

EUROCITIES

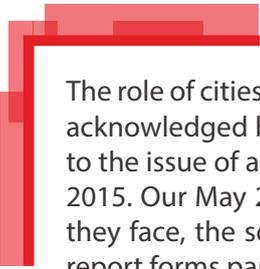
SOCIAL AFFAIRS REFUGEE RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION IN CITIES

March 2016





Our report is based on the findings of a survey carried out at the end of 2015 among EURO CITIES members. We collected information from 34 cities in 17 EU member states and Norway.



The role of cities as first points of arrival, transit hubs and ultimate destinations is well established and widely acknowledged by institutions and stakeholders at national and European level. EURO CITIES drew attention to the issue of asylum and refugees long before the strong urban dimension became so evident in summer 2015. Our May 2015 statement on asylum (bit.ly/20X1h9u) details the role played by cities, the challenges they face, the solutions they can deliver, and their recommendations to national and EU institutions. This report forms part of our efforts to showcase the practical implications of the work that cities do in receiving and integrating refugees.

On a daily basis city administrations across Europe must strike a fine balance. On the one hand, they have to manage the urgent challenges presented by the daily arrival of refugees and asylum seekers. And on the other hand, they need to establish the necessary infrastructure to prepare for the considerable long term challenge of integrating newcomers into our societies and ensuring social cohesion over the years to come.

We highlight emerging trends and best practices on the way cities are responding to the refugee situation in Europe. Our aim is to feed into the current debate on migration and integration at European level and contribute to the partnership on refugee integration to be developed under the EU Urban Agenda¹.

1. Urban partnerships are intended as the key delivery mechanism of the EU Urban Agenda. The partnership on migrant integration will be coordinated by the city of Amsterdam.

We present information, facts and data¹ on:

- how cities are adapting their services to ensure newcomers can be fully integrated into the local community, with equal access to the labour market, education and housing
- how cities communicate with citizens on this issue
- how cities collaborate - or do not collaborate - with the regional and national level
- what kind of support cities receive or need, and what coordination exists
- the practical challenges cities face and solutions they identify
- the impact of the situation on the city budget

These findings are organised in the following sections:

- reaction and coordination
- impact on budget and staff
- population response
- housing and reception
- national context and responsibilities
- communication
- education
- economic inclusion

We make a series of recommendations to member states and the European institutions with regards to developing effective strategies to address the long term issue of refugee reception and integration.

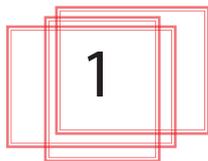
The annexes contain data from cities on asylum and the responses to the survey conducted with EUROCITIES members².

1. Most recent figures from December 2015. The situation evolves constantly.

2. The questionnaire will be available on www.integratingcities.eu

Key findings

- Cities have shown strong leadership and the ability to coordinate different city services and external stakeholders, sometimes in the absence of a national response.
 - The public response in cities has been mostly positive, with civil society mobilising to support local administrations' efforts. Nevertheless, there are some concerns about rising tensions among the local population towards refugees, and issues of public order caused mainly by far right-wing protests.
 - Providing affordable housing for refugees is extremely challenging for local authorities, and cities are working hard to ensure fair living conditions. Organisations working with refugees have criticised housing conditions and lengthy application procedures for asylum seekers.
 - The capacity of city authorities to deal with refugees is heavily dependent of the fact that asylum policy is a responsibility of national governments, with local authorities often given little room for manoeuvre. Many cities have nevertheless effectively taken over from national authorities to set up reception measures.
 - Many cities are opting for open and transparent communication with their populations on the reality of the situation.
 - Promoting fast-track inclusion of newly arrived children into the education system is a priority for many city authorities, who recognise the importance of education for medium to long term integration.
 - Many cities are forced to operate in the context of budget cuts and recruitment freezes. In addition, current EU state aid rules make public support for affordable housing more difficult. This has a negative impact on policies intended to promote a social mix and increases the risk of ghettoisation.
 - Cities with a tradition of strong and well-funded public services are better placed to cope with this exceptional situation.
 - Some cities are increasing their own spending to address the refugee situation by recruiting additional staff and enhancing the provision of services such as language courses. They consider this to be an investment in the future with the potential boost to the local economy.
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Reaction and coordination

Cities generally deal with refugees with a cross-cutting approach. They involve several departments, such as integration, education, healthcare, public order or housing, city agencies and external stakeholders, often under strong political leadership from relevant deputy mayors, as is the case in Leipzig and Ghent, or from the mayors themselves, like in Munich.

