134th PLENARY SESSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- WEDNESDAY 10 APRIL – THURSDAY 11 APRIL 2019 -

ITEM 4

DEBATE ON

LAUNCH OF THE "CITIES AND REGIONS FOR INTEGRATION" INITIATIVE: WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EUROPE

Submitted by the secretary-general

BACKGROUND NOTE
MEMO FOR CoR MEMBERS
134th PLENARY SESSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

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Debate on
Launch of the "Cities and Regions for Integration" initiative: Working Together Towards a More Inclusive Europe

1. Cities and Regions for Integration initiative

The overarching aim of this new CoR initiative, to be implemented in cooperation with the European Commission and a number of European associations (Eurocities, CEMR, CPMR and AER), is to step up efforts to improve the integration of migrants and to present a positive narrative of solidarity, showcasing the potential benefits of the integration of migrants in EU cities, towns and rural areas, and the political, social and economic costs of failed integration. The initiative will bring together mayors and other local and regional politicians (CoR members and non-members) to promote diversity as an added value to building inclusive cities and ensuring social cohesion.

The specific objectives of the integration initiative are to:

- Provide a political platform for cities and regions to develop and promote proposals for EU policies and funding for the integration of migrants, addressed to the EU financing and decision-making institutions (European Parliament, Council, and European Commission).
- Share good practices from local policies and initiatives in the area of integration of migrants (third country nationals), as implemented by local and regional stakeholders, such as policies linked to skills and work opportunities (access to labour market, vocational training), education (access to schooling, intensive local language learning, inter-cultural exchange), initiatives towards unaccompanied minors, and partnerships with civil society, etc.
- Promote peer learning, especially linking cities that have more experience with cities and towns that have only recently begun to receive migrants. The initiative is addressed in particular to small and medium-sized cities and rural administrations, which are willing to integrate migrants but lack the experience and tools in their existing structures and networks.
- Share information on European funding for integration support (AMIF and future AMF, ESF+ and other funds for regional development including targets for the integration of migrants).
- Develop a positive narrative and positive examples/solutions for integration policies and counter disinformation, stressing that Europe can be stronger thanks to its diversity.
- Collect data on good experience and present it in an interactive map.

The initiative can be joined by interested cities and regions simply by filling in a short questionnaire: https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/IntegrationInitiative.
The Initiative will be implemented in collaboration with European territorial associations (CEMR, Eurocities, AER, CPMR) and national associations of local and regional authorities, as well as DG REGIO and DG HOME. Furthermore, an event within the framework of the Initiative will take place in June, co-organised in partnership with the OECD, the Council of Europe Development Bank and the International Catholic Migration Commission. Also during the European Week of Cities and Regions in October, a workshop focusing on integration in small and medium-sized cities will be organised.

2. **Debate – speakers and integration policies in their cities and region**

**Speakers:**
- **Dimitris Avramopoulos**, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship
- **Jacek Sutryk**, Mayor of Wrocław, Poland
- **Valeria Mancinelli**, Mayor of Ancona, Italy
- **Annika Tännström**, President of the Regional Council, Västra Götaland region, Sweden

**Jacek Sutryk** was elected Mayor of Wrocław in November 2018. He graduated in sociology from the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Wrocław and was awarded his PhD by the Collegium of Socio-Economics at SGH Warsaw School of Economics. After completing his studies, he assumed the post of director of the Warsaw-based WRZOS Association, an NGO representing interests of socially marginalised people facing the threat of exclusion from society. Since 2007 he has worked at the Wrocław City Council. From November 2011 and until his election as Mayor he held the position of director for social affairs, supervising the city's cultural institutions, sports and recreation centres, as well as medical and social service facilities.

**Valeria Mancinelli**, who was awarded the World Mayor prize for 2018, was elected Mayor of Ancona in June 2013 and re-confirmed for a second term on 25 June 2018. She is a lawyer by profession, specialising in administrative law. As mayor, she has focussed on practical solutions and on an honest relationship with residents. She was instrumental in reviving the declining shipbuilding sector and other manufacturing enterprises. Mayor Mancinelli also focuses on the challenges of integrating newcomers to Ancona. Around 13% of the city's residents are from outside Italy. "Many foreign communities are concentrated in two of the city's neighbourhoods. There is no denying that some tension exists and that integration is a long and far from easy process. But a new model of community will be built over time."

