

Elements of multilevel governance of intercultural integration and their applicability to the Republic of Cyprus



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Executive Summary

In the twenty-first century, an intercultural paradigm for the management of cultural diversity has emerged. This finds its clearest expression in Europe in the work of Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme, and the European Union's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027). Translating intercultural management principles and methodology into practice, however, involves elaborating national integration plans. These in turn present the challenge of multilevel governance.

The prominence of multilevel governance in this process stems from the fact that intercultural integration is, by its nature, a responsibility of all governmental levels – national, regional, and local. It also requires inter-departmental co-ordination at each level of government, and effective partnerships with non-governmental organisations. This was recently recognised by the [Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)10 on multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration](#), and its implementing tool, the [Model Framework for an intercultural integration strategy at the national level](#).

Two key questions follow. How should the actions within such national intercultural integration plans be distributed between the tiers of government, so that the work of national, regional and local administrations is (vertically) co-ordinated? And how should authorities on any one level collaborate (horizontally) with non-governmental partners, with their counterparts in other locations, and across departments? The latter is not just a question of efficiency, but of promoting truly intercultural integration that delivers the diversity advantage for all – as opposed to integration defined only in terms of unidirectional service delivery to a minority group.

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' answer to these questions, as different European states have different constitutional and institutional arrangements. These can be broadly conceptualised as centralist, federal and decentralised, with the 'decentralised' category subdivided into regionalised, localised and asymmetric variants. This paper explores examples of each governmental structure and how those states have put into place the multilevel governance of intercultural integration. From this research, elements of a multilevel governance framework that could work in the context of Cyprus are distilled, taking into account the experience of the ongoing joint European Union and Council of Europe project, [Building structures for intercultural integration in the Republic of Cyprus](#).

Element 1: National leadership from the top. Political leadership from the highest level, preferably the office of President/Prime Minister, would convey the issue's importance and the imperative of cross-departmental co-operation. In Cyprus, a Commissioner for Intercultural Integration answerable directly to the Prime Minister might provide additional momentum.

As explained in this paper, this is better than assigning the leading role to the Ministry of Social Affairs or Labour, though this in turn is better than designating the Ministry of the Interior as the lead, as this tends to give the work an inappropriately securitised focus, sending the wrong signal to members of minority communities.

Element 2: An expert agency. This exercise of political responsibility from the top should be complemented by the creation of an agency which is a repository of professional expertise favouring evidence-based policy-making, co-ordinated by the Commissioner for Intercultural Integration. This agency can broker connections between the different levels of government, vertically and horizontally, as well as with civil society and non-governmental organisations (see Element 3), ensuring that the latter are involved in dialogue with ministers and officials at every level.

Element 3: Horizontal co-production, co-ordination and consultation. This element is essential at every level of governance, given the complex and cross-departmental nature of intercultural integration. In particular, structures – such as 'integration councils' or similar – should incorporate representatives from, and sustain dialogue with, migrant, refugee and intercultural organisations. It is to be underlined that integration councils should be inclusive and empowered, avoiding clientelism and tokenism.

The lower-level authorities should also be scanning the horizon – including through their own associations and wider transnational networks such as the Intercultural Cities Programme – to be apprised of good practice elsewhere that they can replicate. They, in turn, can promote their own success stories and lessons learned to other administrations.

Element 4: A national Intercultural Integration Plan. The expert agency would be a hub for public deliberation on the periodic preparation of a national Intercultural Integration Plan, its subsequent implementation on the ground, and its ongoing monitoring and evaluation (see Element 8). The agency would be co-ordinated by the Commissioner for Intercultural Integration as it can only manage a meaningful and effective plan if it has power to compel others to act. The national level should lead with a vision of intercultural integration, prepared in co-operation and co-ordination with the other levels, as well as with intergovernmental partners. This plan and its vision should then be the ‘glue’ holding everything together.

Element 5: Local leadership and planning. Local levels should contribute to the preparation of the national Intercultural Integration Plan, through their experience of developing and implementing their Intercultural Strategies and Action Plans, where they exist. Local levels can further develop their more specific plans within the overall agreed national framework, to which they have already contributed. Such local plans will be more fine-grained in their specification of partners, for example, for maximum effectiveness and legitimacy on the ground. Mirroring the national level, regional leaders and mayors should lead this process, demonstrating their commitment when it comes to promoting the benefits of intercultural integration to their own administrations and residents.

Element 6: Regular meetings. There should be formal, regular meetings between the key representatives of the different levels of government, called by the Commissioner for Intercultural Integration, to address issues arising from the implementation of the national plan and concerns expressed by authorities closer to the ground, or, where certain local authorities might fail to meet their commitments, vice versa.

Element 7: Fair and sustainable funding. The plans should be matched by an objectively fair distribution of funding between all levels and partners, proportionate to their responsibilities, as an incentive and catalyst to sustained political commitment. It is critical to avoid working only through the short-term mechanism of project funding, which can create unnecessary competition between applicant authorities and non-governmental organisations, for example, and leave infrastructure without investment.

Element 8: Evaluation. Evaluation should be an ongoing aspect of multilevel planning, based upon clearly defined objectives at each level, and therefore conducted at each level. The results of the ongoing evaluation will lead to the adjustment of current and future plans and funding as a function of the performance.

The arrangements best tailored to Cyprus can thus be designed from some or all of these elements, each with varying degrees of formal or contractual obligation, as required.

Introduction

This paper begins by rehearsing the concept of multilevel governance in general and how this informs the governance of intercultural integration of refugees, migrants and other minorities. It goes on to explore arrangements in 11 European states. It analyses these arrangements' strengths and weaknesses, particularly in terms of vertical and horizontal co-ordination. Highlighting the implications for Cyprus, it concludes with the elements of a possible bespoke model.

The evidence is drawn from interviews with officials at different levels of government in several countries, participant observation in meetings in these countries, and desk research on the relevant academic literature, as well as related work on multilevel governance and 'migrant integration' by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and a project, just concluded, called 'Regions for Migrants and Refugee Integration' (REGIN), led by the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions.

Multilevel Governance

The term 'multilevel governance' arose towards the end of the twentieth century as a solution to a long-running debate about European states' political integration (Allain-Dupré, 2020). Was the European Economic Community / European Community / European Union evolving towards a supranational order, or would it remain no more than an intergovernmental arrangement among the member states? In the 1990s, this debate was recognised as increasingly sterile, focusing as it did only on national and supranational institutions in Europe, while ignoring the evolving structures of regional and local government (Jeffery, 1996). What was really needed for a fuller picture was an approach of multilevel governance, in which the European, national and regional/local institutions were all encompassed, with a recognition that subnational actors, including non-governmental organisations, could themselves operate supranationally (Marks *et al*, 1996). It was increasingly recognised that societies were becoming much too diverse and dynamic to be managed by the nation-state alone (Hirst, 1997).

In this context, the related idea emerged of "networked" governance (Benington, 2001), with regional and local governments having genuine discretion and autonomy within their (often expanding) competences. And rather than public authorities monopolising this power, they would share it with non-governmental partners, at all levels, in networks capable of bringing more concrete knowledge and practical skills to bear for the greater public good.

This would be particularly germane to those policy areas straddling departmental 'silos', where horizontal as well as vertical co-ordination was essential. The Committee of Ministers [Recommendation 2022\(10\)](#) recognises that this is true of intercultural integration.

Multilevel governance should therefore be conceived as having not one but two dimensions: it is not only about the vertical relationships between levels of government but also the horizontal relationships which those different levels establish with their partners. It will thus have something of a fractal character. Again, the Committee of Ministers Recommendation 2022(10) appreciated this:

'Multilevel governance' is a model of governance which embraces central, regional and local governments, as well as civil society organisations. The ways in which it is organised may vary greatly from one country to another. Ideally, it includes a bottom-up element and implies the setting up of participatory processes for policy co-creation, co-operation and co-ordination among all relevant public authorities, at all levels of governance, and with all relevant stakeholders, in areas of shared competence or common interest.

