

A better inclusion of migrants starts in cities

Bridging divides to make integration work for all

In recent years, Europe has been rattled by several crises that have deepened existing inequalities and created fertile ground for the rise of populism across our continent. This has led to increasing hostilities, alienation and disregard for vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees. In line with the Eurocities manifesto “A better Europe starts in cities”¹, cities are calling for a strong European Union, based on the values of humanity and inclusion, that works closely with member states, cities and regions to foster and protect diverse societies where everyone can live with dignity.

Cities and local governments play an essential role in promoting and respecting the fundamental values of the EU, which ensure that all their citizens can live in a democratic, diverse, tolerant, equal, inclusive and peaceful society. These principles hold true for everyone, regardless of their ethnic origins or migration history. This is especially relevant, given that eighty per cent of all Europeans are projected to live in urban areas by 2050.

Cities’ essential role in implementing integration policies

Cities serve as pivotal actors in protecting local democracy, implementing integration policies and facilitating the participation of migrants in our societies. Cities implement policies aimed at fostering inclusivity and social cohesion and providing support services for migrants and refugees.

This involves tailor-made language courses and activities that support participatory democracy and labour market integration policies. It also includes specific educational support for newly arrived children and adults, as well as dedicated (mental) health support for particularly vulnerable people who may have gone through traumatic experiences to reach Europe.

Women often have particular reasons for leaving their home countries, including poverty and a lack of resources. In addition, they are at heightened risk of experiencing gender-based violence during their journey to and after their arrival in Europe.



Many of the local services that support vulnerable groups are devised and implemented with NGOs, faith-based organisations and volunteers, ensuring that a lively civil society is sustained. Through such initiatives, cities not only enhance local democracy but also contribute to building more inclusive and cohesive societies.

While integration is local, cities are ready to collaborate closely with EU institutions to implement EU policies and initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion and equality. With their in-depth knowledge of local dynamics and needs, cities are well-equipped to implement inclusive strategies that address the multifaceted challenges facing diverse communities. By partnering with the EU institutions, cities can bring together resources, expertise and networks to develop tailored solutions that promote accessibility, social integration and equal opportunities for everyone. Across different governance levels, cities and the EU can build vibrant urban environments where every person can thrive, irrespective of their background or circumstances.

Ahead of the European elections, cities are calling for increased support from the EU to implement integration policies. This support at EU level is essential, given that the involvement of national authorities in these matters is likely to dwindle or even disappear.

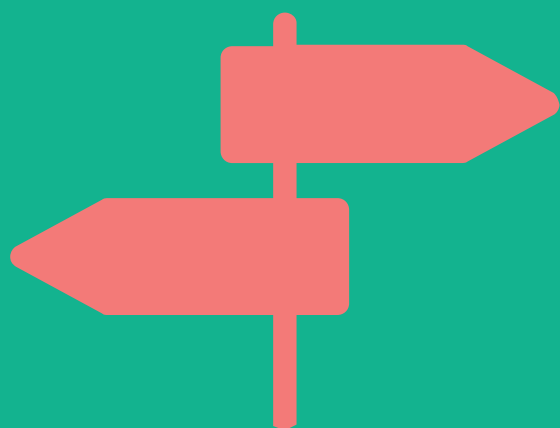
Cities call on the EU

As the European elections approach, Eurocities and our network of over 200 member cities call for the following issues to be addressed at EU level:

✓ Future-oriented integration policies:

