



Protecting and Welcoming Refugees in Europe

A joint statement issued by ICMC Europe on behalf of the SHARE Network, on the occasion of the SHARE Network Conference (Brussels, October 20th, 2015)

Since March 2012, the [SHARE Network](#) has engaged with [actors at the European, national and - crucially - local level in 20 European countries](#). Involving cities, municipalities, civil society organisations, volunteers and refugee/migrant associations has ensured concerted action to enable many refugees to settle, integrate and move toward independence in their new societies in a dignified and supported manner.

This statement and the recommendations and conclusions that follow respond to the multiple actions and initiatives undertaken by thousands of organisations and citizens across Europe.¹ It focuses primarily on the local aspects of reception and integration for newcomers in Europe, and on actions and approaches by actors at all levels that can positively impact outcomes in this area. We hope it will provoke constructive discussions that ensure refugees coming to Europe can successfully build their lives in their new communities.

A new era for refugee protection

The number of forcibly displaced persons around the world has now reached approximately 60 million, around a third of whom are refugees. The world is therefore experiencing the largest refugee crisis since World War II. Europe has seen an unprecedented level of refugee arrivals, and numbers continue to increase on a daily basis. It is essential that [European responses continue to uphold international obligations to protect refugees in this context of multiple refugee crises](#), including refugees fleeing both Syria and the many other refugee-producing conflicts and situations across the globe.

An effective European response requires [sustained solidarity and cooperation](#), both amongst European countries, and between the European Union and the countries currently hosting the vast majority of those who are displaced. It will require increased and sustained support for these countries, the realisation of internal European Union protection mechanisms such as relocation, and expanded safe and legal avenues - complementary to existing refugee resettlement programmes - that enable refugees to enter and seek protection in Europe.

¹ See for example <http://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2015/oct/03/refugee-help-efforts>

To ensure the solutions offered to refugees and those seeking protection in Europe are truly durable, this reformulating of European policies and frameworks must include [a renewal of approaches to reception and integration](#). This requires [engaging actors in local communities](#), particularly in countries with little previous experience of receiving refugees, and [continued advocacy at the political level](#) to counter xenophobia and improve the level of understanding amongst the European public about the need for refugee protection.

Inclusive policies and partnerships to host larger numbers of newcomers

Inclusive societies guarantee rights and opportunities for all their members, both citizens and newcomers alike. Ensuring that [integration is addressed throughout public policy, reception planning and local service provision](#) will help to ensure that newcomers, including refugees, can enjoy equal rights, pursue their aspirations, and participate in the life of their new communities in a way that benefits all residents.

Many European countries have policies in place to organise refugee reception, providing accommodation, welcome and integration possibilities in larger cities and towns as well as smaller rural communities. To better support integration, such policies should, as far as possible, take account of factors such as refugees' aspirations for their future, family links, employment and educational opportunities and support networks.

Planning, coordination and communication

[Multi-stakeholder engagement, coordination, information-sharing and awareness-raising](#) are essential to successful reception and integration. Together, these approaches can help to ensure citizen support for refugee protection, whilst taking account and building the responsiveness and capacity of local services.

To ensure European countries can receive larger numbers of newcomers, [new and innovative partnerships must be developed amongst governments, local authorities, civil society organisations and other service providers](#), which should in turn engage with a broader set of stakeholders such as churches, migrant and diaspora associations, employers, universities and others.

In addition to standard components of integration, such as language-learning, children's access to education, health services and employment support, planning for partnerships that will facilitate integration should address the specific needs of particular refugee groups, such as those related to trauma and periods spent without access to basic healthcare. Partnerships should also include [grassroots, citizen-led initiatives](#), which have a central role to play in extending local capacity to provide a welcoming environment (see below).

Managing mutual expectations

[Integration is a complex, two-way process of mutual adaptation that does not happen overnight](#). Refugees may have unrealistic expectations of their new communities, such as the

type of housing they will receive on arrival and how quickly they can expect to find employment. Those in receiving communities may also have unrealistic expectations of refugees including, for example, how quickly they will learn the language or gain employment. There is a strong need to [manage these mutual expectations through improved information provision at both the pre-departure and post-arrival stages](#), and by providing opportunities for refugees and local citizens to meet and engage in common activities.