Within this complexity, the potential for weak co-ordination is evident (OECD, 2022). That is why it is so important that there be a well-developed national intercultural integration plan, driven – as the [Model Framework](#) appended to the Council of Ministers Recommendation 2022(10) indicates – by a clear overarching vision, to which everyone in this fractal structure sees themselves as contributing, and allocating clearly differentiated responsibilities, so that everyone is also aware of their specific role within it.

Equally, interculturalism's cosmopolitan orientation will and must operate at all levels, from the global to the local (Beck, 2006; Bekemans, 2012). This, then, explains why multilevel governance is so central to this discussion of successful intercultural integration management. The task of inclusion and creating a sense of belonging that extends from the local vicinity up to national and/or European identity is essentially the same at all levels of government.

It is thus a task no level of government can shirk, in the expectation that, somehow, someone else somewhere will deal with it. But if all levels of government are steering in the same direction, potential synergies and effective co-ordination can be achieved.

Constitutional Models

European states are variously unitary, decentralised or federal (Franzke and Ruano de la Fuente, 2021). In regionalised states, such as Italy, or in federal ones, such as Germany, even though immigration control remains a state responsibility, intermediate levels of government are responsible for key policies when it comes to social, political, economic and cultural integration. Where decentralisation is even further extended, as in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, municipalities play key roles.

Decentralisation can be variously political, administrative and/or fiscal (OECD, 2022). In centralised states, such as France and much of eastern Europe, a top-down approach prevails (*ibid*: 338), taking the form of contracts between the centre and lower government levels. Generally, however, there is a growing recognition of the importance of “vertical and horizontal co-ordination” across and between all levels (*ibid*: 340).

Decentralisation reforms, not just in federal states, have allowed regional and local authorities to develop their own policies on integration (Manatschal *et al*, 2020). These tend to be more inclusive, as these authorities confront practical challenges which must be dealt with pragmatically rather than ideologically, and they are closer to the people and organisations on the ground.

Regional governments are often the key actors responsible for public *services*, such as health and social care. Aside from the particular case of Belgium, these competences are generally shared with national governments.

Also, while states deal with legal citizenship, regional authorities can stimulate migrants’ political participation and engagement, for example via integration councils or similar structures, which in turn can affect regional policy on integration. More inclusive regions promote “social citizenship” (*ibid*: 1480) by going beyond minimum national welfare standards and encouraging refugees and migrants and their children to seek naturalisation. Regions, cities or municipalities can thus act as policy laboratories, and have been at the forefront of pro-active integration planning efforts. Barcelona, for example, produced a Plan on Immigrant Integration in 1993 and the Spanish government followed a year later (*ibid*: 1481). Vienna has had an integration strategy since the 1990s, but a State Secretariat for Integration within the Austrian Ministry of Interior was only created in 2011. Similarly, Nordrhein Westfalen, with its extensive postwar manufacturing sector attracting migrant workers, has led the way among German *Länder* in the introduction of integration ministries.

An OECD (2022) study investigates the organisation of governance in Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands, as well as (outside Europe) Canada and New Zealand, in relation to the four service-delivery areas mattering most for refugee and migrant integration: employment, education, housing and health/welfare. This study confirms that subnational governments have recently become more assertive when it comes to managing integration. Seventy-three responded to an OECD survey (with the Committee of the Regions) and, although these were skewed by disproportionate responses from Germany, they nevertheless showed a clear demand for more decentralisation. This reflected how these authorities often found themselves having to deal with refugee movements, particularly since the mass arrivals in 2015, without either a legal mandate or dedicated budget.

When integration is broken down into its constituent policy areas, subnational levels of government play a prominent role. This then implies a need for co-ordination if a consistent national strategy is to be implemented. In Italy, for example, some regions and municipalities require a minimum period of work or residence to be eligible for social housing, whereas others do not.

Adding further complexity, in the countries studied by OECD, allocation of responsibilities for the four policy areas “varies greatly from country to country and sector to sector”, while “various degrees of upward and downward accountability, and various ranges of central government control exist”. There is no “optimal allocation”, because of the tension between economies of scale (favouring centralisation) and locally tailored arrangements (favouring decentralisation) (*ibid*: 42).

This creates the risk that integration-relevant policies may not themselves be integrated – especially where they were not primarily designed with intercultural integration in mind and/or they are bracketed off from one another due to departmental demarcations. The OECD thus concludes:

What is important is that subnational governments have had to integrate policies that otherwise operate in silos. Regardless of the degree of decentralisation, they play a *de facto* role in integrating migrants. This must be recognised by intergovernmental and multi-actor co-ordination mechanisms that make subnational governments voice audible and allow integration-related policies to reflect local needs of migrants and native-born populations. (*ibid*: 47)

Again, this puts a premium on overall co-ordination and a national plan realising its objectives through practical programmes and projects, which may indeed straddle departments as well as levels of government, as the [Model Framework](#) indicates.

Even in relatively unitary states, “asymmetric decentralisation” (Allain-Dupré, 2020: 803) has become common. The United Kingdom, lacking a written constitution and with only partial devolution to the regions/nations, is a prime example. This allows for more experimentation and innovation, but it is more complicated to co-ordinate and more complicated to hold to account. Indeed, even within constitutionally symmetrical states (such as federal Germany), the geography and demography of diversity will create huge local variation.

The individualised approach of intercultural integration, which rejects policymaking for supposedly monolithic ‘communities’, provides another strong argument for genuine devolution of power to lower levels of government. It is important to allow real discretion for those authorities to develop bespoke networks of partners, as the Regions for Migrants and Refugee Integration (REGIN) project discovered:

It is important to consider that migrant and refugee populations are composed of different gender, age, ethnic, social and economic backgrounds, and encounter different obstacles regarding access to fundamental rights/services. Regional and local authorities enjoy the advantage of *being close to their population and have first-hand knowledge of the challenges and needs of their residents*. (CPMR, 2022: 7, emphasis in original)

But regional and local governments often lack the necessary human and financial resources, or have to cope with an unfavourable political context, or may have little or no prior experience of arrivals from particular crises or cultures. Experts from CIDOB in Barcelona and the Migration Policy Group in Brussels, working with REGIN, analysed 25 European regions. They found that in most cases regional integration governance left “a great deal of room for improvement”, with insufficient involvement of non-governmental organisations and inter-regional collaboration (Pasetti *et al*, 2022: 27).

They found that most regions had an intercultural integration strategy, but with gaps in crucial areas, such as language, the labour market and housing: “Particularly worrying is the scarce participation of migrant associations, which tells us that governance of integration tends to be conceived without the inclusion or consultation of the population that it targets.” (*ibid*: 28). Critical deficits in staff training existed, with only a minority of regions actively promoting intercultural competences (*ibid*: 30).

Urban regions performed better in being more likely to have a developed strategy and dedicated budget. Hence the value of inter-regional co-ordination and experience sharing, REGIN concluded. In this regard, the Intercultural Cities network has proved invaluable as a vehicle for the horizontal sharing of [good practices](#).

One of the defining features of the intercultural approach to managing diversity is that integration has been defined, since a 2008 [White Paper](#), as a two-way process, implicating adaptations by members of the ‘host’ community as much as by newcomers and holding out the prospect of mutual enrichment. This leads to an emphasis on positive interaction and participation, as well as on equality and diversity. Similarly, the REGIN project learned “that integration and inclusion cannot be fostered in a unidirectional sense, as they imply mutual commitment of the local community and newcomers, thus *recognising cultural diversity as a collective resource*” (*ibid*: 27, emphasis in original) and that this called for more voices and interaction (beyond the usual suspects), more community (while recognising diversity within it), and more engagement. It was important, the project reported, that member states “engage their Regions in national strategies, plans, reports and programmes in areas where they are directly concerned, reinforcing the multilevel governance approach” (*ibid*: 46).

In OECD countries, capitals tend to have (proportionately) nearly twice as many foreign-born residents as the rest of the country – indeed, in Belgium the range is from around 5 per cent in West Flanders to more than 40 per cent in Brussels (OECD, 2018). Moreover, local authorities will best understand local labour market conditions. Unmet demand may seek to attract migrant labour and some cities have made promotion of diversity key to their public relations strategies for this reason: [Oslo](#), for example, is the fastest growing city in western Europe and its OXLO (“Oslo extra-large”) Business Charter promotes migrants as a resource for enterprise.