West Midlands Migration Partnership

The West Midlands Migration Partnership in the UK was established to help local authorities support asylum seekers in the region. Birmingham is one of the partners, along with six others, aiming to provide strategic leadership, advisory and coordination functions for migration in the region, especially in respect to asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants.

Cities also work with greater flexibility and creativity than other levels of government. They can deal with the challenge quickly and efficiently by introducing pilot projects and practices for refugee reception and integration.

Some cities have managed to assemble refugee taskforces in a matter of days. Others have had more time to prepare or took preventive measures a few months before the influx of arrivals through the Balkan route. Dusseldorf was the first German city to appoint a civil servant as 'refugee commissioner', responsible for overseeing the whole dossier. Ghent established three working groups within its taskforce on refugees: shelter, emergency/volunteers, and integration. This improved cooperation between different city services, the Public Service for Social Welfare (PSSW/OCMW), local NGOs and individual volunteers.

In the best case scenario, this coordination has taken place in close cooperation with the regional and national level, in accordance with the level of responsibility and goodwill of these authorities.

Riga involved in ministry working group

Specialists from Riga's welfare department participated in meetings of the national Ministry of the Interior's working group on the development of an action plan for persons requiring international protection, transfer and admission in Latvia.

Some cities have had to establish themselves as transit hubs for refugees wishing to reach other countries, as has been the case in Athens, Budapest, Genoa, Malmo, Munich, Stockholm and Vienna. This means dealing with a very fluid situation often in the absence of support, or even in the face of hostility, from the national level due to the lack of an EU and national legal framework to define responsibilities and competences in dealing with transit issues. As an example, over 500,000 people transited through the Piraeus harbour in Athens in 2015, often spending a few days in the city in 2015.

Communication with national authorities has proven difficult in some instances, with cities such as Barcelona, Bilbao and Nantes reporting that they were either informed late in the process or never at all about how many asylum seekers they should expect under the EU relocation scheme and how their reception would be funded. Many cities report that they have effectively acted instead of their competent national authority to provide reception to asylum seekers and migrants.

Many cities have also played a crucial role in coordinating organised or individual solidarity efforts from civil society. The Ghent city council volunteer working group coordinates all initiatives and responds to requests from civil society organisations and NGOs in order to match supply with demand. The working group also raises awareness of the different situations and perceptions of newcomers and aims to foster solidarity with other vulnerable groups in the city.

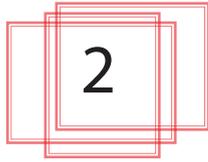
Most respondents cite strong collaboration with other cities at national level. This can take the form of exchanging information, carrying out joint advocacy work and organising study visits, such as the example of Karlstad visiting Gothenburg. This collaboration is also taking place through city associations, such as the meeting of German EURO CITIES members, the 6-pack meeting of the largest Finnish cities - including Helsinki and Tampere G4 in the Netherlands, Villes de Solidarité in France, including Nantes, Cities of Refuge in Spain (see below), and the Norwegian Integrating Cities.

Cities that are not yet affected by the refugee situation impacted are aware that they could find themselves facing similar circumstances and are taking measures to prepare themselves for the challenge if and when it arises. Such cities include Belfast, Brno, Gdansk, Lisbon, Ljubljana, Preston, and Riga.



Cities of Refuge in Spain

In September 2015 Ada Colau, mayor of Barcelona, put out a call to European cities inviting them to become 'Cities of Refuge'. She stated that: "It may be that states grant asylum, but it is cities that provide shelter." She was joined by the mayors of Madrid, Cadiz, La Coruña, Santiago de Compostela, and Zaragoza.