**Annika Tännström**, President of the Regional Parliament of Västra Götaland Region since the elections in 2018, has been a member of the parliament since 2002 and was a member of the Regional Board of Västra Götaland Region between 2006 and 2018. She has a long history of political remits in the healthcare sector, such as Member of the Board of Sahlgrenska University Hospital 2010-2018, Vice President of Svensk Luftambulans/Swedish Air ambulance (helicopters) 2015-2018 and Vice President of Svenskt Ambulansflyg/Joint Commission of County Councils for Swedish Air Ambulance (fixed wings) 2016. In the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and
Regions (SALAR), Ms Tännström holds the position of Vice President of the International Committee

Wrocław

Wrocław's official integration policy is based on the Strategy of Intercultural Dialogue adopted in 2018 and on the vision of a city as "a community of people whose inhabitants live in mutual respect regardless of their origin, cultural distinctness, language or religion (...)"). It takes account of local specificities and is implemented in cooperation with members of migrant communities and local experts and organisations. The strategy (2018-2022) includes 25 operational goals and 142 tasks in four areas (education, integration, safety and cooperation), reflecting the city's main values, its multicultural tradition and its reputation as an economically developed academic city inhabited by people of different nationalities.

More information can be found at: https://www.wielokultury.wroclaw.pl/en/homepage/.


Ancona

Ancona has been focusing on improving its ability to meet the reception and integration needs of all citizens, and in particular of those from third countries. Active participation of all citizens is one of the Municipal Administration of Ancona's missions. The city has focused on improving the collaboration among the public administration, private entities (Confcraft, Confindustria, etc.) and the third sector with a view to creating synergies instead of competition. The city involves the private and the third sector through "co-planning tables" in the design phase of initiatives and services and in the monitoring and checking phases. As a result of this approach, the year 2018 saw the reopening of the Immigrant Service Centre, managing relations with immigrant associations, and a gradual increase in the participation of these associations in public life. Civic volunteering as a free service for the city is also supported, in particular in the maintenance sector (urban decor and green spaces), culture, the social area and communication. 30% of the active participants are foreigners. Information on civic volunteering can be found at: https://www.comune.ancona.gov.it/ankonline/cose-il-volontariato-civico/.

Language and civic education courses

Language knowledge is an essential element in the integration process. Among other activities, Ancona participates in the ICAM (Italiano Cantiere Aperto Marche) project, providing literacy, language and civic education courses. The objective has been to involve an adequate number of immigrants, the attention being focused on the Bengali Community (47% of participants), the second foreign community in Ancona, and especially on Bengali women who have more difficulty in integrating (their attendance was possible thanks to the babysitting service provided).

Improvement of first and second reception and labour market inclusion

Since 2018, Ancona has been focusing on solving issues resulting from the fact that the reception system is split into two levels governed by different authorities: Prefectures and Ministry of Interior for first reception – CAS or Extraordinary Reception Centres – and local authorities in cooperation with the third sector for second reception (formerly SPRAR system, with has been recently replaced by the controversial SIPROIMI, taking access to many integration-related services away from asylum seekers). Ancona has been trying to overcome this through periodic meetings and data exchange with
a view to better managing reception places and helping vulnerable people and those who are not independent.

Ancona is also involved in a network of municipalities managing integrated reception projects that go beyond the welfare perspective and provide assistance and guidance on building individual socio-work placement paths. The city also provides professional training courses and work placement services, including training on workers’ rights and duties and workplace safety.

**Västra Götaland**

Refugees and migrants are a shared responsibility between municipalities and the national government. Västra Götaland regional authority is responsible for public health, public transport and regional development. The region sees integration as an important aspect of regional development, so integration action is funded from the Regional Development Fund and the Social Fund. Among other things, the region coordinates integration initiatives for refugees working in the priority sectors, such as food and green industries (incl. the "Future Kitchen"). It has also focused on providing further education to immigrants with work experience in healthcare, which has resulted in improvements in the quality of healthcare for citizens.

Västra Götaland is coordinator within the Fast track integration in European regions (FIER) programme funded by the EaSI fund. Thanks to this project validation and competence assessment has been introduced to skills development programmes for migrants and refugees, as well as new formats for language courses combined with work experience.