Not all cities are capital cities, of course, nor all municipalities urban. And decisions about integration taken at the national, or sometimes regional, level may not in their view take adequate account of localised considerations, needs and expectations. This can sometimes lead to public “resentment and resistance to migration and integration” (Committee of the Regions, 2020: 41).

Local authorities have to respond to diverse newcomers and residents and promote integration, yet most of the framework conditions are set by nation-states. For a long time, most such nation-states focused purely on managing immigration controls, so they did not develop real integration strategies. Hence local authorities have almost been forced to adopt a “pioneering role”, especially multi-ethnic cities (Franzke, 2021a: 312).

Yet more and more states are addressing the integration of immigrants, for example because workers with specialist expertise are not available domestically, putting a premium on effective multilevel governance arrangements: “As a result, the division of competences and responsibilities in immigration policy is becoming more and more complicated. Inter-level conflicts, especially relating to financial resources, are increasing” (*ibid*: 313).

An OECD survey of 72 cities in 2018 found that nearly 90 per cent of them criticised the quality of co-ordination (*ibid*: 313). The 2015 political crisis around refugee reception accelerated this, as municipalities had to hurriedly co-ordinate responses across departments and civil-society organisations, while also co-ordinating vertically with higher government levels and handling associated conflicts over resources and competences.

In this same OECD study, governance options for municipalities were found to include: an integration department, a cross-departmental task force, putting integration under an existing department, or some mixture of the above. They either complied with what limited competences required of them or they pushed the envelope and demanded more responsibility and funding (*ibid*: 324). Managerially, integration can be co-ordinated by a mayor, a specially appointed officer, or by an existing head of department. A survey of municipalities in Brandenburg found that the first had proved more effective than the second, though the latter had benefitted cross-departmental working (*ibid*: 329-31).

There is, moreover, potential for competences to be shared across levels of government, as with active labour market policies in decentralised Italy (national and regional) and Spain (central, autonomous communities and municipalities). The OECD (2022: 28) concludes: “What seems to matter most [for migrant integration] is that governance structures come with mechanisms to adjust active labour market policies to local economic and social conditions.”

However, there is a risk, as the OECD found, that evaluation of policies distributed across different levels of government will be “underdeveloped” (*ibid*: 17). Hence the importance, identified in the [Model Framework](#), of designating clear outcomes (not just *outputs*) to be achieved by a national intercultural integration plan, and monitoring and evaluating these in real time.

National Case Studies

In this section, examples of multilevel governance relating to integration in a centralised (France), federal (Germany) and in a regionally (Italy), locally (Norway) and asymmetrically (the United Kingdom) decentralised state follow, with additional country comparisons included where relevant.

Centralised states

In 2018, within the Ministry of the Interior in **France** (Bonnotte and Sénimon, 2021; OECD, 2022a), a *Délégation interministérielle à l'accueil et à l'intégration des réfugiés* (Diair) was established, to co-ordinate action at all levels of administration and relationships with associations and civil society. It co-ordinates horizontally with the General Directorate for Foreigners (in the same ministry), the ministries for Europe and foreign affairs, cohesion of the territories, solidarity and health, labour and education, the Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons, the Office for Immigration and Integration and the Inter-ministerial Delegation for Accommodation and Access to Housing (Dihal).

The 2018-21 national strategy for the integration of refugees is managed by Diair with the General Directorate and Dihal. A *Conseil national pour l'intégration des populations immigrées*, which engaged civil society in a consultative role, was [abrogated](#) in 2006.

Vertically, the regionalisation and localisation of the national strategy, such as the regional allocation of quotas of asylum-seekers, is under the direction of the prefects. Communes, departments and regions have, however, extensive competences in safety, health, housing, training, employment-inclusion and economic intervention, teaching and youth, culture and sport; communes have a power of general competence.

The role of the communes, departments or regions is then governed by contracts with the central state, formalising actions to be implemented, for instance in developing sports and cultural activities, providing infrastructure, equipment, staff and funding for civil society organisations. Other partners include other agencies, associations and private actors; calls for projects can be involved.

Since 2019, these *contrats territoriaux d'accueil et d'intégration des réfugiés* (Ctair) have been signed between Diair and cities or metropolitan areas, accompanied by financial support. The actions supported, often carried out by non-governmental associations, must be aligned with the seven priorities of the strategy. The Ctair are flexible, allowing at least some budgetary devolution, and permitting focused support for priority groups such as women, youth and traumatised refugees. They also provide scope for innovation and pilot projects, with the potential for promising practices to be replicated elsewhere.

But the risk is that the overall picture becomes one of fragmented or overlapping actions, which are themselves short-term (three-year). Evaluation is also not built in, in terms of outcomes and achievement of national strategic goals (although Clermont-Ferrand has developed a good qualitative approach to evaluation). The state-city nature of the Ctair can moreover lead to 'fuzziness' as to the role of cities, an at best informal involvement of the *départements*, and an absence of exchanges with the regions (OECD, 2022a: 19).

The general model for the Ctair is France's six-year *contrats de plan* between the state and the regions, under which funding is allocated by the former to the latter for projects advanced in the context of a strategic vision. That the focus is on a transfer of funds, rather than collaborative implementation of an overall policy, and that this is framed by a contract rather than an iterative dialogue between levels of government, reflects the fact that France is a country exhibiting relatively low levels of administrative trust. (The French public always emerges as an outlier by comparison with that of other western European states in European Social Survey surveys about trust, although considerably more trusting than publics in central and eastern Europe.)

The question then arises as to whether a country such as France can only enjoy a modest form of multilevel governance in this domain – restricted to bilateral, project-related contracts – or whether it can develop a more robust model over time, and successive iterations of its national intercultural integration plan, as trust grows among the actors involved.

Portugal has basically only two layers of government, with the exception of the two autonomous regions of Madeira and Azores, of which the 308 municipalities form the core of the local government (OECD 2019). The Secretary of State for Integration and Migration co-ordinates the work of ministries, public institutions, civil-society organisations and local authorities in this arena. There are 15 municipal plans for migrant integration for the 2020-2022 period; there are also local plans for Roma integration (with some overlap of personnel). There are 151 Local Support Centres for the Integration of Migrants (CLAIM). The CLAIM network is a result of partnerships established between the *Alto Comissariado para as Migrações (ACM)*, and municipalities, higher education institutions, and civil society organisations that, through co-operation, promote an integrated service. There are also three national ‘one-stop shops’ for signposting of services.

Portugal was, with Spain, one of the pioneers of integration plans, its own first being published in 2007. The current Strategic Plan for Integration dates from 2015. An official from the *Alto Comissariado para as Migrações (ACM)* highlighted the importance of partnerships and multilevel governance within this, stressing that “immigrant associations are part of the solution and municipalities are the local deliverers of the national framework”.

The ACM is a key element in the Portuguese multilevel governance, sitting under the Council of Ministers, not the Ministry of Justice. It has to be consulted on migration-related legislation while this is at the deliberative stage. Indeed, the ACM [highlights](#) on its website its direct line to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – that is, the Office of the Prime Minister – and its very comprehensive mission “collaborating on determining, executing and assessing the public, transversal and sectoral policies concerning migrations that are relevant for the integration of migrants in the national, international and Portuguese-speaking context”. Among its consultative bodies is the *Conselho para as Migrações*, which includes the migrant non-governmental organisations and social partners (representatives of management and labour e.g., employer organisations, trade unions), as well as various officials across government.

Such a repository of expertise in this complex arena, on one hand with access to government at the highest level, yet on the other at arm’s length from it, can play a powerful role in the multilevel governance of intercultural integration – especially when we see the destabilising effects changes of government can have, and the tensions between different levels of government which can otherwise arise. A non-partisan and evidence-based agency such as this can be extremely valuable.

Ireland (Quinn, 2021) is one of the most centralised states in Europe and its example highlights the associated difficulties of multilevel governance. There are no democratic regional authorities, and, with limited powers, local authorities depend significantly on non-governmental organisations and collaboration with other national-level public authorities in developing and implementing integration policies. Because the latter agencies are not part of local government, however, the extent of their collaboration varies.

