

Recommendations on the governance of migration and cooperation in Western Balkans and Central European countries

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, there is a necessity 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.

Recommendations:

- Focus on protection of vulnerable groups. This particular component is not put into practice even though each structure has this component among their priorities
- Clear coordination structure on site. The local authorities together with UNHCR should be responsible for overall coordination. There should be a clear overview of who is responsible for what.
- Registration of organizations and individuals working on site: there is a need for clear rules for registration, authorities should not misuse registration process to prevent providing of aid namely from independent volunteers. Registration is important in order to avoid abuse of refugees – authorities have to know who is working on site.
- Professionalization of aid: A clear Code of Conduct should be devised which will be followed by organisations and individuals; Training needs to be provided for aid workers on refugee cultural background; Supervision needs to be provided for aid workers.
- Individualization of all processes – „small groups policy“

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.

Recommendations:

- Civil society should be ready to offer its expertise and assistance in the process of integration;
- Local stakeholders should accept the CSOs as partners in the process of integration of refugees;
- CSOs should foster exchange of best practices through the creation of a well-coordinated regional network;
- CSOs and local stakeholders should promote and encourage the involvement of the host community in integration efforts.

Intercultural dialogue and public perception

Several factors impact on public perception of migrants: national and European politics, media coverage, the novel, horizontal yet unmediated social media space, just to name a few. This complexity needs to be kept in mind when confronting the public perception of migrants, and it demands a holistic approach.

Effective policies aimed at counterbalancing hate speech, intolerance and xenophobic attitudes towards migrants have to prioritize strategies directed towards that part of the public sphere which is not already sensitized. Too often indeed, initiatives aiming to promote tolerance and openness are directed towards groups, individuals and organizations that already recognize and uphold the rights of migrants. If we want to be effective in promoting a more informed and tolerant approach, we shall be able to address “the other half of the public sphere”. And not only for the sake of having a genuine impact: there is an urgent need to close the gap between public opinions which are increasingly polarized by migration. Hence the question: how to reach out to people who are not already sensitized?

Recommendations:

- The local level can be a starting point – examples provided during the seminar have shown that grassroots initiatives at the local level (like those implemented in Slovenia, France, Poland) have a positive impact and allow to counterbalance social fear and closure;
- Multi-channel strategies, combining face-to-face activity at the local, grassroots level and wide-reaching communication and information campaigns through traditional media and social media;
- Novel approaches in reporting migration are needed and can effectively promote value changes. Local media have a crucial role as they still have a high penetration in local community. Along with this, “solution journalism”, “explanatory journalism” and positive coverage all contribute to stimulate citizens’ active engagement with solidarity and integration initiatives towards migrants;
- A compelling issue concerns the adoption of an appropriate communication style when media, local authorities and CSOs work closely with migrants. How to talk about migrants? A key element in this regard is to move beyond collective labelling, which is often the starting point for over-simplistic approaches promoting either pity or fear. It is crucial instead to place, at the centre of the discourse about migrants, the notion of recognition: recognizing each migrant subjectivity and the rights it entails; recognizing the common grounds between migrants’ experiences and national citizens: especially in South East Europe, the dramatic experience of the 1990s provides valid grounds for recognition, but all across Europe there are many other instances of experiences of displacement and exploitation which constitute a common ground.

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- Local authorities can contribute to a positive public perception by promoting physical integration in the public space, avoiding the concentration of migrants in collective centres which have a negative impact on the life of migrants and on the attitude of the local communities where such centres are situated;
- The education system is a starting point to promote openness, the values of dignity and tolerance among younger generations that will be the citizens of tomorrow.

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