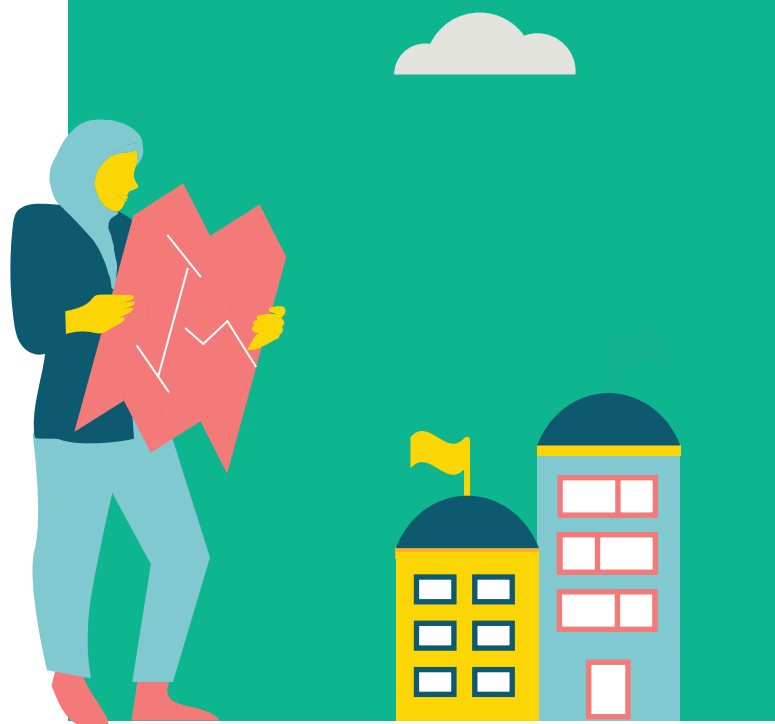
Cities call on the EU and its member states to monitor the outcomes of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. The legislative files that make up the New Pact, once implemented, are likely to undermine human rights standards and European values. Equally, the desired equitable distribution of refugees and asylum seekers across all EU member states still depends on how the member states decide to implement the New Pact. Given this situation, the European Union must ensure that the new migration and asylum legislation upholds each person's right to asylum and provides fair and efficient access to asylum procedures for those seeking protection.

The stringent border procedures and focus on detention during the assessment of protection needs are likely to have a direct impact on European cities. This may lead to more irregular migrants arriving in Europe through new or unmonitored pathways, or



an increase in the number of refugees who require additional support after enduring these processes. If this occurs, cities will face new challenges to support these vulnerable people, which will require further EU support to provide services to these groups.

On this basis, and in line with our 2022 Statement “Caring Cities: Acting in solidarity with all refugees”, cities emphasize the need to uphold the universal right to asylum and ensure equal access to rights and protection for all refugees in Europe. We need to ensure that all refugees, regardless of their origins and identity, no matter the colour of their skin, their gender, sexual orientation or religion, are receiving the same right to protection. With future migration crises certain to occur, we must protect these rights and avoid a splintering of protection statuses based on nationality or background. This is particularly pertinent currently with respect to the unequal treatment between Ukrainian refugees and refugees of other nationalities when it comes to access to various services and the labour market.