For example, education and employment are national responsibilities whereas concentrations of migration may intensify these challenges locally. Yet if issues of integration are perceived as peripheral by agencies which assume their priorities lie elsewhere, then they do not participate and attend meetings. Moreover, where local government functions are narrowly defined, this does not encourage the agency of refugees and migrants, or local communities, at that otherwise most accessible initial level.

[As of 2020](#), 26 of the 31 local authorities in Ireland had, or were working towards the adoption of, local integration plans. The Intercultural Cities member Limerick has in a way made the best of the country’s constitutional structure. Its local integration plan, the third iteration, is managed by a working group bringing together all the relevant agencies with a non-governmental organisation – the Jesuit Refugee Service – in the chair. In centralised states with relatively weak local authorities, civil society and non-governmental organisations may thus have to take more of the strain, not only in terms of integration work on the ground but also in terms of its management.

Federalised states

Turning to **Germany**, the challenge is very different. With the federal system of the *Länder*, and below that the municipalities, the difficulty is one of co-ordination of this vast array of actors. As an official in the federal Ministry of the Interior put it, it is a matter of putting together all the integration measures on the three levels

of administration, as well as numerous private initiatives, so as to avoid overlap and to ensure individual users of Germany's integration programme progress smoothly from one aspect to the next.

Having long officially denied that it was a 'country of immigration', in the expectation that largely Turkish post-War *Gastarbeiter* would return to their country of origin, Germany's first general immigration law was only passed in 2005, setting up the *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (BAMF) (Franzke, 2021). As of 2017, nearly a quarter of the population had a migrant background, with about half of these holding German citizenship. *Nationale Integrationsgipfel*, bringing together states and local authorities, social partners and migrant organisations, were mounted from 2006. A National Integration Plan followed in 2007 and a related Action Plan in 2013.

The 16 *Länder* are responsible for accommodating asylum-seekers, although they mostly assign this work to local authorities. Each *Länder* has its own integration concept or guidelines, which is embedded in law in four. A commission bringing the federal and state levels together determines the annual allocation of asylum-seekers, through a formula based on tax revenue and population. In 2017, the Municipal Association for Administration Management (KGSt) developed a common vision for municipal integration management. But, recognising the diversity of starting points, and challenges on the ground, they acknowledged that there was no single model (*ibid*: 115).

The problem for municipalities, especially the big German cities, is that they bear the main burden for the reception and integration of refugees and have developed considerable expertise but do not set the legal framework and also lack adequate funding for integration: "Civil society actors and local governments addressed the question of integration long before Germany developed a national strategy, leading to bottom-up integration policy and a high level of civil society engagement." (*ibid*: 116).

However, since 2015, nearly half the population have been involved in some form of civic welcoming activity, which led to the coining of the term *Willkommenskultur*. While this has attenuated over time, it has been reactivated in the recent voluntary efforts to accommodate Ukrainian refugees. In Brandenburg, Franzke (2021a: 331) specifically found that co-ordination structures with civil society originating from 2015 and its 'welcoming culture' had remained functional with high mutual trust and non-hierarchical relationships.

Netzwerk Integration durch Qualifizierung is a project which exemplifies the complexity of multilevel governance in Germany. Established in 2005 to improve employment opportunities for individuals of migrant background – a key objective of almost any integration plan – it has four priorities: counselling for recognition of credentials and job training, bridge training schemes within the context of the Recognition Act (effective 2012), development of the intercultural competences of key labour-market stakeholders, and regional skilled-worker networks in the context of the Skilled Immigration Act (effective 2020). Sixteen *Länder* networks manage some 400 *Netzwerk IQ* subprojects nationwide. There are five 'competence centres' dedicated to migrant-specific issues. At the federal level, a Dissemination Project co-ordinates implementation, diffusing good practices developed in the subprojects while also learning from abroad. The competence centres are thematically arranged and organised by specialist non-state actors. The network provides widespread intercultural competence training for labour market stakeholders; its regional offices are attached to chambers of commerce or other non-governmental organisations. The overall perspective is as follows:

WA one-[size]-fit[s]-all strategy with objectives imposed from the top-down would fall short in tackling the challenges faced by the target group given the varying context across *Länder* and municipalities ... By encouraging tailor-made innovative approaches and giving stakeholders room to manoeuvre, the Network IQ allows for a coherent approach, while preserving the customisation of implementation and adaptation to diverse contexts. (OECD, 2022a: 27)

Thus it can be seen that well-managed multilevel governance not only deals with the challenge of complexity, but, rather than service users feeling 'treated like a number' or 'directed from pillar to post', it can allow a sensitivity and responsiveness towards the diverse individuals for whom a programme or project is designed. For example, a common integration failure is that newcomers, and especially refugees, find themselves working below their skill level, due to non-recognition of professional qualifications. *Netzwerk IQ* therefore fosters horizontal and vertical co-operation in government to address this challenge. In 2020, a Service Centre for Professional Recognition (ZSBA) was established as a central point of contact in the professional qualification recognition process (OECD, 2022).

Regionally decentralised states

Since the 2001 decentralising constitutional reforms in **Italy** (Bettoni and Tamponi, 2021), Italian regions and local authorities have acquired important roles in planning and managing inclusion of immigrants. Their

powers range across health, education, social integration, teaching Italian, enhancing culture of origin and cultural mediation, housing, training and job placement.

That same year, the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior, the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed a memorandum of understanding to design a national asylum programme. This agreement generated the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR). Based on a law of 2002, the ministry formed a central agency for information, promotion, consulting, monitoring and providing technical support to local authorities and entrusted its management to ANCI, supported by the *Cittalia* Foundation established in 2008.

SPRAR was a multilevel governance structure where local authorities were voluntary participants, third-party agencies performed an essential collaborative role, and local networks of all those concerned with refugee reception and integration were developed. It was much more successful than conventional interventions by the Ministry of the Interior. It has gone through successive iterations and is now called the System of Reception and Integration (SAI).

Against the backdrop of the 2015 refugee arrivals, a national integration plan was developed, agreed in 2017. An official from the Civil Liberties and Immigration Department of the Ministry of the Interior highlighted the fact that “Multilevel governance and institutional responsibility” is the title of one of its sections. A new Plan was in draft at time of writing.

Multilevel governance arrangements for the 2017 strategy focus on the *tavolo di coordinamento nazionale*, responsible for the preparation of the plan and its successors. Led by the Ministry of the Interior, this brings together representatives of other ministries and agencies as well as those of the regions (which are encouraged to develop their own plans), the provinces and municipalities. There is also a *tavolo asilo nazionale*, which brings in the non-governmental organisations, including trade unions, and which has two representatives on the *tavolo di coordinamento nazionale*, but it remains an informal network.

UNHCR plays a support role in making the strategy, but the *tavolo di co-ordinamento nazionale* is not frequently convened; this happens mainly when allocations of asylum-seekers are being decided. Moreover, only the Ministry of the Interior is represented on it at a political level. So, though in principle the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies has integration competences, its role is essentially formal, because the Ministry of the Interior has the power when it comes to reception and associated funds.

This is also problematic on a vertical level. Poor southern regions, such as Calabria (one of the poorest), are willing to receive more asylum-seekers in the context of the SAI system than their more prosperous northern counterparts, partly because they are less politically resistant and partly because public funds accompany the numbers – yet they are of course the worst placed when it comes to integrating refugees into the labour market. Integration is also difficult due to the undeveloped nature of the Italian welfare state and the associated reliance on informal relationships (Lynch, 2009) which newcomers do not yet have.

There are 7,134 municipalities gathered in ANCI, which provides guidelines on reception of asylum-seekers. Political tensions exist between the regional and local levels, such as in Piedmont and Lombardy *vis-à-vis* Turin and Milan respectively, over their openness in this regard.

Italy also has a specific [National Strategy](#) for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Communities (2012-20), currently being renewed. The *Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali* (UNAR), which derives from legislation in 2003 and reports to parliament and the Prime Minister, was involved in drafting the Strategy, following dialogue with the main national and international associations and the Roma and Sinti federations. The Strategy commended the key role of regional and local authorities.