3. **Possible topics and questions for the debate**

**Multi-level framework for integration policies**

Responsibility for integration policies across the different levels of government varies substantially across the EU. This is due to the cross-cutting nature of this policy area (involving issues as diverse as housing, health services, language courses, education, recognition of acquired skills and competences, labour market integration and so on), which also adds complexity to the coordination and coherent implementation of the different measures and policies across sectors and governance levels.

Integration policies are primarily implemented and deliver results at the local level, and local representatives know their towns and cities, local populations and businesses and know where the best opportunities are. Regional (or metropolitan) authorities – apart from their primary competences – can also better coordinate policies and the provision of services to migrants and refugees across their areas and play the role of mediators with the national and EU levels who set the general rules and the legal framework.

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1. **Irregular migration and provision of services to irregular migrants** to cover their basic needs is a special chapter of multi-level governance in migration and integration policies. While EU and Member State policies on irregular migration often aim to discourage irregular migrants from staying by marginalising them and excluding them from both the labour market and basic social and health services provision, local authorities cannot ignore them and must respond to their presence in their areas. Local and regional authorities in Europe have adopted different approaches and solutions, ranging from moving them away to other areas to recognising their vulnerability and providing them with access to basic health, education, shelter and other services. As a consequence, municipalities often struggle to find a balance between the need to respect national immigration rules and international and other legal obligations related to human (socio-economic) rights (requiring inclusive measures as opposed to the national immigration rules). The inclusive approach is therefore not always straightforward and local authorities are often bound to look for innovative, sometimes unofficial ways to provide a service without breaching national rules.

Based on: The challenge of responding to irregular immigration: European, national and local policies addressing the arrival and stay of irregular migrants in the European Union, Nicola Delvino, Autumn Academy 2017, Global Exchange on Migration and diversity, University of Oxford.
Strengthened communication, cooperation and connectivity between the metropolises and smaller towns and municipalities in rural areas/regions can bring a more holistic approach to integration policies across areas and increase their efficiency. It can also contribute to achieving a more balanced geographical presence of newcomers, easing the "migration burden" in large cities and metropolises\(^2\) and, at the same time, help smaller municipalities that are losing their populations to bigger population centres to reverse this trend. The right policies and targeted services can help to attract new inhabitants to take up vacant jobs and houses and bring new life to these localities.

- **How can the local, metropolitan and the regional levels better cooperate to ensure a smoother and more complete integration of migrants, a more efficient provision of services and possibly a better geographical balance of migrants and refugees across geographical areas?**
- **Do you have relevant examples of good practice of such cooperation from your region or city?**
- **What can the EU level do to facilitate this cooperation?**

4. **Overview of the relevant CoR opinions**

**Opinion on the Action plan on the integration of third country nationals\(^3\)**, rapporteur Karl Vanlouwe (BE/EA), adopted on 8 December 2016; CDR 4438/2016

Key points:

- local and regional authorities are confronted most directly with the challenges and opportunities of integration;
- integration is a two-way process that should form part of the framework of rights and obligations for the third country national newcomer and the host society, both of which have to shoulder their responsibilities;
- the social and economic costs of the failure to integrate third country nationals may well exceed the investments needed in integration policy and the potential which results from this;
- integration policy should focus more on the considerable diversity that exists within the various third country nationals’ groups and their different needs; a good integration policy is based on tailor-made solutions, not a one-size-fits-all approach.
- European society is based on fundamental norms and values such as democracy, the rule of law, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, equality between men and women, human rights, solidarity and tolerance; if integration is to be successful, both third country nationals and the host society must understand and accept these European norms and values. Integration policy should also cover civic integration and community-building;
- knowledge of the language of the host country is vital in order to be able to integrate successfully; systems should be set up, possibly based on internships, as well as

\(^2\) "Nearly two thirds of migrants settle in mostly metropolitan, densely populated regions, with capital-city regions recording the highest population shares of migrants in the majority of OECD countries. While migrants tend to concentrate in urban areas, however, asylum seekers are more spread across urban-rural areas than are the rest of the resident population.” Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees: A territorial perspective on migrant and refugees integration, OECD, April 2018.

\(^3\) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals – COM(2016) 377 final.
advisory services and legal assistance, enabling third country nationals to gain access to the labour market as quickly as possible;

- the Commission should limit excessive administrative complexity and bureaucracy with regard to the monitoring mechanisms of the different European funds that are used for integration projects.