

# **From global to local:** Migration as an opportunity for sustainable cities and communities

DECEMBER 2019

**CASE STUDY  
REPORT**





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The publication is part of the three-year project Faces of Migration, SDGs and Migration – Multipliers and Journalists Addressing Decision Makers and Citizens, funded by the European Commission. It aims to raise public awareness on the sustainable development goals, migration and the relationship between them.

**The following organisations are involved in the Faces of Migration project which is managed by Diakonie ECCB:**

**Global Call to Action Against Poverty (Belgium),  
Bulgarian Platform for International Development (Bulgaria),  
Federazione Organismi Cristiani Internazionale Volontario (Italy),  
ActionAid Hellas (Greece),  
Ambrela – Platform for Development Organisations (Slovakia),  
Povod (Slovenia).**



This project is funded by  
the European Union

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of ActionAid Hellas and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

This publication is part of the SDGs and Migration – Multipliers and Journalists Addressing Decision Makers and Citizens project which is realized in the framework of the Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) programme.

# FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL: MIGRATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

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The 2030 Agenda, along with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 sub-goals, have substituted the Millennium Development Goals that were adopted by 189 nations in 2000. Those had been an attempt to ensure that common development policies would be implemented at a global scale - based on a time frame that foresaw implementation by 2015 - in the purpose of tackling the famine, poverty and acute inequalities that plagued humanity. The goals set in 2000 never became anything more than a wish list. Instead, the gap between the rich and the poor increased, with more than 100 million people still going hungry and almost a quarter of the world population unable to gain access to sufficient food.

Faced with these challenges as well as the need to preserve environmental sustainability and establish international collaboration on development, on September 25, 2015, the global community devised the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by 193 nations, including Greece.

According to the new definitions, doubling as goals, **development is sustainable when it simultaneously promotes financial and social well-being and environmental protection, and results in improving the standard of living of people, wherever they are.** The constantly increasing mobility of people, both within countries and across borders, in search of better living conditions, combined with the rise in refugee flows due to wars, persecution, oppression, famine, under-nutrition and climate change, can only be construed as a factor decisively affecting the sustainable development of nations around the globe. Such mobility entails population concentration in specific areas, which over time grow unable to provide sufficient resources to fully meet the population's needs - an outcome that directly impacts on and largely determines their degree of sustainability.

SDGs have an **implementation time frame by 2030 and cover a broad range of targets** linked to specific thematic policies: zero poverty and hunger eradication, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, access to clean water, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, innovation encouragement, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, tackling climate change, protecting marine resources and land ecosystems, peace, justice and strengthening institutions and partnerships between nations for SDG implementation.



Further reinforcing the 2030 Agenda key message that «**no one must be left behind**», 8 out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are either directly or indirectly linked to migration.

- One of them is **Goal 4 on ensuring that all people have access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities**, so as to promote sustainable development, gender equality, human rights, a culture of peace and diversity and global citizenship education, mobile populations included.
- Moreover, **Goal 5 on gender equality** encompasses a series of actions aiming at either positive measure-taking in order to boost women participation in various facets of social, financial and political life or policy adoption in order to eradicate all forms of violence and sexual exploitation or harmful practices, such as early marriage or female genital mutilation: reasons that force women and girls into fleeing their countries.
- **Goal 8 on access to work** upholds the eradication of child and forced labour and the protection of labour rights. It makes special reference to people in precarious employment, migrant workers and in particular women migrants.
- Further down, **Goal 10 on reducing inequality** promotes the social and economic inclusion of all, irrespective of sex, race, religion, disability or ethnicity, origin and advocates the adoption of initiatives and policies to facilitate safe and smooth migration and mobility of people.
- As for **Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities**, it promotes measures aimed at ensuring access of all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and at upgrading slums.
- With a view to fulfilling **Goal 16 on peace and social justice**, the following are promoted: an end to all abuse, exploitation and trafficking and to any violence inflicted on children; equal access to justice for all; providing a legal identity for all, including migrants and refugees.



- Last, **Goal 17 on global partnership** underlines the need to support least developed countries, so that they can collect and provide reliable and high-quality analytical data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in the corresponding national contexts.

## Sustainable cities & Migration

Despite efforts to raise obstacles and build up literal or metaphorical walls between states, so as to deter migration, it is cities and local communities that step up and provide collaboration examples on implementing policies that seek to improve the socio-economic living conditions of their inhabitants. City and local community networks have at times been established - they gave rise to cooperation initiatives and exchanges of good practices regarding thematic axes of common interest, advancing economic, cultural, educational and social ties.