In terms of multilevel governance, this National Strategy required the minister for international co-operation and integration to establish a task force (*cabina di regia / tavolo politico inter-ministeriale*) with the ministers of labour and social affairs, interior, health, education and universities and research, and justice, also convening representatives of regional and local authorities, including mayors of large urban areas, and representatives of the Roma and other communities. A Forum of Roma and Sinti Communities was also established in order to share good practices and monitor, review and update the strategy.

UNAR was to report periodically on the state of play to the *tavolo politico interministeriale*. At first the arrangements worked well, a UNAR official said. The political lead meant the regional authorities and mayors attended. But the system was not sustained by ongoing political will: a minister for international co-operation and integration was no longer designated after 2014, the regions stopped responding, and the mayors sent officials instead of attending in person.

UNAR tried to create a regional network in 2018, committed to regional action plans, but only five regions became involved. It is creating a network of committed municipalities, which will allow sharing of good practices via peer learning – for instance, experience of moving Roma from separate settlements into social housing and into employment. This network can also liaise with international networks such as Eurocities and the Intercultural Cities network.

As to the forum of Roma associations and associated non-governmental organisations, conflicts among them meant UNAR had to help with mediation and capacity-building. Now some 80 associations are involved in the platform, which meets around twice a month. In some cases, these have developed direct channels of communication with key municipal officials, for instance in Milan.

The Italian experience shows that in a complex multilevel governance set-up – of national, regional and local levels, and horizontal relationships between authorities and other actors – political volatility and polarisation make it difficult to sustain the stable and effective relationships required. In this context, an agency at arm's length from government, such as ACM in Portugal, or such as UNAR, may be able to act as a 'buffer'.

It also places a question-mark against the allocation of the leading role on intercultural integration to a security-focused ministry, the Ministry of the Interior, as these issues require more of a social policy approach, as well as trust-based relationships with members of minority communities. Whether due to these design deficits or others, at the end of 2019 the National Strategy was **reduced** to 'pilot actions' in Piedmont, Emilia Romagna and Calabria.

Spain is also a case of regional decentralisation since the creation of the 17 'autonomous communities' in the late 1970s and early 80s, in the wake of the transition from the Franco dictatorship. Spain was a pioneer Council of Europe member state in translating the intercultural integration paradigm into reality. The Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (PECI) of 2007-10 was drawn up by the then Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs with the participation of social organisations.

This Plan's premises included that integration was "a *two-way process* of mutual adaptation", that a "holistic approach" was needed, and that "[n]ot only the different levels of government, but also society at large, including immigrants themselves and all social players must *share* the *responsibility* for the integration process and its management" (*Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales*, 2007: 20, emphasis in original). Interculturality was one of its three principles, alongside equality and citizenship (*ibid*: 21).

The Plan went through a second iteration during 2011-14. In its evaluation of the first Plan, the second observed how the open and consultative elaboration of the first had accrued legitimacy to its principles and lines of intervention, allied to its bi-directional concept of integration. A dedicated fund had been important to its sustainability, as had a system of governance involving not just the national level but also the *comunidades autónomas*, the municipalities and civil society organisations. Through the municipalities receiving a dedicated slice of the fund, they could pursue pilot projects and innovative actions.

A weakness identified in Spain, however, was poor public awareness of the Plan beyond those involved in its implementation. And, indeed, the Plan was **not renewed** after a change of government in 2011, perhaps for this reason among others. Interviews conducted between 2010 and 2011, among policymakers at different levels and non-governmental representatives, identified "difficulties experienced by the political class in accurately defining the meaning of the intercultural option" (Fernández-Suárez, 2017: 120). Since then, the success of the Intercultural Cities Programme and the 2015 and 2022 Recommendations of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers endorsing the intercultural integration approach have provided greater clarity. A new Strategic document is currently being prepared by the State Secretary of Migration, although it is too soon to know if the intercultural approach will have the same relevance as in the previous Strategic Plans.

In principle, the 1978 Spanish constitution assigns exclusive competence to the national government in the management of nationality, immigration and asylum. The autonomous communities, however, have relevant cross-cutting competences in social assistance, health, education and culture, while local governments have a power of general competence in providing public services. Non-governmental organisations (including migrant associations) are represented together with public administrations in the Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants. But the lack of a national plan, with multilevel governance arrangements, means there is a deficit in co-ordination.

Thus, a complex institutional structure can be observed in which, in addition to the EU authorities, various central government ministries must implement co-ordinated policies (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the current Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, at least) and, in turn, this layer of government must rely on the capacity of the regions to integrate the immigrant population into their territory and on local governments that try to manage conflicts between immigrants and their resident population while

trying to tackle the most urgent situations (unemployment, unaccompanied minors, housing). This need for co-ordination between different bodies within the same administration, between territorial administrations, and between these and social organisations makes it very difficult to design a single policy that is capable of implementing an effective reception and integration system (Ruano de la Fuente, 2021: 253-4). However, in Spanish academia there is a consensus that the lack of a rigid and homogeneous model of integration has been really useful to facilitate the integration and inclusion of migrant population in the different regions of Spain (Cebolla Boado and González-Ferrer, 2013; Godenau, Rinken, de Lizarrondo Artola and Márquez, 2017; Zapata-Barrero, Domingo and Pinyol-Jiménez, 2020: 125-145).

Many newcomers fall back by default on the municipal authorities; only they have the resources to be ambitious with regard to integration services. But the lack of co-ordination means regions and municipalities diverge in the actions they take, and there is a lack of unifying vision. Spain thus highlights that, when it comes to intercultural integration, a well-functioning system for multilevel governance is absolutely indispensable.

Locally decentralised states

It is worth dwelling on more than one Nordic case in this regard, partly because they tend to exhibit well-functioning multilevel governance arrangements. This returns us to the issue of trust. In [European Social Survey](#) polls regarding trust, the Nordic states tend to always rank top. This has been linked in a classic study (Rothstein, 2005) to their still distinctive (Hay and Wincott, 2012: 183) universal welfare states, and their cultures of impartial public authority.

The welfare state has in turn been seen as key to integration across the Nordic countries. In particular, in the context of high post-War employment, there has been a strong belief across the Nordics that integration should follow the 'workline', identifying employment as a privileged route (Brochmann and Hagelund, 2012). This has had the side-effect of enrolling the social partners in the multilevel governance arrangements via their involvement in labour market regulation.

In **Denmark**, for instance, the social partners agreed a deal in 2016, supported by government, to facilitate the integration of refugees and reunified family members into the labour market. This streamlined and accelerated the assessment and recognition of skills, acquisition of vocational Danish, and job placement, including via new obligations placed on local authorities. It established a training programme for entrants not yet able to command a trade union wage, while incentivising placements with a bonus for companies.

Similarly, **Sweden** developed a series of 'fast tracks' to promote the early employment of refugees through agreements with the sectoral social partners, while Norway used social partnership to facilitate the integration of migrants into the labour market without "social dumping" (Søholt and Tronstad, 2021: 42).

The arrangements for multilevel governance in **Finland** are thus unsurprisingly led by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy (although they did come under the Ministry of the Interior before 2011). There is an advisory board (ETNO) at national level, plus seven regional boards. These involve some 300 participants, representing associations, parties, labour market organisations, and government at all levels.

This means that the [At Home in Finland](#) project, for instance, which ran between 2015 and 2020, involved a representative in each of the seven regions as well as national co-ordination and local co-ordinators in municipalities. As one national official put it, connecting the national and the local in this way worked better than where the intervening regional level was absent, since the regions understood the municipalities better than Helsinki; trust-based administrative relationships were also important.

The 2010 Promotion of Immigrant Integration Act requires each Finnish municipality, alone or in combination, to produce an "integration programme", to be renewed at least once every four years. It tasks the 15 regional centres for economic development, transport and the environment with monitoring the adoption and implementation of these. There are tensions between the municipalities and government over the level of support and variation in performance, as some are more willing to invest resources than others (Koikkalainen, 2021).

The 2010 Act also requires the Ministry of Employment and the Economy to elaborate a national programme, with objectives over four years, and relevant departments to set their own objectives and measures within that, with a framework for interdepartmental co-operation. Regional centres for economic development, transport and the environment are required to co-operate with regional administrative agencies and may appoint a regional committee.

