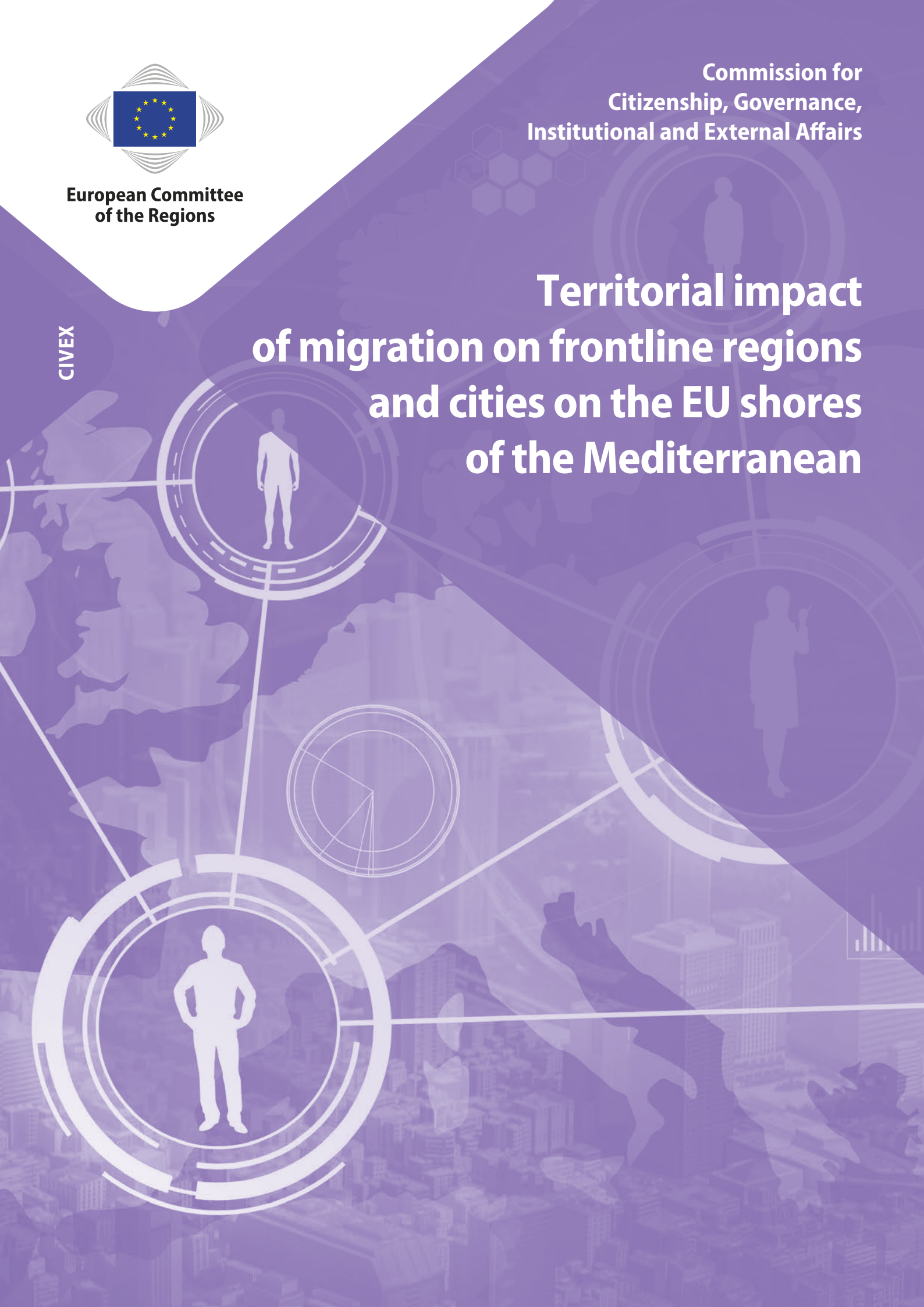
European Committee of the Regions

Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs

CIVEX

Territorial impact of migration on frontline regions and cities on the EU shores of the Mediterranean