Agenda 2030 acknowledges migration's positive impact on inclusive wealth production, as well as on sustainable development. It further acknowledges that international migration is a multi-dimensional reality of the utmost importance for the development of all countries of origin, transit and destination, requiring a cohesive and comprehensive response.

**Goal 11 is about the resilience of communities hosting refugees, especially in developing countries.** City resilience encompasses the entire set of measures ensuring that in the event of a natural (e.g. flooding) or social (such as population inflows or extreme poverty) emergency cities manage to preserve their cohesion and their consistency.

City sustainability doesn't solely depend on implementing policies regarding urban and peri-urban areas, improving infrastructure or strengthening mechanisms of response to natural disasters. It also depends on proper planning, i.e. planning that actively incorporates citizens and everyday living in the community. **An important challenge that cities are faced with nowadays is the large population concentration in urban centres and, as a result, housing needs, infrastructure and basic services cannot be adequately met.** Be it factual or simply notional, this challenge seems to augment with each arrival of migrant and refugee populations, the needs of which naturally vary. In the diverse environments being forged inside large urban centres, meeting needs, communication and inclusion in host communities, the local labour market and social life are but some of the targets that are easier to detect than to attain.

For inclusion in the local everyday life to take place, **holistic solutions are required, ones that foster city resilience by taking into account the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of all the factors present and shaping a new reality.** More specifically, it calls for the cooperation of all public stakeholders as well as for the invaluable contribution and experience of civil society. Without doubt, the outcome of actions undertaken with a view to strengthen city resilience will have a multiplier effect. The benefit for local communities, though certain to be visible in the short-term, will primarily be long-term, even if the mobile populations do not consider the country and city of stay as their final destination, but rather as an interim stopover along their migratory path.

## Main Definitions

**Social inclusion:** it is the process by which a society or system allows its members to hold positions and to take on roles, within the framework of social organization, in order for all members to contribute to a social system's functioning. Inclusion of individuals shows that society's elements maintain their cohesion, as well as the process in which different ethnicities have strong social, economic and political ties. (*Abercrombie & Hill & Turner, 1988*)

**Social integration:** it is the process that defines the dynamic course towards a desirable situation as well as the situation that defines the lack of discrimination between comparable native and non-native groups in the country of reception. (*Amitsis & Lazaridi, 2001*)

**Assimilation:** it is the process destined to result in an appropriation of the host society's cultural model. It is considered a unidimensional, one-way process, given that the dominant culture's cultural identity is imposed on migrants, who are forced to abandon their own culture. (*Schnapper, 2008*)

**Absorption:** a term that is inappropriate for people. It is primarily used in finance (e.g. absorption of funds).

**Intersectionality:** it is the way with which we perceive the issue of women's discrimination, adding to it the dimensions of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age.

**Gender:** other than the biological sex, this concept also refers to the social gender as linked to social roles.

**Multiple vulnerability:** exposure to multiple threats because of someone's gender (human trafficking, sexual exploitation, abuse, single parenthood, threatened pregnancy, etc.).

**Multiculturalism:** it can be construed as the coexistence, within a society, of various social groups bearing different national, ethnic and cultural characteristics. It denotes acceptance of diversity and equal recognition of the differing national and religious groups.

## Obstacles that migrant and refugee women face

Although investing in refugee and migrant women inclusion would have a positive multiplier effect on local communities, the numerous obstacles that women are faced with render the inclusion process no easy task. It is a fact that on an international scale women and girls make up almost half the migrant & refugee population. In Greece, 23.3% of the refugee population consists of women, many of who have been subjected to violence, be it in their countries of origin, during their journey or even after their arrival and during their stay in Greece. Their gender is the primary reason why migrant and refugee women are subjected to violence; and it is the first in a series of obstacles that they must overcome, as it can take on many forms and be inflicted upon them by different individuals along the journey, both by familiar persons and strangers.

Migrant and refugee women comprise 71% of human trafficking victims. During their journey, they often fall prey to abuse and sexual violence, same as during their stay in refugee camps or while they are homeless.

In their countries of origin, they are often victims of rape, honor crimes and domestic violence, with many of them having been forced into matrimony or married off at an early age and others having undergone the atrocity of genital mutilation. **Key patterns of domestic violence are the same in both the local and the refugee populations. The sole difference lies in the way that the effects of violence become magnified when a woman is a refugee: the lack of a family and/or supportive environment is extreme, financial dependency is total, uncertainty over the future is absolute.**

While travelling, those who are pregnant must also deal with no access to health structures or family planning services. Those who are going through an unwanted pregnancy - quite often a by-product of rape - do not interrupt their pregnancy, either because they are truly unable to do so or for other reasons.