All these mandatory requirements on the three levels of government help ensure they each play their part, regardless of political makeup, rather than being in conflict. In less trust-based societies, such legislatively

defined duties can compensate to some extent for an absence of spontaneous commitment and collaboration between levels. These legal obligations also help multilevel governance to have the ideal fractal character discussed earlier, in that wherever one looks, at whatever level, one sees (reassuringly) broadly the same picture. As a firmly defined model that does not depend upon spontaneous or sustained participation to work efficiently, this Finnish experience may be of particular interest to Cyprus and other states establishing multilevel governance systems for integration.

Similarly, in **Sweden** the Public Employment Service of the Ministry of Employment is responsible for the co-ordination and introduction to the country of newly arrived migrants. At the regional level, 21 county administrative boards are responsible for regional co-ordination and reception of asylum-seekers. The 290 municipalities are meanwhile responsible for providing integration services such as Swedish-for-immigrants and civic orientation courses, housing, pre-schooling and schools.

The 'workline' approach was introduced after a change of national government in 2010, which *reduced* integration to merely entering employment and transferred responsibility for the two-year introduction programme for refugees from municipalities to the Public Employment Service – partly due to the patchy delivery of the former (Hudson *et al*, 2021).

Partnership Skåne is, in this context, an interesting initiative at the intervening regional level. This Partnership, involving municipalities and non-governmental organisations, began in 2007, after a series of workshops in Skåne, which has a highly diverse population. These workshops identified gaps in provision for newcomers *vis-à-vis* health and social inclusion, which were deemed important prerequisites of language acquisition and labour market entrance. Partnership Skåne has now brought together the regional authority with the county administrative board, Public Employment Service, municipalities, universities and civil-society organisations, as well as providing a focus for interaction with national structures.

The intercultural component is expressed through the fact that that Partnership tailors holistic support to individual needs and delivers civic education and health support from peers of the same language and/or migrant background. Individual advice and support are also provided through local non-governmental organisations who know how people can best access municipal resources.

It has evidenced the success of its interventions through the involvement of high-level experts, attracting recognition from the World Health Organization. Incremental innovation has developed through pilots, studies and evaluation of everything, in a "continuous feedback loop" (CPMR, 2022: 32). It is clear, then, that the regional level in a governance system of local decentralisation can be of major significance.

In **Norway**, the association of local authorities has a bilateral partnership with national government on integration, periodically reviewed. This allows, for instance, for discussions about distribution of refugee quotas, which are associated with *per capita* assistance from central government. Norway's 2021 integration law places most duties on municipalities, so they can offer individually tailored services. Indeed, more central funding has been distributed to the municipal level in recent years, in recognition that local authorities spend it better and more innovatively in this arena. This proportionality between share of responsibility and share of funding is credited for keeping all parties engaged and committed – an important lesson for other states.

At least twice a year, there is a meeting of the Association of Norwegian Local and Regional Authorities and the government, chaired by the Association's Chair and attended by the Director of Integration and Diversity, and the Director of Immigration, on the government's behalf. This routine has formed the backdrop to the handling of Ukrainian refugee reception in 2022.

Additional commitment to multilevel governance has also been required for the system to meet increased demand. A senior official in Bergen explained that the city had anticipated 185 refugees in 2022 but was now likely to resettle 1,000 (out of 35,000 nationally). Central government had issued a questionnaire to the 3-400 local authorities on how many refugees they could each take, leading to a response and then a meeting involving the Prime Minister and the Minister for Integration. The latter (a former mayor of Bergen, as it happens) has been meeting representatives of the municipalities weekly throughout the crisis, he said. A meeting had also been taking place every week of leading figures from all seven departments of the municipality. Bergen was working with the Red Cross and the Ukrainian association in the city (previously there were nearly 400 Ukrainians in Bergen), partly to ensure vulnerable refugees are not put at risk.

Regional government has relatively limited competences in Norway, compared to national and local levels, but what the Bergen official described as the "interactive" character of the relationship between local and central government means there is a "willingness to co-operate". "Trust is very important," he added. Everyone knows,

for instance, roughly how much reception and integration cost local authorities per refugee. Whatever the outlook on immigration at national level, there is cross-party consensus locally about meeting these costs.

The **Netherlands** also falls into this group, though with a less positive experience of multilevel co-ordination. Migrant integration falls under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. It is **officially accepted** that “integration policies have changed along with the different [national] governments and their visions”, while the provinces have only a “modest” role in co-ordination of asylum seekers’ intake and distribution (Zwaan, 2021: 99).

In 2015, an agreement was reached between the Dutch national administration and the association of Dutch municipalities on reception. Asylum-seekers are accommodated by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) but local authorities are partners if they have a reception centre and they have responsibility, once a residence permit is received, for providing social housing and, if the individual is unemployed, social benefits, as well as social guidance to find their way. The rather artificial division between reception and integration support of a given individual is therefore mirrored by the division between national and local competence. This division of competences between levels, rather than co-ordination across levels, makes for a fragmented result, for example in comparison to Norway where co-ordination is effective.

Asymmetrically decentralised states

Asymmetric decentralisation is true to some extent of Spain but is particularly true of the **United Kingdom**, which uniquely in Europe lacks a written constitution and introduced devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in an *ad hoc* and differentiated fashion in the late 1990s, as a **research project** monitoring its working demonstrated.

The four jurisdictions, including England, have thus tended to go their separate ways according to their competences and political dispositions. **Scotland**, for instance, has developed a welcoming approach to refugees, whereas the UK Home Office has focused on trying to restrict the numbers of asylum-seekers arriving in Britain. The formal, structured intergovernmental relations of symmetrical federations, such as Germany, with overlapping competences and framework legislation, are not in evidence (Trench, 2005).

This has rendered multilevel governance in the UK applicable really only to relations between the UK government – here operating also *de facto* as the government of England – and English local authorities. The latter themselves are quite a patchwork in terms of powers, without consistent arrangements.

In 2018, the UK department currently known as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities published a Green Paper (policy outline) on “integrated communities strategy”, followed by an action plan a year later, with some 70 commitments across various levels and aspects of government. An integration area programme trialled the ideas in these documents in five local authorities. The pilot municipalities were supported in developing local integration strategies via local partnerships, drawing in faith groups, non-governmental organisations, schools and so on. There are currently 13 local authorities in a new wave of programme participants, looking at a range of social policy challenges from a refugee and migrant integration angle. The UK experience is therefore a good model of how multilevel governance can be structured to maximise bottom-up learning, using project funding to truly test ‘pilots’ and then replicating and mainstreaming success.

A participant in both waves of this programme has been the low-income northern city of Bradford, location of inter-ethnic rioting in 2001. Its “Bradford for Everyone” strategy was framed in the context of public consultation around the green paper. The Department had supported “continuous innovation and improvement” and “co-operation has been brilliant”, however another department, the Home Office, adopted policies on issues from asylum to voter identification, which contradicted those Bradford was seeking to embed locally. This suggested that there was an issue with horizontal governance at national level.

Bradford had adopted a ‘test and learn’ approach, a Bradford official said, being honest about failures and inadequacies. More than 70 local organisations funded had been required to monitor and evaluate their work and they were brought together regularly to broker connections. A Stronger Communities Partnership Board, of local stakeholders and individuals who had been designated Bradford for Everyone ambassadors, reported to the Bradford Wellbeing Board, chaired by the Council leader and with the health service, police and other services involved. It was important that everyone knew that “integration is everyone’s business and in everybody’s interests”, given the challenge of inertia, where individuals lacked a grasp of interculturalism or were unable to see what it had to do with their area of work.

An indicator of the difficulties in this regard is that the [report](#) to the Home Office on the 2001 riots in Bradford and other northern-English cities defined the key problem as the 'parallel lives' occupied by members of different ethnic communities under the UK's historically multiculturalist system for managing diversity – segregation especially evident in schools. Yet another Bradford official pointed to how the continued promotion of faith schools by the Department for Education undercut the efforts of Bradford to promote interculturalism, as supported by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Even though the UK is a polity distinct from others in Europe (and of course is no longer a member of the EU), it does reveal sharply the relationships between vertical and horizontal aspects of multilevel governance. Where horizontal co-ordination is poor at central level, its vertical ramifications for local government are very problematic, given the mixed messages municipalities then receive.