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Abbreviations

AFM	Personal Tax Identification Number
AMIF	Asylum Migration and Integration Fund
AMKA	Social Security Number
CAS	Extraordinary Reception Centres
CELAV	Centro di Mediazione al Lavoro
CIVEX	Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ESTIA	Emergency Support to Integration & Accommodation
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
HRID	Human Rights and Integration Directorate
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LRAs	Local and Regional Authorities
MIICT	ICT Enabled Services for Migration
MLG	Multi-Level Governance
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Member States
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PON	National Operational Programme
REACT21	Refugee, Assistance, Collaboration, Thessaloniki
RoC	Republic of Cyprus
SAI	Reception and Integration System, formerly SIPROIMI/SPRAR
SAIER	Service for Immigrants, Emigrants and Refugees
SEM	Municipal Council for Integration of Migrants
SOAPI	Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan Instructions
SPRAR	Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati
TCN	Third-Country National
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WeMi	Il Welfare di Milano

1. Introduction, methodology and theoretical framework

Migration has had a strong impact on cities and regions throughout the European Union (EU), especially on the frontline member states (MS). As such, it has also been an area of interest for the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), which on 19 March 2021 adopted an opinion on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (CIVEX-VII/005). In the document, the CoR expressed concern that "the local and regional dimension has not been sufficiently taken into account [in the Pact] and that the countries on the EU's external borders are once again to have primary responsibility for arrival and registration"[1]. Furthermore, on 1 July 2021, the CoR adopted an opinion on the "Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean" (JOIN/2021/2 final)[2].

While highlighting the inefficiency of the measures adopted by the EU in relation to migration, the document stressed the fact that "in the absence of further joint instruments at European level, including an appropriate distribution mechanism to relocate migrants, the burden of managing the migrant emergency falls primarily on the local and regional authorities of the European countries on the front line, in particular the border regions and communities in the south of the EU, which are under greater pressure from migratory flows in the Mediterranean"[3].

Against this background, the aim of the present study is threefold. First, it provides information on the recent (2020-2021) impact of migration flows via Mediterranean routes on the EU frontline regions and cities. Second, it takes a closer look at the local integration strategies developed in these frontline regions and cities which have been transforming the potential of migratory flows into social and economic gains benefitting both the host community and the third-country nationals (TCNs). To this end, five case studies are being presented as part of the study: Barcelona (Spain), Milan (Italy), Thessaloniki (Greece), Nicosia District (Cyprus), and the South East Region of Malta. Last but not least, the study also serves as a source of information for the CoR's Annual Regional and Local Barometer.

[1] The opinion might be accessed here: https://cor.europa.eu/pl/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opid=CDR-4843-2020.
[2] The opinion might be accessed here: https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opId=CDR-1315-2021.
[3] Ibidem.

To achieve the objectives of the study, the research team applied a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. First, the team conducted desk research of primary and secondary sources (e.g., media sources, academic and expert literature, policy documents of Local and Regional Authorities [LRAs] and databases and websites, including those relating to relevant projects implemented by LRAs). Second, our findings have been informed by interviews with stakeholders which included representatives of relevant LRAs as well as international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and charities involved in the reception and integration of migrants in the cities and regions selected for the case studies.

Regarding the time frame of the study, it has to be noted that the estimated number of migrants[4] who irregularly entered the territory of the EU in 2020 declined compared to 2019 (around 124,000[5] and over 139,000[6] detections, respectively). The main reason behind this change was the COVID-19 pandemic and the related international, transborder, and internal movement restrictions introduced by the EU and its MS[7] as well as the majority of migrants' countries of origin and transit territories. In 2021, however, the number of irregular border crossings at the EU's external borders has risen significantly – during the first five months of 2021 the number of detections reached over 47,100, which is 47% more than the total number from the same period a year ago, according to Frontex[8]. The majority of migrants reach the EU shores via the Western Mediterranean, Central Mediterranean, and Eastern Mediterranean routes (72,278 irregular arrivals in 2020, 58% of the total number[9]).

