

Cooperation on the Governance of Migration in the Western Balkans and Central European Countries

20-21 of June 2016, Skopje

The two-day international seminar “COOPERATION ON THE GOVERNANCE OF MIGRATION IN WESTERN BALKANS AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES” was opened on World Refugee day, 20 June 2016 and gathered 25 partners from 9 countries and more than 70 international participants in Skopje, Macedonia.

The concept of the Seminar was to present every aspect of migration management by the exchange of experience and open debate on various questions with a special focus on the good management of local authorities and civil society organisations involved in actions on the subject of migration management (the Agenda of the event is included as a separate document in attachment). Experts and key note speakers were addressing 5 key areas:

- Effective emergency and reception migration management at local level
- Local policies managing diversity (risk mitigation, policies for integration: the role of local authorities)
- Immigration as an opportunity for local development: creating socially inclusive environment, promoting effective intercultural communication and integration programmes
- The role of citizens: how to build intercultural dialogue and inclusive societies

A Networking component was also implemented as part of the seminar in order to build partnerships and further cooperation on this subject. The Networking Component was constituted as “thematic working groups” who drafted the Recommendations of the event by topic respectively: 1) Policies on migration emergency management; 2) Integration of migrants: the role of CSOs, local authorities, citizens; and 3) Public perception of migrants: How to influence it in a positive way and build intercultural dialogue.

The presentations delivered during this International Seminar drew a global picture of the ongoing crisis and stimulated recommendations on how the national stakeholders and, more specifically, the local stakeholders should engage and coordinate in order to face the issue. All participants had the opportunity to share their experiences and concerns, while analysing potential actions to ensure the best reception and integration of migrants. Participants debated also on local inclusion of refugees through education and professional training, on the role of citizens and media to fight against prejudice, and on how to create partnerships for inclusive communities.

The International Seminar is included in the framework of the project “WELCOMING – Wanting Europe as Leverage for Co-operation on the Migratory Insertion Governance” co-financed by the Central European Initiative (CEI), with the financial assistance of the EU, and the support of the programme for Decentralized cooperation Normandy – Macedonia and the International Institute for human rights and peace in Caen.

The project was implemented by ALDA Skopje, a branch of the [European Association for Local Democracy \(ALDA\)](#), a non-governmental organization dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA focuses on activities that facilitate cooperation between local authorities and civil society. ALDA’s mission is the promotion of good governance and encouragement of local development.



Recommendations for inclusive and resilient communities

Policies on emergency reception

Concerning the emergency aid, it is important to agree on clear coordination and task sharing schedule between CSOs on the field and registration centres, as well as the creation of a code of conduct in reception structures. Moreover, the necessity was stressed to improve professionalization of aid workers (providing trainings on safety, psychological supervision and cultural backgrounds). We have to focus on the protection of vulnerable groups among refugees, individualisation of processes, and on the quality of practical information delivery. The Balkan route can be reopened soon, we need to be prepared.

Integration policies

On the area of integration, it is crucial to foster cooperation and coordination between CSOs and local stakeholders on local and national levels so as to improve integration structures and implement better public partnership principles on this issue. CSOs need to develop platforms and networks dealing with refugees and migrants, which will lobby and advocate for improving legislation on local, regional and national levels, and exchange good practices. CSOs and local communities should cooperate to provide support and services in order to develop refugees' skills (linguistic and income generating activities), and to implement local awareness raising campaigns to create a true bond between the hosting community and the refugees and migrants.

Intercultural dialogue and public perception

A lot of factors are influencing public perception: politicians' statements, media reporting, social media... The solution can be to develop direct face to face contacts between refugees and local population through local activities involving schools, local media and social media. Solutions journalism is crucial to bring positive perspectives on migration and to have positive answers from people. Working on local level is necessary to deconstruct and fight against problematic collective labelling. One main point is to recognise refugees as human beings in situation of vulnerability (and not victims, terrorists...). They experience forced displacements, we have to develop empathy for their experience. A major way to improve the situation is to focus on Education so as to develop critical thinking, to process the huge amount of information and increase direct encounters with the local population through pupils and parents.