



Refugee policies for the intercultural city

Policy Brief



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INTERCULTURAL CITIES POLICY BRIEFS

Refugee policies for the intercultural city 2017

While local authorities do not have competence over Council of Europe member states' policies on the granting of asylum, they do have very considerable capacity to foster a 'welcoming culture' towards asylum-seekers and, particularly, to facilitate the building of relationships between those whose claims are successful, acquiring refugee status, and members of the host community. This is an important element of local strategies for intercultural integration – indeed for many larger cities one which has moved rapidly up the agenda and will continue so to do – particularly in those states which have accepted proportionately (Norway and Sweden) or absolutely (Germany) the most refugees.

The Council of Europe and its partner cities have developed an intercultural approach to issues of integration which enables cities to reap the benefits and minimise the risks related to human movement and cultural diversity. Its key elements of intercultural integration are:

- Setting-up spaces and opportunities for deep interaction and co-creation between people of different cultural origins and backgrounds, to build trust and realise the creative potential of diversity;
- power-sharing – involving people of diverse origins in decision-making in urban institutions, be they political, educational, social, economic or cultural;
- fostering intercultural competence in public, private and civil-society organisations;
- embracing cultural pluralism and the complexity of identities through leadership discourse and symbolic actions; and
- managing conflict positively, busting stereotypes and engaging in a debate about the impact and potential of diversity for local development.

In much media reporting in recent years, refugees have been represented as the subjects and objects of merely instrumental behaviour – 'economic migrants' at the mercy of 'traffickers' – thus denying natural expressions of human empathy towards those fleeing conflict and oppression while occluding the contribution refugees granted asylum can make to their new home. Of course, states-party to the Refugee Convention of 1951 are obliged to offer asylum to those with a 'well-founded fear of persecution' in their country of origin.

Notwithstanding, especially when the arrival of refugees is treated like a crisis or an emergency, it is easy to establish a clientelistic relationship where people are helped, but they do not become a part of the networks and the structures of social solidarity of the societies that they arrive into. In all societies, forms of social solidarity exist that enable people to make governments respect their rights, as well as expand the scope of those rights – the most historically important is the trade union, but lately social movements, neighbourhood groups, cooperatives, municipalities themselves and many different types of institutions have emerged that can play that sort of role.

Some municipalities, and NGOs, have therefore sought in addition to provide services, to give expression to that sentiment of empathy towards individuals fetching up in their locality, to engender a network of supportive social relationships. The more far-sighted have seen the potential which refugees can offer, over the long run, to local social, economic and cultural performance – an

example of the 'diversity advantage' the ICCs network has sought more generally to exploit. Success in these endeavours, however, depends entirely on a well-managed process of integration.

In fact, it has been proven that refugees can increase consumer markets for domestic commodities, create new markets, bring new skills, provide employment and fill vacant positions. The experience of many countries in Europe and beyond (Australia, United States among others) has also been that refugees can have a big role in the revitalisation of small and rural centres. All of these positive outcomes, though, depend on the presence of a strong leadership, which has worked previously on raising awareness and in making the case for the diversity advantage.

In the last decades, many of the inhabitants of Riace, in the South of Italy, had moved north in search of work. The town was therefore strongly depopulated and in danger of disappearing.

In 1998, after a group of 200 Kurdish asylum seekers arrived on a beach near Riace, the Mayor Domenico Lucano, decided that, if migration had brought Riace to the brink of extinction, then maybe it could bring it back from it too. He then decided to re-orient all administration through an inclusive integration lens opening schools, investing in micro-financing, redesigning laboratories, bars, bakeries and the curbside separate collection of waste that is now managed by two young newcomers. A big investment was also made in terms of cultural mediators who helped bridging between the inhabitants.