[4] For definitions of the key terms used in this study please consult Annex 2.
[5] Frontex, Irregular migration into EU last year lowest since 2013 due to COVID-19, 8.01.2021. Available at: https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/irregular-migration-into-eu-last-year-lowest-since-2013-due-to-covid-19-j34zp2.
[6] Frontex, FLASH REPORT – Irregular migration into EU at lowest level since 2013, 8.01.2020. Available at: https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/flash-report-irregular-migration-into-eu-at-lowest-level-since-2013-n5pHiA.
[7] See for example: Nasar Meer, Leslie Villegas, The impact of COVID-19 on Global Migration, 27 May 2020. Available at: https://www.glimer.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Global-Migration-Policies-and-COVID-19.pdf.
[8] Frontex, Situation at EU external borders – Detections rise from record lows a year ago, 22.06.2021. Available at: https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/situation-at-eu-external-borders-detections-rise-from-record-lows-a-year-ago-AvxIbX.
[9] Excluding arrivals to Canary Islands. Source: please consult footnote no 5.

The pandemic has made the already unfavourable climate for displaced migrants worse, amplifying the persisting challenges and creating new ones. Prior to 2020, regions and cities in the frontline MS held the main responsibility for arrival and integration[10]. The failure to enforce the principle of burden sharing among the EU MS resulted in LRAs being forced to innovate in managing migration flows[11]. For some of them, the housing and accommodation of the newly arrived posed a critical challenge, which was further aggravated by the introduction of national quarantines in 2020 and 2021. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic tested the integration policies introduced by the LRAs. Providing migrant communities with adequate information, social services, and access to education are just few examples of areas in which local integration policies had to adjust. The CoR has been supporting LRAs in their integration efforts through such initiatives as the Cities and Regions for Integration of Migrants which provides a dedicated political platform for European mayors and regional leaders[12] as well as through organising various capacity building events[13]. The CoR has also established a partnership with the EC to increase cooperation and support to EU cities[14].

[10] Eurocities, Cities and Migrants. Implementing the Integrating Cities Charter, October 2018. Available at: https://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/3rd_Integrating_Cities_Report_October_2018_FINAL.pdf

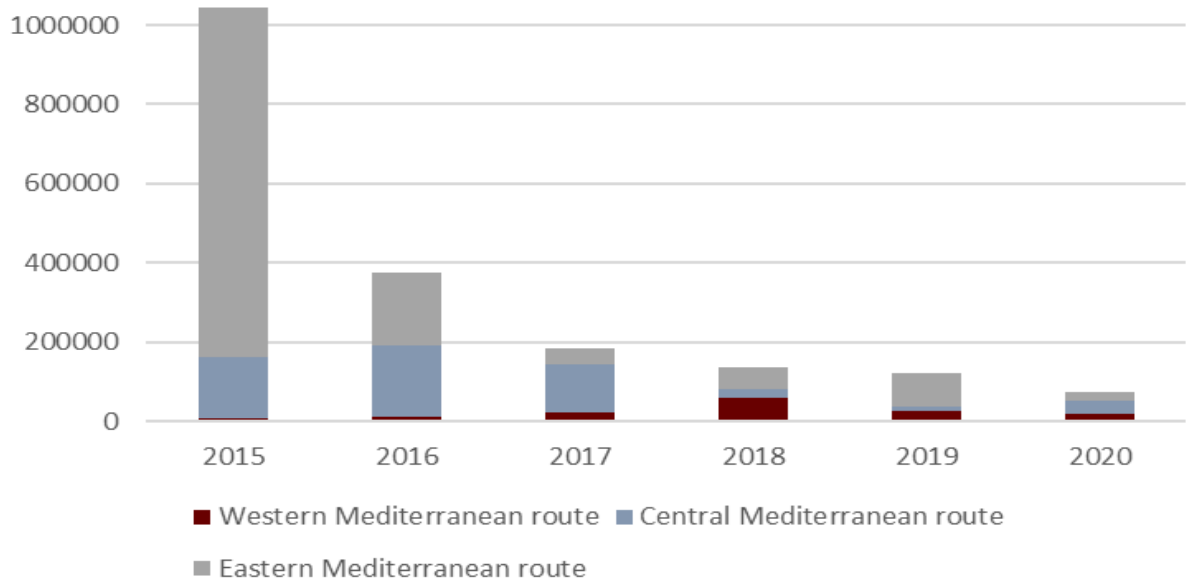
[11] Nasar Meer, Claudio Dimaio, Emma Hill, Maria Angeli, Klara Oberg, Henrik Emilsson (2021). Governing displaced migration in Europe: housing and the role of the "local". Comparative Migration Studies 9:1. Available at: https://comparativemigrationstudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40878-020-00209-x.