Furthermore, the various obstacles that they are faced with for being women and of migrant origin give rise to multiple discrimination. As a matter of fact, where **there are specific outlets to discrimination in the framework of everyday life**, racist attacks have been both observed and denounced within the public domain, at their workplace, in their access to education or even their access to health services.

Moreover, many times bureaucratic procedures aggravate pre-existing disparities between spouses (for example, married couple asylum applications are assessed together). This is particularly true for women who seek a divorce or have fallen victim to violence from their husbands and wish for their asylum petition to be assessed separately. In addition to all that, they have limited access to basic knowledge on reproductive health, violence and their rights in the country of their reception.

Last, it is made particularly difficult for them to gain access to the labour market and to learn the local language, despite the fact that both steps are fundamental to inclusion. Instead, migrant and refugee women - much like the local female population - often assume family and childcare responsibilities, which do not allow them to efficiently participate in the integration process. **As a result, their employment ratings are worse than those of migrant men and native-born women.** They often have limited language proficiency and do not benefit as frequently from skills assessment, re-training measures and other integration programs. Women arriving as asylum seekers may also have to spend long, unproductive and discouraging waiting periods before having a clear opportunity to stay (and work), thus wasting valuable time that could have allowed for early integration. Asylum adds a further element of vulnerability, as refugees generally have worse integration outcomes (e.g in the labour market) than migrants arriving through other channels.

(Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/feature/integration-of-migrant-women>)

## Melissa Network

Melissa is a network for migrant and refugee women living in Greece. Its purpose is to build up and strengthen ties and to construct bridges of communication with the hosting community. Melissa Network was founded in 2014 and has members women from more than 45 countries that live, work and are active in Greece. It aims to support and empower women refugees and migrants and to promote their active participation in the society.

### Hana:

“I started working for Melissa in 2016. I like it a lot, because I have always enjoyed helping, even as a child.”

Anna was born and raised in Chernivtsi, Ukraine, a multicultural city brimming with Russian, Romanian, Moldavian, Jewish and Polish inhabitants, among others. She never knew her Russian father and - at 15 years old - went to live with her grandmother, as her mother emigrated to Greece to seek a better future. Anna married her husband when she was 19. She studied Finance at the city University and worked for nine years at the Regional Statistics Authority in Chernivtsi. Her salary was very low, barely enough to pay for essentials.

When her grandmother also left for Greece and her husband lost his job, they decided to follow her and reunite with Anna's family. They came to Greece in April, 2005. Her husband got a job as a carpenter, while she helped out her mother who had opened up a cheese pie shop at Piraeus. Due to the economic crisis, the shop closed in 2010. From then on, she moved from one job to another.

When she first came to Greece, Anna faced numerous difficulties, the hardest being while she was pregnant to her third child. Despite the hardships, Anna and her husband now have three healthy children: her oldest son is a student at a public Vocational Education Institute and her middle son is doing great at school.

Anna got her first steady job at the Melissa Network and since 2016, she has been working there, supporting the daily operation of the daily centre. All in all, Anna is particularly active in defending and promoting migrant and refugee women rights and coordinates the Club of Ukrainian Women in Greece.

Anna has many interests: among other things, she loves to cook, since the ritual of preparing food brings back beautiful memories of happy family gatherings.



## The role of Municipalities and the Civil Society

For social inclusion to be successful, **the creation of full-time employment opportunities for third-country citizens should incorporate the hosting community, whose needs and abilities must serve as a point of reference for the actions of all parties involved.** It is equally important to involve communities in joint action. As such, it is evident that **Municipalities and Regions should play a pivotal role in the shaping and implementing of migrant and refugee population policies, that can start from affecting local communities and spread out to ultimately inscribe themselves to a country's broader inclusion policy.** Local authorities are better aware of locally prevailing conditions, which is important seeing as such populations primarily tend to live, work, be active and form bonds with others on a local scale.

Local and regional authorities are involved in all the stages of migrant and refugee men & women reception and integration: from initial reception to housing and from organizing to activating all pertinent services. **At the same time, given that inclusion is a two-way street, any measures taken need to sufficiently address the needs of both the migrant & refugee and the native-born populations.** This is particularly important for nurturing a feeling of acceptance on behalf of the native-born towards incoming foreigners, as well as for preserving social cohesion and peace, especially in communities that are already plagued by the consequences of prolonged economic crises and thus provide little to no employment opportunities.

It is up to municipal authorities and other local stakeholders to encourage, among other things, refugee and migrant people to partake in local activities and become community members by participating in organisations and social bodies. **Inclusion measures need to be seen as an investment in human development, destined to bear fruit in the long run, by boosting economic growth, creating job openings and ensuring social cohesion.** Migrants and refugees, both men and women, can significantly contribute to the economic growth of local communities if given access to the local labour market and entrepreneurship initiatives. In addition, they are the link between local communities and international happenings, their social and cultural capital acting as a significant asset to the progress of these communities.