Impact on budget and staff

All respondents have been affected at some level in terms of budget and staff. Even in cities where only a small number of refugees have so far arrived, additional budgets were foreseen for 2016 to cope with a possible influx. Some cities report that all their costs have been covered by national or regional governments, while others report they have only been reimbursed partially or not at all.

Helsinki, for example, has hired 100 extra staff to manage its seven reception centres. However, EU emergency assistance totalling €8 million that was awarded to the Finnish national government bypassed Helsinki and went to Northern Finland instead. Helsinki has allocated €10 million from the city council's own budget for the reception of asylum seekers and refugee integration measures for 2016 and beyond.

Instead of having direct access to emergency funds for urgent reception measures, Athens had to apply for a grant from the funds managed by the United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) because the UN had received emergency assistance from the EU.

Hamburg has spent €363 million on refugee reception in 2014, and in 2015 the city spending forecasts will have been at least twice. Genoa spent €15 million in both 2014 and 2015. Gothenburg spent €16 million in 2014 and €26 million in 2015. Chemnitz has part of its expenses covered by the Free State of Saxony, with a quarterly lump sum of €1,500 per refugee, increased to €1,900 at the beginning of 2015. Unfortunately, this has not been enough to cover all the costs incurred by the city, which estimates its overspending in this area at €2.1 million in 2014 and €7.3 million in 2015.

Some cities report that their investment of public money is expected to have a positive impact on the local economy. Cities that were subject to recruitment freezes and reduced budgets are now starting to hire new staff and make new investments. This has had an impact on the demand for jobs, especially in the construction sector.

Many cities have had to hire new staff. In Utrecht, the refugee team grew from two civil servants at the beginning of 2015 to 10 people by the end of the same year. In Solna, the team of social workers working with unaccompanied minors grew from three to 23 people. Tampere had to recruit 60 new staff to provide for an emergency accommodation centre that reopened having been closed by the government in 2007.

Cities receiving large numbers of refugees have hired language teachers, social workers, school mediators, tutors for unaccompanied minors and interpreters. However, cities sometimes struggle to find qualified staff to fill the gaps. Cities like Gothenburg and Stockholm have also expressed concerns about staff retention, training new recruits, and increased workload on existing staff.

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Communication

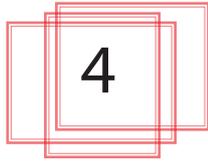
Many cities communicate openly about the reception of refugees, making an effort to position their cities as welcoming towards refugees. This has translated into calls for action from mayors, like those from Athens and Barcelona, political commitments such as from Munich, Nantes, Vienna, and Zaragoza, and city council mandates with instructions given to all city services to act, as in Bilbao, Gdansk, Munich and Zaragoza.

Transparent communication has also proved to be crucial to defuse tensions. In the current context, cities are paying extra attention to communicating clearly and transparently about the numbers and profiles of refugees arriving in their neighbourhoods. Information sessions appear to be most successful when the relevant politicians, NGOs, social workers, health professionals, and the police work together to dismiss fears and debunk rumours, like those in Leipzig and Utrecht.

Neighbourhood information sessions in Utrecht.

Utrecht hosted five neighbourhood information sessions to address residents' concerns about the arrival of refugees, and in particular the establishment of two refugee centres in key locations in the city. These sessions involved a range of stakeholders, including the vice mayor responsible for refugees and asylum seekers, the police chief and a doctor working in asylum centres. Neighbourhood stakeholders were invited to discuss issues such as safety with the police, local policy with the vice mayor, and volunteer activities. The meetings helped to reassure residents and encourage a positive attitude towards refugees. For the past 15 years, Utrecht has taken a human rights approach to migration which has led to a generally inclusive and accepting attitude among citizens.

Cities have been using the city website and social media to provide information, and in certain cases have set up apps and dedicated websites. These actions are particularly important for providing information on real needs in real time, including messages from the police, hospitals, NGOs and shelters. Munich and Vienna were able to set up these types of tools in a few days, while other cities reacted with a similar approach following pressure from residents. Vienna's platform, complemented by a 24-hour hotline, is extremely active (www.fluechtlinge.wien). Utrecht coordinates all activities and information via its website (www.welkominutrecht.nu).