[12] For more information, please go to: https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/cities-and-regions-for-integration.aspx.

[13] The workshop on "Setting Up a Local Integration Strategy – Stakeholder Involvement and Ownership" organised on 18 June 2021 might serve as an example of such initiatives. More on the workshop: https://cor.europa.eu/en/events/Pages/workshop-local-and-regional-authorities-setting-up-local-integration-strategy-stakeholder-involvement-ownership.aspx.

[14] For more information please go to: https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/Integration-of-migrants-partnership-for-EU-support-to-local-action.aspx.

Figure 1 Number of irregular border crossings via Western Mediterranean route, Central Mediterranean route and Eastern Mediterranean route in 2015-2020



Source: own elaboration on the basis of Frontex data

According to the Multi-Level Governance (MLG) framework[15] applied in this study, the role of governments is to provide LRAs with the necessary legal framework, policy tools, and infrastructure to implement reception and integration policies. LRAs have, however, a distinctive role to play in the design and implementation of integration policies on the local level. Despite the fact that they cannot address the limitations of the national level, LRAs can play an active role in receiving and integrating migrants and often do so even without national policies put in place, as exemplified by some of our case studies. This active role includes ensuring integration and social cohesion for the increased diversity of LRAs' residents and providing other vital urban infrastructure and services to meet the needs of the migrant population (e.g., affordable and social housing, quality education, and health services)[16]. Moreover, as migration and migrant integration policies have become increasingly dispersed over various levels of government[17], it becomes all the more crucial to effectively communicate the problems at different levels as regards migrant reception and integration. This

[15] Henrik Enderlein, Sonja Wälti, Michael Zürn (eds.), Handbook on Multi-level Governance. Edward Elgar Pub, 2010.
[16] World Economic Forum, Migration and Its Impact on Cities, October 2017. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/reports/migration-and-its-impact-on-cities.
[17] Peter Scholten, Rinus Penninx, The Multilevel Governance of Migration and Integration, in: Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas, Rinus Penninx (eds.), Integration Processes and Policies in Europe. Contexts, Levels and Actors, IMISCOE Research Series, 2016, p. 91. Available at: https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/28047/1001947.pdf?sequence=1#page=97.

should, in turn, increase the effectiveness of the interdependent political actions in a multi-level system[18].

The study consists of four main sections. Following the introduction, the selected afore-mentioned case studies are presented in the second part of the study. In the third section we indicate and describe the most pressing issues faced by the chosen EU frontline cities and regions as regards the reception and integration of migrants. Finally, the fourth part is dedicated to the presentation of conclusions and recommendations on strengthening the capacities and minimising the vulnerabilities of LRAs faced with migratory flows as well as designing and implementing effective and mutually beneficial local integration strategies.

[18] Peter Bußjäger, Christian Gsodam (eds.), Migration und Europäische Union: Multi-Level-Governance als Lösungsansatz, 2020, new academic press, Wien, Hamburg, pp. 13-14.

2. Case studies

2.1. Cyprus: Nicosia District

The Nicosia District, with an area of 2,710 km^2 and a population of 327,000, is the largest of the six districts of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC)[19]. Its urban centre is Nicosia, the capital city of the RoC. It is also the world's only divided capital – its northern part is controlled by the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The territories of the RoC and the TRNC are separated by the Green Line – a UN-controlled 180-kilometre-long buffer zone.

Most migrants arriving to the RoC cross its territory along the Green Line, entering the Nicosia District. Since 2020, a smaller proportion has been arriving to the RoC directly by boats, also as a result of the alleged push backs by the RoC to Turkey[20] and Lebanon since March 2020 and the country's 2020 agreement on readmission with Lebanon[21]. During the first months of 2021, however, an increase in irregular arrivals was noted (especially of Syrian nationals), either by sea or land through the Green Line.