**Cooperation between municipalities and civil society organisations is key, both for the stages of first reception and integration of migrants and refugees and for the native-born population.** When designing reception and integration actions, it is imperative to include civil society organisations early-on. Further, men and women volunteers can play a decisive part by becoming the link that connects public administration and citizens. Their dedication to their work and pursuit and their vested participation in various activities can significantly advance refugee and migrant acceptance in a community and help eradicate stereotypes related to differing cultures.

What is more, municipalities possess a host of administrative services and structures dealing with the short- and long-term care of vulnerable population groups. It is essential to further mobilise these services, so that they can equally address refugees and migrants. Special focus needs to be given to housing, to setting up, organising and operating accommodation centres and to providing services related to language learning, child & youth care and education, vocational training and facilitation of access to the labour market. Services that provide support and empowerment to the female population should include migrant and refugee women in their line of action and remove any hurdles to their optimal integration. **Deputy mayor offices of Social Policy, domestic violence victim support and empowerment structures, as well as employed and unemployed women and mother support services, they all have the ability to embrace and involve migrant and refugee women, taking into account their specificity, diversity and high degree of vulnerability.**

## Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR)

In 2017, the Athens City Hall undertook the initiative to establish a central coordination body, whose action would help shape a strategy meant to improve services provided to migrants and refugees and to ensure their seamless and optimal inclusion in life in the city. Thanks also to the financial support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the Athens Partnership (comprising the Municipality of Athens and private institutions), this led to the creation of the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR). The center began its operation as part of the actions released by the Deputy Mayor Office for Migrants and Refugees and - despite the structural changes that took place following the 2019 municipal and regional elections - remains an internationally established coordination hub for the exchange of good practices and know-how between local and international NGOs, world organizations, public bodies and service departments of the City of Athens.

The goal of this center is the joint creation of tools and the implementation of actions promoting migrant and refugee integration in the city's everyday life. In this light, a refugee and migrant integration strategic plan has been drawn up, along with a blueprint for the development of a Crisis Preparedness, Coordination and Management Mechanism for increased flows in Athens, aimed at ensuring optimal coordination and timely response in the event of an emergency. **The Centre also promotes cooperation with other municipalities around Greece, for the purposes of exchanging experiences, tools and know-how.**

Presently, the center has more than 80 members, which engage in its action by means of more than 300 representatives. Six working committees convene on a regular basis - one of them specifically tackling the issue of refugee women and the gender-related dimension of the refugee crisis. Together, these committees identify needs and deficits in the fields of legal support, access to social and health services, education, housing and access to the labour market that are subsequently prioritized. All resulting conclusions and ensuing tools are disseminated to other municipalities across the country.

## The Bahar Project




In between June 2018 and March 2019, ACCMR organized three actions that used cooking as a vehicle in order to bring women from migrant communities in contact with other women communities that are active in Athens, with a view to facilitate the exchange of experiences and ideas. The “Bahar Project”, as these actions were collectively named, brought together women from the Nigerian, Afghan, Georgian and Ukrainian communities that, alongside Greek women who volunteer within the City of Athens, cooked together, recounted their stories and shared their experiences. Supported by ActionAid Hellas, the City of Athens, the Melissa Network of Migrant Women, and Almasar, an organization of both young people of migrant origin and Greek citizens, these actions were carried out under the auspices of the Migrant Integration Council of the City of Athens. Crowned with success, the “Bahar Project” endeavours enabled women of different origins and cultures, who all live in the same city, to meet and work together.

## Recommendations

Consequently, the dynamics and potential of refugee and migrant populations living in Athens and in Greece, can help forge cities of increased resilience and hence sustainability. The city needs to be in open dialogue with its inhabitants, allowing it to detect and promptly meet any and all emerging needs. The necessary “ingredients” for achieving all that has been described in the previous paragraphs comprise coordination between all parties involved, communication, use of updated tools and means for any approach adopted, extroversion aiming to comprehend what other cities are doing, and a firm emphasis on the future. On a practical level, the road to sustainable and inclusive cities, where migrant, refugee and native-born women all play an active role, can start as follows:

- By recording the needs and skills of migrants and refugees, under the prism of multiculturalism.
- By researching, identifying and recording the city’s resources (services provided per area, etc.) so as to match them to the needs of its populations.
- By strategically redesigning services provided, under the prism of multiculturalism and for the purposes of integration and of fostering communication between refugee & migrant and native-born populations.
- By organizing training and know-how dissemination actions with the participation of other cities and Civil Society organizations.

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