Population response

The civil society response across Europe has been large-scale and reactive since September 2015. When pictures were published in the European media of residents welcoming refugees in Munich and Vienna, many city authorities were contacted by volunteers keen to help. Volunteers have donated material goods such as clothes, toys and food, provided shelter and language courses, and offered help with medical appointments and administrative procedures. There are 2,000 volunteers working in refugee camps across Hamburg. Dusseldorf has approximately 3,500 active volunteers and a variety of private initiatives in place. Utrecht's residents have organised 'eat and meet' events where residents invite refugees to dinner in their homes, with 350 residents hosting so far. Munich currently finances several volunteer managers who work for different NGOs supporting refugees in coping with the stress, trauma and day-to-day issues linked to migration in Germany. The city council in Helsinki is preparing a model of cooperation for the volunteer work of citizens and associations.

Private initiatives in Finland

In Espoo, several private initiatives and start-ups have emerged to support asylum seekers, such as the Funzi service (www.funzi.mobi). This provides practical information about Finland in Arabic, and advice on jobs, housing, education and other services.

Many cities have however reported concerns about the rise of anti-migrant groups. Assault and threatening behaviour towards refugees and volunteers has been reported, as well as arson attacks and vandalism of refugee shelters, including in Germany, Finland, France, the Netherlands and Sweden. Some city politicians have been threatened and subsequently put under protection. Pro-refugee movements have often opposed these groups with counter-demonstrations and other activities, which has raised other security concerns, resulting in clashes and increased police presence, for example¹.

1. Most responses were gathered before the event of New Year's Eve 2016 in Germany.

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Housing and reception

Cities are working hard to avoid segregation and the creation of ghettos. Much effort has been made to distribute asylum seekers and refugees across the city in individual housing units, with the aim of alleviating tension and fostering long term integration, as is the case in Gdansk, Leipzig, Dusseldorf, Chemnitz and Riga. This is a trend that we observe in many countries, and in general cities want to avoid refugee camps and collective housing.



Housing needs in Berlin

In Berlin, 50,000 refugees will need to be housed. It is estimated that 9% will find their own housing, so the city will need to find places for 45,000 people. There are 21,500 places already available, which leaves a further 24,000 that still need to be found or built. Berlin will receive €31.5 million from the national government each year to support social housing.

24,000
places to
find/build
in **Berlin**

Decentralised housing in Chemnitz

As of 23 October 2015, 79% of asylum seekers and refugees in Chemnitz were living in apartments distributed around the city and 21% in communal accommodation.

Social work in Leipzig

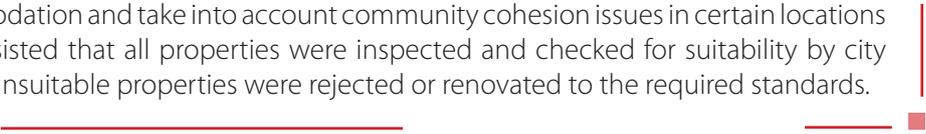
Social workers in Leipzig support refugees in communal accommodation. There is one social worker per 50 inhabitants. They start by helping refugees to settle in and live together in the accommodation. They then support the integration process by organising language courses, homework help for children, accompanying the refugees to support offices or local initiatives, coordinating volunteer activities and fostering relationships in the neighbourhood. Social workers also provide support to refugees who live in own apartments.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Cities work with their own housing stock, use mediators to private landlords, refurbish empty office buildings, and coordinate solidarity initiatives among residents willing to host refugees in their homes. Nevertheless, city staff often struggle to find new places on a daily basis, meaning that temporary accommodation has to be created for a transition period. Many cities were already facing housing issues, with waiting lists for social housing and difficulties for vulnerable groups to access the private rental market.



Finding suitable houses in Preston

Preston City Council provided clear guidelines on the number and type of accommodation units the city's rental sector could provide and sustain to government contractors responsible for sourcing accommodation for refugees. This number was agreed by all parties and meant that the council was able to guarantee the safety standards of the accommodation and take into account community cohesion issues in certain locations around the city. The council insisted that all properties were inspected and checked for suitability by city teams before being occupied. Unsuitable properties were rejected or renovated to the required standards.