Overall, the number of migrants arriving on the island has risen significantly in recent years[22]. According to some of our interviewees, the support received from other EU states to tackle problems arising from this situation is not sufficient and responsibility sharing should be obligatory. Currently, the RoC has the highest number of first-time asylum applications in the EU per capita and about 4% of its population is now made up of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. In 2020, a total of 7,094 applications for international protection were registered in the RoC; 147 refugee statuses were granted and 1,496 persons obtained subsidiary protection. Among the most numerous applicants were nationals of Syria (25%), India (15%), Cameroon (8%), Bangladesh (8%), and

[19] Please note that the numbers provided in this section relate to the RoC; access to exact numbers regarding the Nicosia District only is limited due to the design of statistical records.
[20] Also, to the TRNC. See: Nasar Meer, Emma Hill, Timothy Peace, Leslie Villegas, *Rethinking refuge in the time of COVID-19*, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Volume 44, 2021 – Issue 5: Themed Issue: Race and Ethnicity in Pandemic Times, pp. 864-876. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01419870.2020.1855359.
[21] Emma Wallis, *Deal with Lebanon makes seeking asylum in Cyprus more difficult*, InfoMigrants, 8.10.2020, https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/27809/deal-with-lebanon-makes-seeking-asylum-in-cyprus-more-difficult.
[22] https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2021/03/Cyprus_Fact_Sheet_MAR_2020.pdf

Pakistan (7%)[23]. Until 2019, the flows consisted mainly of Syrian migrants followed by East Asian nationalities (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan) and Georgians. According to the UN refugee agency UNHCR, around half a thousand irregular migrants have arrived in Cyprus over the first half of 2021[24].

This situation has had a profound impact on the state, its administrative units, and its municipalities, including Nicosia District and its settlements. On the one hand, they have been challenged with organising the reception of the newly arrived, on the other – with integrating those who had already been granted protection. These have been additionally amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the crucial points in reception is the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers, a service practically non-existent in the RoC. As part of the anti-pandemic measures and following a nationwide lockdown, asylum seekers living in independent accommodation were forced to move to the Pournara First Reception Centre in Kokkinotrimithia near Nicosia. As of April 2021, the Centre was still operating 60% above its capacity under deteriorating conditions, hosting some 1,600 people[25]. This, coupled with an arbitrary detention of asylum seekers in the camp, has resulted in riots, demonstrations, and hunger strikes already in 2020. Moreover, even as national COVID-19 restrictions were eased, residents of the camp were not allowed to leave[26]. Despite the difficulties with observing social distancing and limited access to hygiene facilities, COVID-19 infections did not spread in the camp.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the accommodation conditions of established migrants. As unemployment was rising and a housing crisis was unfolding, many were forced to find accommodation in inexpensive, overcrowded apartments in cities and rural areas. According to UNHCR, there are now cases of migrants living in severe destitution, for example in abandoned shops and offices in Nicosia and other cities, with no access to fresh water and fresh air, in unsanitary conditions, and with limited access to fresh supplies.

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[23] Asylum Service, http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/asylum/asylumservice.nsf/asylumservice18_en/asylumservice18_en?OpenDocument.

[24] Emma Wallis, *Sent back: 56 migrants were refused entry to Cyprus at the weekend*, 17.05.2021, InfoMigrants, https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/32269/sent-back-56-migrants-were-refused-entry-to-cyprus-at-the-weekend.

[25] https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Europe%20COVID-19%20update%20April%202021.pdf. Some 587 persons live in the main camp, 812 in quarantine spaces, and 261 in a tented area outside the camp due to space limitations in the main area.

[26] Catherine Bennett, 2020. *Migrants Forced to Stay in Cyprus Camp Despite Easing of Covid-19 Lockdown*. France 24, 26th May. Available at: https://observers.france24.com/en/20200526-cyprus-migrants-camp-pournara-covid-19.

Regarding employment, asylum seekers in Cyprus have restrained access to the labour market as they can be employed only in a limited number of occupations in agriculture, manufacturing, waste management, and other specific fields, and their contracts have to be approved by the Department of Labour. With the now observed shortages of workers in such sectors as hospitality, some of our interviewees argued for revising and expanding the list of occupations open to this category of migrants.