The village now buzzes with artisans such as the Afghan women who are taking up the regional craft of glass-making or the Nigerian embroiderer who has learned skills passed down from local nuns. They receive €800 a month from the Italian state to support their activities. The village has even created its own currency (or tokens whose value is linked to the Euro), with pictures of Gandhi, Che Guevara and Martin Luther King, which migrants can use whilst they wait for the European funds.

'Refugees welcome': sending the right signals

Challenging xenophobia towards refugees entails replacing a notion of a collectivised 'self' and an alien 'other' by recognising individual diversity and a shared humanity. This can make members of the 'host' community feel more positive towards refugees and make the latter feel more welcome in their new home.

In September 2014, the municipality in Erlangen in Germany, which had been asked to accommodate 300 new refugees, organised a giant picnic around a banquet table 180 metres long on the main street. Around 1,000 native Erlangers and asylum-seekers shared the experience, with the refugees invited to tell their individual stories and anti-rumour materials provided on placemats. The event attracted much, positive, media and social-media coverage, at a time when Germany's refugee intake was largely being represented in a manner raising public anxieties.

For local administration, addressing public opinion with a strong political message about diversity as an asset is a key element for addressing public fears. Especially in times of perceived crisis, it's important to lean into the core values of intercultural integration, and help people every day to understand how we all benefit by being welcoming to people from across the globe. An ongoing, positive communications strategy can help recognise and address the fears that people may have while also building greater longer-term understanding.

It is also important for local authorities to engage in active communication with their population, showing that they take seriously the questions, doubts and fear of the host community, but also showcasing success stories of integration, as well as the human side of the phenomenon.

In Grande-Synthe (North of France), once the border with the UK in Calais was blocked, the refugee population increased from 60 to more than 1000 people in a month. Damien Careme, the Mayor of this town inhabited by 22.000 people, understood from the beginning the need to address the local community as an actor of inclusion. Thanks to his efforts, over 10 000 citizens-volunteers came to the camp in just one month and no complaints nor protests were registered.

Refugees are often the best ambassador for themselves. Firas Alshater, a drama student and filmmaker from Syria has started a YouTube project to show Germany's locals and newcomers that the best way to understand each other is through humour.

The first video published on his channel (Zukar) has been watched by 858,632 viewers and some of the subscribers to his channels have contacted him to tell him they were normally against the arrival of refugees, but they were surprised by the way he approached the matter and therefore interested to see more videos.

Firas is also part of the guerrilla campaign started by the "Flüchtlinge Willkommen" organisation ("Refugees Welcome"), "Search Racism. Find Truth". The organisation has purchased advertisement rights to specific YouTube search queries. Therefore people in Germany searching for xenophobic videos on YouTube are first shown clips in which a refugee debunks prejudices with facts, personal anecdotes and humour. Spots cannot be skipped and each of them links to a website with more videos of refugees' stories.

Refugees include journalists too, of course. And they can offer a different experience if given the opportunity by media organisations in the city to which they have fled.

Paris, a member of the International Cities of Refuge Network as well as the ICCs, supports the [Maison des journalistes](#). Set up in 2002, it welcomes journalists who have fled their country of origin and supports them to rebuild their careers. It publishes its own journal, *L'oeil de l'exile* (eye of the exile) to give them a voice in their own right.

Radio SPRAR is an experience taking place in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto, Messina province, Italy. The radio, started as a way to support the learning of Italian, is animated by the asylum seekers and refugees welcome in the town. They take turn in each episode, featuring news, music, recipes, and stories from their country of origin. The radio, on the air three days per week, collects more than 800 listeners per month.

Refugee Radio Awareness Network addresses the lack of reliable information for asylum seekers and refugees, as well as their difficulty to make their voice heard.

The network provides input to positive political change by addressing problems affecting displaced persons and examining possible solution while calling authorities for actions.

The Radios want to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are included in the decision-making processes. They also provide reliable information indispensable to inform and stimulate dialogues, debates and exchanges.

All podcasts are developed and broadcast by people with migration and refugee experience.