Applicability to the Republic of Cyprus

Leaving aside the continuing partition of the island and the Turkish-controlled north-east, the Republic of Cyprus falls into the category of locally-decentralised governance. Local autonomy is enshrined in its Constitution, as reflected in the predominantly urban municipalities, of which there are 39, and more than 400 rural communities. These, however, have mainly administrative competences. Only the major cities have any genuine autonomy. The [2020-22 Cyprus action plan on integration](#), produced by the Ministry of the Interior, accords with this in describing itself as “decentralised in its administrative dimension”. The regional level, meanwhile, is underdeveloped in Cypriot governance structures. During the colonial period, six districts were managed by district officers appointed by central government. This system ended with independence, but no democratic regional governance has replaced it. None of this means that Cyprus cannot implement versions of the multilevel governance structures described above when it comes to making intercultural integration effective.

Since 2018, central government has been seeking to strengthen the regional and local structures by integrating municipalities and clustering communities. The number of municipalities is to be halved through amalgamations to 20, in advance of the next round of local elections due in May 2024. An amendment to the relevant legislation has been made, which allows existing as well as future authorities to design and implement their own integration actions. These reforms will facilitate better governance of integration at the local level, especially if authorities recognise the need to contextualise such actions within consistent national strategy.

The current Action Plan recognises that “the integration process is a bottom-up approach that starts at the grassroots level”. It documents substantial social exclusion of newcomers and highlights UNHCR / University of Cyprus research on host-community attitudes, including treatment of refugees and migrants that fails to differentiate their individual skills and needs. Government services must therefore emphasise a more “person-centred approach”, it says.

As the present paper has shown, such an individualised approach is often closely dependent upon a set of effective multilevel governance arrangements, which give local authorities the competence to meet local needs in locally appropriate ways. The [“Baseline overview and assessment of integration policies in the Republic of Cyprus”](#)¹ highlights the novelty of this emerging policy framework in Cyprus, noting that “there are no formal governmental strategies or mechanisms in place to promote social integration into society” and that “there are no official mechanisms in place for welcoming migrants into the community”. By default, this has left the task of integration largely up to unofficial networks and time-limited EU-funded projects.

The Action Plan itself appreciates the importance of “improving the co-ordination of integration policies across multiple levels of government”, “improving the coherence of integration policies to address the needs of migrants” (across housing, education, employment and health) and “effective funding at local level to support the integration process” (where authorities can currently find themselves competing for funds). Local authorities are “becoming particularly important”, it says, in reflecting “the vision of inclusion in all aspects of social life” and “a holistic approach” should be taken.

At the central government level, however, the Action Plan does not enjoy the support of the current Council of Ministers. A successor is being prepared for 2023-25 and there will be a presidential election in February 2023. While a “holistic approach” has thus not been possible for the moment, several actions have nevertheless been taken forward by individual ministries, the Plan having derived from widespread consultation amongst them.

1 This report was prepared under the joint Council of Europe and European Union project “Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus” which is being carried out with funding from the European Union, via its Structural Reform Support Programme, and in co-operation with the European Commission’s DG for Structural Reform Support.

Included in the Action Plan is the two-year European Union and Council of Europe joint project *Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus* which is running until May 2023 in partnership with the Ministry of the Interior. One of the goals of this project is to assist with the development of a suitable multilevel governance co-ordination mechanism for the country and it is with this aim in mind that this report has been prepared. The project has been structured to develop five regional intercultural networks, mirroring the districts, with one of the major cities serving as the network hub in each case: Famagusta, Nicosia, Larnaca, Limassol and Paphos. Each district will prepare an intercultural strategy which would then feed into a national strategy.

The current Action Plan recognises the need for a co-ordinating body, with a mechanism to “include representatives from all partners”. It proposes that this role be allocated to the Advisory Board on the Integration of Migrants under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior. This body, established in 2011 (and which fell into desuetude between 2014 and 2019), comprehensively engages local authorities, the social partners and the non-governmental organisations in Cyprus.

Placed in the context of the evidence marshalled in this paper, there is a strong case for making the apex of the multilevel governance system accountable to the office of the President – to ensure a holistic approach is taken across the whole of the Council of Ministers – rather than the Ministry of the Interior. After next year’s presidential election, one way to make quick progress would be for the incoming President, regardless of party affiliation, to appoint a Commissioner for Intercultural Integration. Within the current system of governance in Cyprus, Commissioners can be appointed by the President to address cross-cutting issues. There are [currently 14](#) – covering, for instance, gender equality – and a Commissioner for Intercultural Integration could inject some momentum on the issue across government departments, while providing an interlocutor in central government for those at lower governance levels.

Over time, were there to be parliamentary approval for the necessary legislation, this could develop into a [Deputy Ministry](#), of which there are currently three – covering research, innovation and digital policy, for example – again accountable directly to the President. (The number of conventional ministries is constrained by the 1960 Constitution.)

An early task could be to sharpen the thinking behind the Cyprus approach, drawing on the Council of Europe’s [Model Framework and the experience of the current Cyprus project](#) in applying the perspective developed by the Intercultural Cities network. Cyprus’ Action Plan describes its current approach as “a mixture of assimilationist and multiculturalism”. Such an approach cannot be as coherent nor as contemporary as interculturalism, transcending, as it does, both prior models for the management of cultural diversity (Wilson, 2018: 95-118).

The “[Baseline overview and assessment of integration policies in the Republic of Cyprus](#)” spells this out thus: “The immigration model of Cyprus has been [pre]dominantly separatist, foreseeing little intercultural interaction between communities, while at the same time [favouring] assimilation where contact is unavoidable.” The [MIPEX index](#) characterises this as “immigration without integration”. In practice, this has meant a narrow focus on the reception of newcomers, with hardly any state resources allocated to integration as such.

If the forthcoming 2023-25 Action Plan can acquire more of a strategic flavour than its predecessor – in line with the 2021 [Model Framework](#) – this can help avoid the limitations of the project-based funding on which integration work in Cyprus has by default depended. The Framework necessarily includes allocating the resources required for implementation. By placing funded programmes and projects at the service of an overall vision and objectives, it ensures that expenditures are synergistic and sustainable – thereby offering better value for money – rather than *ad hoc* and short-term.

Looking towards that next orientation of Cyprus’ Action Plan, it is important to give a strong voice to the municipalities, the “[Baseline overview and assessment of integration policies in the Republic of Cyprus](#)” recognises that some local authorities have “attempted to establish networks of collaboration and create communication channels between the local community and migrants” and it recommends that they continue to “become more active and involved”.

The Union of Cypriot Municipalities and the Union of Cypriot Communities provide means of concerting such a voice, but in the [current system of multilevel governance](#) they are not party to formal consultation procedures by central government. The structural reforms at central level suggested above are therefore needed to provide the basis for a genuine dialogue.

The experience of the horizontal networks comprising the current Cyprus project should be disseminated, so that all municipalities can join the networks or develop such co-ordination themselves, with their specific arrays of local partners. Already the Union of Cypriot Municipalities has sub-groups organised around the

districts. Non-governmental and civil society organisations also operate across Cyprus and have co-operative relationships in what is a relatively small jurisdiction.

Finally, maintenance of the five regional networks established in the context of the Cyprus project should be considered after the European funding for the project is exhausted. Given the developments at the central and local levels outlined above, they can play an invaluable linking role in Cyprus' emergent system of multilevel governance of intercultural integration.

Conclusion:

Recommended elements

This paper has demonstrated that multilevel governance arrangements for intercultural integration vary in relation to the different governance systems of European states. Why certain approaches are taken rather than others in any one state is, however, a question not often asked, and lessons from successful models may be more transferrable than first assumed.

The converse is also true: ideal multilevel governance arrangements must be tailored to fit wider constitutional structures, rather than a single model being universally applicable. What is proposed here in conclusion is thus not a rigid, detailed construct, but rather a flexible framework of key elements, all of which should be present for multilevel governance to operate most effectively but which can be assembled in a bespoke fashion in a particular state.