Welcoming newcomers in European cities and towns

[Direct contact and interaction with local citizens in receiving communities](#) can counter isolation, improve language skills, foster a sense of belonging, and assist in the understanding of local cultures and systems. Language acquisition is a particularly important element of building toward longer term integration and settlement, and opportunities to practice language outside of a formal classroom setting are an essential component of learning.

Citizens can be engaged in supporting refugee integration through [volunteer programmes](#) focused on refugees' immediate needs post-arrival, or accompanying refugees through the integration process towards their full independence. Volunteers can take up a multitude of roles including, for example, assisting refugees to understand and access services, helping children with homework, acting as mentors, offering short and long-term accommodation, supporting local orientation, and engaging in sports and cultural activities. The [coordination of volunteer initiatives with refugee-assisting organisations and city services](#) is vital to ensure both good quality assistance that meets refugees' needs, and the participation of a wide cross-section of the population in volunteering activities that meet refugees' interests, develop their skills and make the best use of their capacities.

[Citizen-led voluntary initiatives](#) are also a vital local integration resource, particularly when endorsed and supported by local authorities. [Citizens can organise](#) flexible and rapid humanitarian assistance, disseminate information and calls for action through a wide range of networks and media, and provide innovative approaches and solutions to meet the needs of newcomers and refugees. In Europe, for example, such initiatives have provided housing options for newcomers and refugees, engaged private business to assist in training and work placements for refugee professionals, and facilitated arts, sports and educational activities for refugee children.

[Citizen-led initiatives can supplement but cannot replace refugee reception and social services, and/or integration programmes](#). In this way, citizens can build support for refugee integration from all sections of society, and continue to make a substantial contribution to offering a broad and inclusive welcome for newcomers in European towns and cities.

Recommendations: What Europe can do

1. Although European relocation and resettlement programmes are now being planned and implemented, and EU emergency funding has been released to support both these programmes and assistance in the region surrounding Syria, there has yet been little

discussion on how to ensure that refugees will be met with adequate housing and support to ensure speedy integration.

To ensure the success of these programmes, both for individual beneficiaries and in terms of how they are viewed by the European public, the importance of successful integration outcomes and lessons learned in this area from the early stages of programme implementation should be present in future discussions and decision-making at the European level. Integration is what will come next for Europe, and needs to be the main priority for action under the European Agenda on Migration.

2. In national AMIF programmes, just 20% of the financial envelope is allocated to integration activities, a proportion that is far from sufficient in the current context. In general, AMIF funding for integration is allocated to activities for all third-country nationals, including refugees. A defined amount of AMIF funding for integration should be dedicated specifically to *refugee* integration.
3. Cities, in consultation with civil society partners and local populations, must be able to determine integration priorities and target groups, as they know best what is needed in terms of integration. Direct access for cities to AMIF integration funding would ensure that European funding for integration reaches the local level and supports effective, locally developed integration measures and priorities.
4. Volunteering and active citizenship initiatives should be supported, endorsed and celebrated at the European, national and local levels - including through the development of inclusive policies, funding for coordination, and tools to recruit, manage and support volunteers.
5. European funds take too long to be processed and allocated by Member States. Cities and their partners are frontline service providers, with proven capacity to respond urgently to humanitarian crises. Direct access to emergency assistance for cities, currently prevented by the AMIF Regulation, would enable this capacity to be mobilised to meet humanitarian needs far more quickly and efficiently.
6. There is a clear need for improved coordination and information-sharing structures for integration, involving national governments, local authorities and civil society organisations. European exchange on policy and practice in this area should focus on transmitting expertise from countries with experience of receiving refugees to those with less history of doing so, and national authorities should transmit learning via training, tools and resources for regional and local actors.
7. Actors at all levels should prioritise awareness-raising on refugee protection and solid communication on legal rights and integration support measures, including by incorporating both in anti-discrimination policy and programmes.

SHARE

a european resettlement
network for cities and regions



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Signatories

European networks:

- European Council on Refugees & Exiles (ECRE):



- Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Europe:



International organisations

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)



- International Organization for Migration (IOM):