7 FM channels have been developed in Berlin, Hamburg, Marburg, Rome, Paris, Munich and Zurich, and more than 1400 listeners per week are tuning in.

An important issue for local administrations, but also civil society and social entrepreneurs, to take into account is that special services for refugees might be helpful at the beginning stage of their arrival and in certain areas, but can also have the opposite effect of ghettoising them, isolating them from mainstream services and treating them differently from the rest of the population. This

has the double counter-effect of defining people by their asylum status and alienating part of the host community that feels neither cared nor considered enough by the administration. As far as possible, and when the situation and needs of refugees do not structurally differ from those of the broader community, existing services should be open and accessible to all. As prescribed by *Resolution 411(2017)*¹ of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on "The role of local and regional authorities facing migration", key services should be provided to all residents without discrimination, addressing their needs regardless of their status, nationality or country of origin.

A key success factor for refugee inclusion is, finally, the takeover of activities by the refugees themselves in the optic of co-design of policies and strategies, as ultimately they know best what their needs are and they can effectively spread information within their respective communities. When traumatised and destitute people arrive, it is normal to care for them and help them, but in this situation it is easy to forget that they also have skills, resources and desire to shape their own destiny. Therefore systems of support more often than not deprive them of agency.

When the city of Stromsund, in Sweden decided to design their cultural orientation programme for resettled children, they started by interviewing 35 children that lived through the same experience and asking them what they would have liked to be told before arriving. The range of suggestion was wide, but helped in both designing the material and understanding some misunderstanding that had created tensions in the past.

Turning 'huddled masses' into productive local citizens

No one wants to be defined as a 'refugee'. It perpetually recalls the trauma he or she may have fled and leaves them feeling passive victims of their fate, when they desperately want to build a new home for themselves and their families. By contrast, migrants in today's Europe may well keep on moving (or returning), while using new technologies to keep in touch with family back home. It is thus essential to turn refugees into 'citizens' as quickly as possible – and not just by the formal progression of their asylum claim.

If the 20th century was '[The American Century](#)', it was in large measure because of the invitation inscribed in the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, enticing the 'huddled masses, yearning to breathe free' to America's shores. World-leading innovations such as Hollywood and jazz cannot be fathomed without recognising the contribution of Jews who had fled the pogroms of eastern Europe. The link, scientifically, is via the contribution which '[cognitive diversity](#)', if well managed, can make to problem-solving.

In 2000, the European Union's Lisbon Strategy sought to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the new century. But such catch-up aspirations with the US, in productivity for instance, have not been [realised](#), as the successor Europe 2020 Strategy [recognised](#) – while mentioning Europe's 'cultural diversity' as an asset only in passing. The mayors of Paris, London and New York have however jointly [written](#): 'Investing in the integration of refugees and immigrants is not only the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do. Refugees and other foreign-born residents bring needed skills and enhance the vitality and growth of local economies, and their presence has long benefited our three cities.'

One of the strong features of Nordic approaches to integration has always been the so-called 'workline' – linking integration to insertion in the labour market. And the mayor of Stockholm, Karin

¹ Rapport CG32(2017)07 adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on 28 March 2017

Wanngård, has [said](#): 'The increasingly negative discourse surrounding refugees in Europe is worrying. Not only do we have a moral responsibility to help those who are fleeing war and persecution; refugees can also bring real economic benefits to Stockholm and the rest of Europe.'

Vejle, a Danish municipality with 109,000 inhabitants, has its own strategy for the housing of refugees. It is based on a fundamental belief in an intense 'introduction programme to the labour market' and a strong integration effort with which housing is combined.

In Paris – although the organisation is spreading internationally beyond France – [SINGA](#) offers refugees incubator space for refugees to develop their own projects, be they business, social or cultural. It also connects individuals to those within the 'host' society with whom they need to develop relationships. And it organises events and workshops which can engage refugees and indigenous residents, building communities of professionals. SINGA also runs a platform called [CALM](#) ('*Comme a la maison*'), which matches individuals with a spare room with refugees in need of temporary accommodation while they get their on their feet, facilitates an agreement between them and offers intercultural mediation as required.