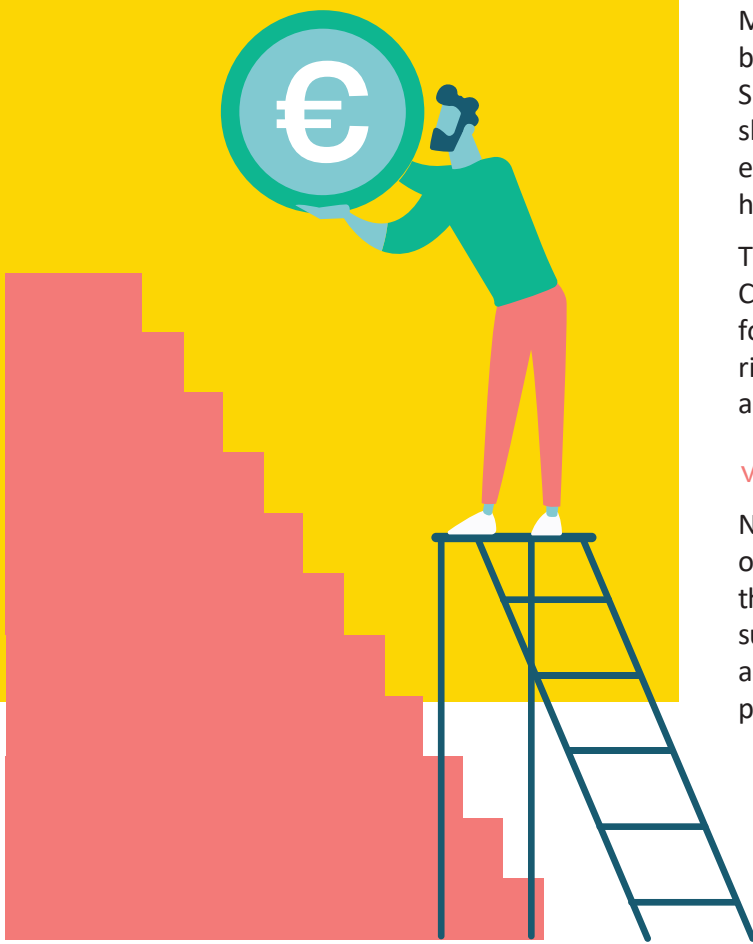


For some time, cities have been calling for more clarity on the future of temporary protection for Ukrainians in Europe². The EU should now either extend the Temporary Protection Directive beyond March 2025, as it has proved to be a swift and unbureaucratic means of protecting displaced people from Ukraine; or facilitate a smooth transition to other protection statuses or work permits. As a minimum step, the EU needs to communicate a clear picture of what is expected from cities following the end of the extended period for temporary protection. Cities will continue to be the level of government that provides services for temporary protection holders, and they need to be able to plan ahead to manage any changes to this service provision and allocated budgets.



Cities need to be better supported to provide services to particularly vulnerable groups. This includes refugees and other people in need of protection, but also undocumented migrants and mobile EU citizens in vulnerable situations. These latter groups often fall through the cracks when it comes to providing support based on the current legal framework, as they are excluded from accessing local services or are not considered in integration policies and funding. Cities are aware of their unique needs and already facilitate their integration into local communities. Yet, local authorities face difficulties in covering the basic needs of all newly arrived people, especially because of a structural lack of affordable housing in cities. Exclusionary migration policies and a lack of funding can therefore contribute to a rise in homelessness among particularly vulnerable migrants.





More generally, migration and integration need to be mainstreamed across different EU policy fields. Support for the integration of migrants and refugees should be made explicit in social policies relating to employment, housing, homelessness, education and healthcare.

This would allow for a fair implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union for people with a migrant background, alleviating the risks of discrimination and inequality they are facing and strengthening social cohesion³.

✓ **More accessible integration funding for cities:**

National authorities must ensure that a larger portion of EU funding is directly accessible to cities, enabling them to address local needs more effectively. Cities need sustainable, flexible and direct EU support to develop and carry out inclusive policies for the integration and participation of migrants and refugees.

In addition, it is important to reduce bureaucratic hurdles and streamline the application process, recognising the reduced resources and capacity that cities have to access funding programmes, particularly those with limited experience in accessing EU funds. This will encourage broader participation and innovation.

These funding programmes should be based on the stringent involvement of cities and civil society, through initial consultations in the programming phase to feedback loops on the programmes' effectiveness and impact. National authorities should actively seek input from the very stakeholders implementing integration projects and the communities and beneficiaries impacted when allocating funding from sources such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) or the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This would ensure that local perspectives are better included in decision-making for these funds, ensuring that they can be shaped in a way that addresses real needs at local level.

EU funding should be made available to sustain and enhance existing successful programmes that have demonstrated their effectiveness in addressing local challenges and promoting integration. This should be in addition to funding that supports the development of innovative solutions to emerging challenges. This way, successful initiatives can be continued, rather than abandoned, while cities can take further steps towards securing increased local financial autonomy.



At the same time, funding programmes should have a bigger focus on medium to long-term integration measures. Integration is a gradual process that requires sustained support over time and beyond short-term reception support. This reality needs to be supported by a more logical and realistic allocation of funding across the chain of reception to integration. This includes minimising demarcations between funding for short-term and long-term integration initiatives and between various vulnerable groups across different funding streams.

To implement future-oriented integration policies that are supported by accessible funding, it is essential to strengthen the strategic dialogue between cities and the EU. Eurocities has played a pivotal role in advocating for the interests of cities and facilitating direct exchanges.

We are ready to work closely with the EU institutions and member states to coordinate and reinforce our actions on building an inclusive society for all. Now is the time to put our European values into action.

More on www.eurocities.eu

Endnotes

1. Eurocities (2023), “A better Europe starts in cities. A strategic agenda for the EU in the urban century”, available [here](#).
2. Eurocities (2023), “Ukrainian refugees in cities: from temporary protection to long-term integration?”, available [here](#).
3. Eurocities Social Affairs Statement (2024), available [here](#).