Services to meet the needs of homeless, low-income families and people with mental health issues.

Food distribution for migrants, low-income people, minorities and people with a disability in seven centres.

Night shelters and centres for people with symptoms for homeless and vulnerable migrant communities

Nurseries and leisure centres are open for children of workers engaged in the COVID-19 response

8.19 Lisbon, Portugal

C40 Knowledge: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Equity-and-inclusion-in-cities-COVID-19-responses-examples-from-around-the-world?language=en_US

Provision of **take-away meals to children of low-income families**; nine schools were kept open for children (up to 12 years old) of essential workers

Two new shelters for vulnerable groups with appropriate conditions for quarantining (contingency plans, reinforced sanitation measures, isolation spaces for suspected cases of infection)

The City is partnering with its 24 boroughs to get basic necessities to those most in need and support vulnerable groups in performing key tasks like shopping, pet care and maintaining contact for isolated people.

MMC_Municipal Covid-19 Resource Guide:
https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub

Lisbon opened **two new shelters for people experiencing homelessness** (note: probably the same as the two shelters mentioned above)

8.20 Athens, Greece

MMC (2020). Action Tracker. https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRqMtCR8xBONCjntcDmiKv0m4-omNzJxkEB2X2gMZ_uqLeiiQv-m2Pb9aZq4AIDvw/pub#h.cnifrcxsgdc8

The Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR) collects and shares **information on Covid-19 for community workers and beneficiaries in multiple languages**