Finding suitable housing for unaccompanied minors has proven a real challenge, due in part to their vulnerability and specific needs, but also because cities sometimes have a legal mandate to care for them. This is a particular challenge in Sweden, with Gothenburg expected to host 2,000 unaccompanied minors, Malmo receiving 250 a day, and Stockholm receiving 50 to 60 a day.

Cities receiving unprecedented numbers of newcomers, like those in Austria and Germany, have been efficient in setting up transit hubs and temporary reception centres. For example, Dusseldorf created a transit hub in its airport and train station. These are used as bases for dispatching asylum seekers and refugees to other municipalities.

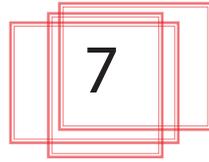
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National context and responsibilities

In most countries, cities do not have a legal competence to care for asylum seekers and refugees. Nevertheless, the scale of arrivals and slow reactions from national authorities have often left cities at the forefront, forcing them to play a role without having a legal mandate nor any specific budget to do so. For example the Vienna Social Fund developed a registration system which involved issuing an ID card to help with health and logistics. Refugees could also use the card for travelling on public transport in the future and negotiations on how this initiative should continue are currently ongoing. In other cases, like with Spanish cities Bilbao and Zaragoza, cities were urged by their regional governments to play an active role.

In countries such as Germany, Finland and Sweden, where cities were used to being informed a year in advance of how many asylum seekers they would be responsible for, the quotas were regularly reassessed throughout 2015 to reflect the reality of the situation. Karlstad, for example, agreed to receive 200 refugees each year as of January 2015. However, some cities were not consulted about their capacity to receive asylum seekers. In Finland, the state is responsible for the reception of asylum seekers but it is up to cities, like Espoo, Helsinki and Tampere, to organise and provide pre-school and primary education and child welfare services, regardless of the number of arrivals.

Certain countries, like Germany and the Netherlands, have implemented legal changes that facilitate actions at local level, such as the building of refugee camps or use of empty industrial or commercial buildings, airport hangars, hostels and hotels for temporary or transit housing.



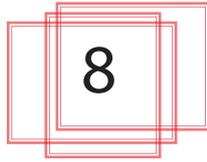
Education

European cities like Berlin, Espoo and Leipzig have had to increase their educational infrastructure at all levels in order to rapidly accommodate children of asylum seekers and provide specific support to unaccompanied minors as quickly as possible. These measures are taken with a long term view in preparation for future family reunification procedures. Education services in some cities are under great pressure to deliver, such as in Utrecht where children of refugees must be schooled within three days of their arrival. In Helsinki, there is a clear will to ensure access for refugees to education and work: the city's department of education has been encouraging immigrant associations to support immigrant schoolchildren.

Cities also put in place a wide range of additional services and projects aimed at asylum seekers and refugees. In Munich for example, the city administration provides: counselling and an assessment of refugees' educational background, a wide variety of language courses for different groups, special classes such as language learning and basic education for young refugees to prepare them for mainstream school, extra school classes for newcomers, and vocational training for teenagers. Before the height of the refugee situation, around 1,500 children were attending 106 newcomer classes around the city, for an average of two years depending on individual progress.

Education of unaccompanied minors in Solna

The city offices for childcare, youth and education, social services, culture and leisure in the Swedish city of Solna are working together closely to ensure the coordinated reception of unaccompanied refugee minors. A dedicated coordinator has been assigned at the Solna Upper-Secondary School to provide leisure activities that promote Swedish learning and integration, in addition to the education services provided. The activities focus primarily on sports, working with local club AIK Solna, which provides equipment and instructions for trying various sports. Other activities include learning how to swim and ride a bike, a summer camp with sailing and fishing, school sponsors and the possibility to socialise and spend time with local families.



Economic inclusion

German municipalities and the Federal Agency for Employment are trying to speed up the process of labour market integration in Germany. Experts meet asylum seekers and refugees shortly after their arrival to assess their qualifications and place them in proper employment where possible. In Finland, private initiatives such as www.refugeejobs.fi, based in Helsinki and supported to varying degrees by the cities of Espoo, Helsinki and Tampere, help connect refugees with available jobs.