Yet refugees often face many barriers to making a contribution, from issues of language competence to recognition of their qualifications. Their potential is thus not fully realised and they end up in positions undervaluing their capacities. Asylum-seekers in any event are stuck in limbo while their claims are processed. In Germany, for instance, this takes on average between 12 and 16 months, during which time skills attenuate and individuals can become demoralised.

The Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg seeks to ease the path for refugees into the institution by orientation interviews, German courses and taster sessions. Indigenous students help by partnering and mentoring individual refugees.

[Kiron Open Higher Education](#) is a Social Startup founded in 2015 that provides asylum seekers and refugees with access to quality higher education. Their innovative blended learning model enables refugees to start studying immediately, regardless of their asylum status. Kiron students, in fact, complete their online coursework over approximately two years, before having the option to transfer to one of our partner universities. The first two years of study consist of a digital and modularized curriculum linked to so-called Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) Learning agreements are negotiated with partner universities and allow for the accreditation of previously completed modules of up to 60 ECTS. Following the application requirements of the partner universities, Kiron students then complete the third and fourth year of study at the partner university where they acquire the 120 ECTS needed to obtain an accredited Bachelor's degree. The number of students has reached 2700 and the partner universities are at the moment 41 in eight different countries.

L&D Support, based in Amsterdam, has developed an [InCheck](#) system to assist in the assessment of refugees' competences, qualifications and potential career paths. Generating bilingual reports, it makes it easier for social and employment advisers to comprehend individual clients.

In 2015 a young social entrepreneur set up the [ReDi School of Digital Integration](#) in Berlin, a co-creation between the tech community and its asylum-seeker students. It offers courses and workshops as well as providing co-working spaces for students and their mentors. The focus is half on programming, half on fostering a spirit of enterprise and building networks.

Individual mentoring can help, including through the commonalities established by shared professional expertise. Brokering relationships with potential employers is also key.

In Amsterdam, [Refugee Talent Hub](#) is an open platform which brings together companies, public agencies and NGOs to match the talents individual refugees possess with the needs of employers. It helps bridge any gaps, for example by encouraging language training and internships while refugees are waiting for opportunities to appear. And Erlangen has brokered a relationship with Siemens, which the company has now replicated across Germany, offering internships to asylum-seekers.

Youth unemployment rate in Europe is currently estimated at 18.7%², which makes it hard for young people from all backgrounds to enter the labour market. Therefore many cities are looking for new solutions for helping migrants and refugees find employment. One way is to help them establish their own businesses.

The [Diversity Connectors for Start-ups](#) is a network of business incubators created under the umbrella of the Intercultural Cities' programme. Many of the members are offering services to support migrant and refugee-led innovation. The ultimate goal, though, is to develop diversity connectors, workspaces where under-represented and mainstream start-ups share workspaces and service provision, but especially cross-fertilise each other work. On the one hand, under-represented start-ups will learn from mainstream start-ups, have better access to finance and gain access to new and established business networks. On the other hand, mainstream start-ups will gain from interacting with under-represented start-ups, which see the world from a different perspective, cater to different markets, and have access to different skills.

Notwithstanding, many experiences demonstrated that, while quick entry in the labour market is surely highly critical for successful integration, other factors are also playing an important role. Unstable housing situation, uncertain legal status, or untreated mental health conditions can all make finding and maintaining employment difficult. On the other hand, employment is not the only means of ensuring community inclusion.

Volunteering and other activities that benefit the entire community are both a way for asylum seekers and refugees to feel active members of the societies where they are living and a way for them to give back to those communities. Therefore they should be encouraged by local municipalities, either through structured opportunities or by supporting ideas from the civil society.