Element 1 is the arrangements for vertical co-ordination between the national, regional and local levels. At the apex, this demands a clear political commitment from the highest level of government. There is a case for this to come from a Ministry of Social Affairs or Ministry of Labour, because social policy is at the heart of intercultural integration, whereas the 'security' focus of a Ministry of the Interior or Ministry of Justice is not appropriate to this challenge. If a specific Ministry leads the intercultural policy work as first among equals, there is a high likelihood that it will fail to convince the other ministries to contribute on an equal basis towards a truly comprehensive intercultural strategy and action plan. Therefore ideally, that commitment should be led from the President's or Prime Minister's Office.

Everyone in public service knows that a prime ministerial commitment will be taken seriously all the way down the government chain – a key priority, not to be displaced by other immediate pressures. Moreover, a Prime Minister has unparalleled access to the media megaphone and so can uniquely communicate a narrative to the public about the country they inhabit and where it is going. Intercultural integration is at the heart of any such narrative today.

This, however, should not be a partisan, ideologically-driven approach. Interculturalism is based on universal norms, enshrining individual human dignity, with opposition to racism and all forms of intolerance as its bedrock. Its practical success in implementation depends on evidence-based policymaking. So, there is a strong case, as indicated, for an independent agency such as the Portuguese ACM (or to some extent UNAR in Italy) which reports directly to the Office of the Prime Minister/President but at the same time provides a repository of know-how outside it. It can draw on the best academic expertise, nationally and around the world, in terms of finding solutions to specific integration challenges. This is **Element 2**.

Such an agency can also serve as the day-to-day focal point for liaison between the national and other levels of government. It can help with capacity-building and act as a clearing house for good practices, so these are not corralled in particular government institutions or non-governmental organisations. It can liaise with international organisations, such as UNHCR, which can offer informed advice and objective evaluation.

Horizontal co-ordination is **Element 3**. This is essential at all levels. In central government, in a cynical view, setting up an interdepartmental committee can be the best way to bury an issue. More positively, again with the Prime Minister or his/her representative in the Chair, individual ministers and senior officials across departments will understand the seriousness with which this policy domain is to be treated. The same applies to co-ordination at regional and local level.

Horizontal relationships among governments at the same level in different places are extremely valuable when it comes to sharing good practices and lessons learnt, avoiding reinvention of the wheel. The Intercultural Cities network and its national sub-networks have shown just how valuable to participants this can be for

municipalities. The emergent [Intercultural Regions Network](#) under the auspices of the Association of European Regions can replicate this success one level up.

Horizontal co-ordination, however, also critically involves non-governmental organisations, which should help to ensure the integration support is more intercultural in nature. Social partners are essential, particularly in terms of labour market issues, but, above all, migrant/refugee/intercultural non-governmental and civil society organisations have key roles to play – especially where, ideally, they are migrant/refugee led or dominated. Their involvement provides essential sources of otherwise informal, undisclosed knowledge – as well as bringing legitimacy to the work in minority communities – while offering them a voice and associated official recognition in return. By co-producing integration planning at each level with such organisations, government will not only produce more valid and compelling strategies but the programmes and projects which implement them on the ground will be better delivered and received.

Non-governmental and civil society organisations may be weak at the regional level but particularly at the national and local levels their involvement is indispensable. Nationally, another value of an agency at arm's length is that it can be the channel for civil society to have access to government. A forum bringing ministers, senior officials and non-governmental and civil society organisations leaders together periodically can be a vital vehicle to review the strategy in real time and make necessary adjustments – as well as building trust and confidence, especially among those around that table not used to being listened to by senior figures from the 'host' community.

At local level, many municipalities have established integration councils or committees, again with the same, fractal form: elected figures, officials and non-governmental organisations from across departments and the local civil society. Co-production via such fora provides a sense of agency for representatives of migrants and refugees (care should thus be taken to avoid the tokenism or clientelism of selecting the 'usual suspects' and ignoring intersectionality) as well as familiarising public servants new to the issues at stake.

At the outset, the independent agency can be the hub and facilitator of the widest and deepest deliberation on – **Element 4** – the preparation and review of an overall national Intercultural Integration Plan, and any subsequent reviews of such a Plan. Its expertise should be applied to organising advance public consultations, including with the lower levels of government, as well as the contemporaneous monitoring and evaluation of each Plan once implemented. Conversely, it is critical that such a Plan clearly designates the roles and responsibilities of the subordinate levels of government, with buy-in on their part, so that it does not remain merely an official commitment but instead has real traction on the ground.

Element 5 is that the various levels of government involved in intercultural integration should replicate the leadership-from-the-top of the national level. This will make for simplicity and ease of co-ordination. Thus, the key figures at regional and local levels should be, respectively, regional political leaders and mayors. The research on the Brandenburg municipalities showed how political leadership by that city's Mayor was critical. In António Costa's period as Mayor of Lisbon, he moved his office into the diverse area of Mouraria, the formerly 'Moorish' ghetto of the city, as a striking and highly visible indication of just how important this issue was to him. Public communication from such mayors to their cities is crucial to building an alternative narrative about what intercultural co-operation looks like in action.

Local levels should contribute to the preparation of the national Intercultural Integration Plan, through their experience of developing and implementing their Intercultural Strategies and Action Plans, where they exist. Local levels can further develop their more specific plans within the overall agreed national framework, to which they have already contributed. Indeed, there is advantage in seconding national officials to the local level from time to time to give them more of a real-world sense of what the work entails.

There should be formal, regular meetings organised by the adjunct agency between the key representatives of the different levels of government to address issues arising from the implementation of the national plan and concerns expressed by authorities closer to the ground, or, where certain local authorities might fail to meet their commitments, vice versa. Such a meeting schedule comprises **Element 6**. The twice-yearly meetings chaired by the Association of Norwegian Local and Regional Authorities is an example of this element functioning in non-crisis periods yet proving resilient when under pressure. Even if the entire multilevel structure is not made legally binding, such meetings might benefit from requiring the mandatory participation of certain officials where there is a risk of the process being downgraded or neglected over time, after a perceived migration 'crisis' has passed.

Element 7 concerns proportionality, sustainability and transparency of funding. Funding for the work that the local authorities do should be sufficient and, to build trust and commitment, should be allocated on objective criteria related to their respective responsibilities in published Plans. Smaller amounts of money should

also be available on a discretionary basis for pilot projects to stimulate innovation, with a view to scaling up proven successes and mainstreaming them nationally (as the UK system encourages), but this project-funding model should not dominate. Legal competences authorities enjoy should also be aligned with the practical demands they find placed upon them, as well as the responsibilities they must fulfil within the overall Intercultural Integration Plan.

Finally, **Element 8** is the commitment to ongoing evaluation of the system and its impact, feeding directly back into the planning cycle. The two-way quality of intercultural integration should be taken seriously in any such iterative evaluation process, with the participation of local residents measured and evaluated alongside the participation of newcomers or other 'target groups'. Such evaluations should also be empowered to make consequential recommendations for the further improvement of multilevel governance.

Like any human being, any state is unique. But every human has a brain, a skeleton, muscle tissue and a blood/capillary system. And it is clear from this discussion that any multilevel governance arrangement has itself to have four analogous features.

Its 'brain' is the national centre, where expertise is concentrated, and executive decisions are taken. Its 'spine' is the stacked series of levels, from national to local, which must work bottom-up as effectively as top-down, with formal, robust relationships. Its connecting 'tissue' is a consultatively made, nationally consistent Intercultural Integration Plan, which gives every element in the governance arrangement not only a clear place but also a sense of its interdependence upon the others. And it also has a 'capillary' system of engagement with non-governmental organisations and ordinary citizens, penetrating to the neighbourhood scale, which fosters trust, realism and commitment by all.

In this way, national integration plans with effective multilevel governance arrangements can ease the tensions between levels of government mentioned earlier in this paper and avoid the sudden partisan shocks changes of government can bring (while also providing resilience in the face of external shocks such as rapid arrivals from war zones, as during the Ukraine crisis). They can replace these symptoms of poorly managed cultural diversity by a positive-sum game – a policy framework, funding (top-down) and on-the-ground innovation (bottom-up), allied to horizontal co-ordination and dissemination of good practice—thereby making the 'body politic' altogether healthier.

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