In Solna, Sweden, where the main challenge is the inclusion of unaccompanied minors, the city offered summer jobs in the municipality to young people, with 60 out of the 300 vacancies earmarked for refugee minors. The city of Munich is currently designing a refugee integration plan with a strong focus on labour market integration.

General comments

Some survey respondents mentioned the need to review and simplify procedures for municipal reception of asylum seekers and refugees. The current funding and reimbursement procedures are unclear and complicated, with many different types of benefits available, making it difficult for city authorities to navigate.

The general feeling is that mass reception centres should be avoided, even for the transition period. Decentralised reception and housing make it easier to promote integration within communities and help avoid fears and opposition from residents as well as tensions and security issues within camps.

It is particularly important to involve residents and communicate with them transparently and clearly, and to pay extra attention to the involvement of local civil society and volunteers. Responding clearly to questions from residents in public debates at city or neighbourhood level helps address fears, concerns and rumours.

Recommendations

- Direct and faster access for cities to EU emergency assistance. Funds are taking too long to be processed and allocated by member states. Cities are frontline service providers and have demonstrated their ability to respond rapidly to a potential humanitarian crisis. City authorities, responsible for social services and social cohesion, are forced to deal with the impact of large and rapid influxes of migrants - 'emergency situation' as defined under article 2 and article 21 of the Asylum Migration & Integration Fund (AMIF). They should therefore be included alongside national governments and NGOs in the list of bodies that are eligible for emergency financial assistance in responding to migratory pressures.
 - Direct access for cities to Asylum Migration & Integration Fund (AMIF). Funding for integration must reach the local level without filters or barriers. Cities must be able to determine their priorities and target groups as they know exactly what is needed in terms of integration. Furthermore, national integration schemes, where they exist, are often insufficient and limited to six months or a year.
 - Stronger focus on integration in the European Agenda for Migration. Recognised refugees will need to be integrated for the most part in large cities. Integration is the next step for Europe and needs to be the main priority for action under the European Agenda on Migration. This is not currently the case.
 - Making use of the 2001/55/EC Directive on Temporary Protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons as a means to provide immediate and temporary protection. Cities should be involved in the implementation of this directive to allow them to prepare for reception and provision of services to asylum seekers.
 - Dedicated and adequate financial support should be available to cities to offer asylum seekers fast and effective access to language training. Asylum seekers must have the right to be gainfully employed and are entitled to equal and fair treatment, pending a definitive decision on their asylum claim. Recognition of their qualifications and entrepreneurial potential should also be facilitated. This would improve their long term potential to contribute to local economies and society, before and after refugee status is granted, furthering their chances of better and faster integration into society.
 - Avoid the creation of ghettos and marginalised communities Refugees should be housed in socially mixed communities. To achieve this, the EU State Aid Package should remove the limitation on the provision of affordable housing only to 'disadvantaged citizens or socially less advantaged groups'. Affordable housing is a crucial tool for creating socially sustainable and cohesive communities.
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Annex

	Asylum seekers hosted (from January 2014 to December 2015, estimation provided by city)	Asylum seekers transiting through the city (from January 2014 to December 2015, estimation provided by city)
Athens	n/a	500,000
Barcelona	2,100 ¹	5,000
Berlin	69,000	n/a
Bilbao	182	n/a
Birmingham	1,572	n/a
Brno	70	140
Budapest	n/a	400
Chemnitz	2,628	3,100
Dusseldorf	6,500	24,000
Espoo	1,800	n/a
Genoa	2,000	4,000
Ghent	1,356	n/a
Helsinki	3,055	n/a
Gothenburg	2,700-3,000	n/a
Hamburg	25,000 ²	n/a
Karlstad	385	210
Leipzig	6,522	n/a
Malmö	3,455	n/a
Munich	25,000	80,000
Oslo	1,400	20,000
Preston	170	n/a
Saragossa	18	n/a
Solna	162	2,178
Stockholm	850 ³	n/a
Tampere	880	n/a
Utrecht	950	n/a
Vienna	40,000	250,000

1. Asylum seeker attended at municipal service SAIER (One stop shop for migrants and refugees)

2. Officially registered only

3. Unaccompanied minors only



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