[Give Something Back to Berlin](#) is a community, both on and offline, comprised of hundreds of skilled volunteers in over 60 social projects all over the city. The projects can be anything from homeless centres, mentorship programs for underprivileged youth, working with the elderly or creative work with children. Today GSBTB also runs six of its own refugee programs reaching 14 474 participants annually, creating 14 064 volunteer opportunities for everyone to contribute to create change and positive outcomes on different societal challenges in Berlin.

[SPRAR](#) (Protection system for asylum seekers and refugees) is the instrument set in place by the Italian Government to address the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. At the basis of the mechanism is the idea that newcomers are not only vulnerable subjects to whom guarantee protection, but also active citizens able to use their capabilities, competences and talents for enhancing and relaunching the territory they are part of. For this reason, the programme is providing the beneficiaries with training and volunteer opportunities, internships and other forms of activities that are connected to their path, background, competences and objectives. In Montalto

² http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics

Uffugo, in Cosenza province, two Afghan young men have, for example, set up free English classes for citizens, as a way to feel useful for the community that has welcome them.

As already mentioned, some of the experiences incurred during their daily life could represent a major obstacle for newcomers to feel a sense of belonging, which in turns hampers the process of integration. One of the most daunting aspects of the refugee experience is dealing with the public administration of the 'host' society – including not only language barriers but also the fact that impartial public rules may well be far from a typical experience in a country of origin riven with conflict or where the state is under ethnic control. Of course, things will be made much easier if there is a 'one-stop shop' for newcomers, including refugees, in the municipality of arrival.

Bergen in Norway has established an Introduction Centre for Refugees, which welcomes around 400 new refugees per year. This leads into a two-year introduction programme, for participation on which each individual is paid a monthly stipend, with the aim of preparation for employment or entry into the education system. Health care and psychological support to facilitate the adaptation of the refugees to the new societal context are also provided.

In Berlin, meanwhile, a group of Syrian refugees, mentored by the ReDi School for Digital Integration (see before), have been working on an app, '[Bureaucrazy](#)', which would store in a database all the possible official forms newcomers might encounter and translate them into English and Arabic. The app would offer multiple-choice-question steers through typically encountered problems and guide users to the appropriate municipal office.

Housing is an immediate need, and municipalities may find themselves under pressure from sudden refugee influxes. One option is to look to disused properties, especially if the alternative is camps, which may not only be inhospitable but also unsafe, particularly for women. In Athens, an empty seven-storey hotel was [taken over](#) in April 2016 by solidarity campaigners, housing some 400 refugees arrived via Turkey. The residents take part in collective administration, such as cooking and cleaning, and take management decisions democratically. This is in sharp contrast to the experience of refugees effectively trapped in camps on Greek islands.

Children have particular needs, of course, including that they start, or renew, their education as soon as possible. Language is an obvious barrier to successful introduction to the new schooling system.

In Neukölln in Berlin, 'welcome classes' have been established for refugee children. These give them a fast-track introduction to German over their initial six months to one year, so that they can make the transition.

Fully half of the world's refugees are under 18, according to Unicef. And refugee children, most especially unaccompanied ones, may well present acute symptoms of trauma which need highly sensitive and individualised attention.

Melitopol in south-eastern Ukraine has had to cope with internally displaced persons from the conflict area a couple of hundred kilometres east and Crimea to its south. One IDP started a project there, 'A Smile of a Child', involving a group of local activists, Mobile Group for Children's Development, including professional psychologists. They organise mentoring events for children (and their parents) in parks, courtyards, playgrounds, libraries and other public spaces. They raise awareness of the values of tolerance and peaceful co-existence, strongly supported in Melitopol, and offer individual psychological coaching.

The Municipality of Bergen (through the Child protection office) has launched a specific programme for unaccompanied children who got the residence permit or refugee status.

Since the year 2000 about 300 UAM have been resettled in Bergen; in 2016, the city has given availability for resettling another 160. In total, these kids represent more than 25 nationalities.

There are huge socioeconomic, educational and emotional differences among UAMs, who are often in a “survival mode”, with different implications for the services to be provided. For instance, there are children who have been victims of family violence or child abuse, and at the same time young adults that have the necessary skills to integrate the university. This led the municipality to put in place an individual assessment of the needs of each child, both upon arrival and on a regular basis. The children that participate in the UAM programme are thus accompanied to express their wishes in terms of expectations from the welfare and assistance system, of plans for future, and of self-determination.

Early integration in the education system and access to job opportunities are considered to be essential in the inclusion process. The workers involved in the UAM programme have to build credit and trust, and invest time and energy in the first phase to build up an individual relationship with each kid. However, the results are good: for instance 90% of Afghan boys are either working or enrolled in higher education after four years in Norway. These are higher rates than the average of Norwegian born kids. Promoting self-motivation and the identification of each one’s talents and skills are considered to be key factors for this success.

The new ambitious targets set this year to increase the number of UAM to host suppose however for the municipality to put in place new strategies so to be able to ensure the same deep and individual follow-up to each kid. This is why the city has started cooperation with the private sector (mainly for job opportunities), and with so-called “support families” that can foster care.

Refugees who have suffered trauma or lost or had to leave loved ones may struggle to develop an integrated sense of self; meanwhile, they may feel perceived as the Barbarian at the Gate in the society in which they find themselves. The arts can offer an oblique way in which refugees can reconsider who they are and articulate who they have become – in a way which can humanise their experience to those for whom it is ‘foreign’.

Botkyrka in Sweden runs a project called ‘Connect, Create, Communicate: art as a language to make new voices visible’. The municipality’s Multicultural Centre has made its arts studio into a mobile tool for visiting refugee centres to engage individual refugees in arts activities.

Refugees do need professional support of various kinds. But they are also individual human beings who need above all warm personal relationships in the strange new world in which they find themselves. Such relationships affect members of the ‘host’ community too – making them [significantly more likely](#) to believe their state should have a responsibility to help refugees. NGOs can make a big difference here in fostering friendships – something public agencies cannot really do, yet very important.

In several major German cities, including Berlin, Cologne and Hamburg, the NGO ‘[Start with a Friend](#)’ (its slogan, *Aus Fremden können Freunde werden*) creates one-to-one friendships between refugees and ‘locals’. The organisation engages and trains intercultural mediators to help match individuals. Nearly 1,500 of such ‘tandems’ have been created since the launch in April 2015.

Copenhagen runs a [Host Programme](#) to facilitate encounters between newcomers, including refugees, and individuals willing to act as hosts – including ‘culture hosts’ to provide entrees into the city’s cultural and community life. Key to its success is collaboration between the municipality and the Danish Refugee Council, which provides Danish conversation courses and information on local associations and activities, and another association focusing on educational and vocational aspects of integration. Nearly 200 hosts have come forward from the two organisations.

Managing integration

In a globalised economy, there is no future for societies which try to put walls around themselves: Japan’s two ‘lost decades’ have been as much about its [closure to newcomers](#) as its macroeconomic policy. Whereas Europe’s economic powerhouse, Germany, accepts some 40 per cent of asylum applicants, in Japan only 0.2 per cent of refugees are successful with their claims. Local authorities which want to be competitive, therefore, need to go on the front foot by proclaiming their openness to the world, showing positively how humanity and hospitality can be winning values – and how hope can trump the fears stirred up by xenophobic populists. Hamamatsu is the first Japanese municipality to join the ICCs network. The city’s [Intercultural Center](#) offers, among other things, ‘global citizen’ training courses, sending speakers to schools and community centres to improve understanding of foreigners living in Japan and Japanese who have lived abroad.

Malta has periodically been the arrival land of refugees crossing the Mediterranean. Valletta, the capital, is keen to put itself on the wider Mediterranean map and its [intercultural strategy](#) has a large horizon: ‘Valletta has the potential to change the terms of debate on “foreigners” in Malta, which is currently framed by defensive fears in response to global events in the neighbouring region, and economic problems across Europe, towards a valorisation of cultural diversity, managed in an intercultural fashion, and a more outward-looking perspective on the wider Mediterranean region. In and through this strategy, stakeholders in Valletta will develop and support best practices to make this a reality.’

The Council of Europe [White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue](#) defined integration as ‘a two-sided process’. This made clear that the onus of integration does thus not lie entirely with the newcomer, as against the host society, while at the same recognising the importance of individual agency. Precisely because they may have been severely victimised in their country of origin or during their flight, refugees need to feel a sense of positive control over their lives – not just that they are passive recipients of welfare (or, worse, of abuse) in the place they wish now to call home.

Municipal approaches to integration therefore need to work with individual refugees and their associations, not *for* them. Across the Intercultural Cities network, a clear lesson has been that municipalities will perform much better in this arena if they work in partnership with civil society organisations, especially members of minority associations. This is a key rationale of the co-ordination office for refugees established by Neukölln, liaising with the flotilla of NGOs and volunteers active in this arena.

Tailored approach, decentralisation and power sharing are the basis of the [SPRAR](#) experience in Italy. Local authorities have to partner with local NGOs to access the governmental funds to support integration projects for refugees. The central government has accepted that local authorities and partners know better the territory and its specificities in terms of labour market, needs and potential. The aim of the programme is to create connections between the newcomers and their new territory, by leveraging on the support of local NGOs. Each beneficiary discuss a personalised path and sign an agreement with the welcoming municipalities including goals and aspirations, the modality of supports and indicators to evaluate the progression wishing the objectives set.

Municipalities can and should, of course, work together for mutual benefit and information sharing – that is the driving rationale of the ICCs network. And, in the face of the reluctance of a number of European states to meet their obligations under the Refugee Convention, several cities have stepped up to form a 'coalition of the willing'. The ['Solidarity Cities'](#) network was launched in October 2016 during a EUROCITIES meeting in Athens, at the initiative of its mayor, Georgios Kaminis, with the support of Amsterdam, Barcelona, Gdansk, Ghent, Leipzig and Stockholm, among others.

The mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, said: "Where are our European values of solidarity, humanity and dignity when it comes to the refugee crisis? The response at national and EU level is clearly not enough, but cities have stepped up." And it is now clear there is much good practice on which those who show the political will can firmly base well-meaning interventions.

Conclusions and recommendations:

- ✓ Consider refugees not only as vulnerable subjects to whom guarantee protection, but also as active citizens able to use their capacities, competences and talent to enhance and relaunch the territories they are living in
- ✓ Work with individual refugees, not for them
- ✓ Engage in active communication with the public, address fears and make the case for the diversity advantage by showcasing successful examples of integration
- ✓ Support the creation of an “ambassador” network of refugees and create space for them to address fears of the community
- ✓ When the situation and needs of refugees do not differ structurally from those of the broader community, include them in the general service. Avoid creating parallel services that might lead to ghettonisation and to the spread of rumours.
- ✓ Involve refugees in designing policies and strategies
- ✓ Support insertion in the labour market as soon as possible
- ✓ Implement/support actions to remove language/qualification barriers
- ✓ Set up/support business incubators (especially in the form of diversity connectors) that enhance the potential of refugee-led enterprise and innovation
- ✓ Take into consideration that alternative activities, beside employment, can ensure community inclusion
- ✓ Support the creation of personal relationship between host community and newcomers
- ✓ Use a tailored approach
- ✓ Work in cooperation with local NGOs and other groups of civil society
- ✓ Ensure long-term vision by designing a comprehensive strategy