As pointed out during the interviews, migrants in Cyprus have limited opportunities to speak for themselves and they lack agency. Such initiatives as the UNHCR's 2nd Annual Integration Conference held in December 2020[27], with the participation of refugees as invited speakers, try to address this issue, which is even more timely taking into account the rising anti-migration rhetoric in the country.

The integration of migrants in Cyprus is highly centralised, with the main role played by governmental authorities. The local government in Cyprus has no legal competence in the area of migration. Currently, however, a reform of local government is being discussed in Cyprus, which would result in the merging of municipalities and providing them with more powers, among others. The reform has though been recently halted[28]. Passing crucial related legislation by the end of 2021 is, however, a condition under which the EU will accept the recovery plan for Cyprus[29].

Recently, the government published the "National Plan on the Integration of Migrants"[30], the first ever document of this type, which was developed in the framework of a project co-financed by AMIF and the Republic of Cyprus[31]. The Plan is to be used as a reference document for state integration policy and the financial support of projects and programmes under the new financial period 2021-2027[32]. According to some of our interviewees, the Plan is rather a list of

[27] For more about the conference please go to: https://www.unhcr.org/cy/2020/12/20/unhcrs-second-annual-integration-conference-tackles-the-integration-process-in-cyprus-and-the-impact-of-misconceptions-about-refugees/.
[28] See for example: *Our View: A referendum on municipal reform would be a disaster*, CyprusMail, 15.06.2021, https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/06/15/our-view-a-referendum-on-municipal-reform-would-be-a-disaster/.
[29] Elias Hazou, *Reforms: A race against time*, CyprusMail, 20.06.2021, https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/06/20/reforms-a-race-against-time/.
[30] https://tcnintegration.com.cy/wp-content/uploads/EthnikoShedioEN.pdf
[31] For more information about the project please go to: https://tcnintegration.com.cy/en/our-work/#toggle-id-1
[32] https://tcnintegration.com.cy/en/ongoing-integration-plan/#toggle-id-8

activities, not a comprehensive strategy; it was also criticised for not being consulted with the end beneficiaries.

Local authorities, although mentioned in the Plan as its key direct stakeholders, lack a dedicated budget to implement integration activities. They are restricted to working within the parameters provided by the national government, which sustains a rather centralised asylum system and integration policy. To get around this restriction, they participate in EU or national projects, an example of which is the programme "New Channels for Integration"[33] implemented in July 2020 – December 2021 by the Nicosia Municipality and partners for the ninth consecutive cycle. The project partners are Engomi Municipality, Nicosia Municipal Multifunctional Foundations, and the consultants "NVK Advent Consulting" and "Losadeal Ltd" as final beneficiaries. The project is co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the EU and the RoC. It is planned that over the current period of project implementation, the eligible migrants will benefit from such services as: social care and psycho-social support; training, education, empowerment, and orientation seminars; and creative expression and acquaintance with Cypriot culture workshops. The most important strength of the programme is its duration which ensures its sustainability, as opposed to ad-hoc and one-off projects and activities.

MIICT (ICT Enabled Services for Migration)[34] is another example of a project involving various stakeholders, including Engomi Municipality. Its goal is to design, develop, and deploy ICT tools that address the challenge of migrant integration. The project has received funding from the EU's Horizon 2020 Coordination & Research and Innovation Action.

A regional integration network around the city of Nicosia will also be established as part of the "Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus" project implemented by the Intercultural Cities Programme of the Council of Europe and the European Commission's Directorate General for Structural Reform Support in partnership with the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior of the RoC[35]. The project will support the RoC in implementing its National Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals 2020-2022[36] and it runs from July 2021 to June 2023. It is planned that the project will contribute to the integration of migrants in a range of areas including participation,

[33] https://localintegration.eu/en/
[34] https://www.miict.eu/.
[35] https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/intercultural-integration-in-cyprus.
[36] The previous one expired in 2016.

education, cultural and social life, urban planning, business, access to the labour market, anti-discrimination, and multilingualism.

Summary of key challenges:

- reception of migrants arriving to the Republic of Cyprus and providing them with decent living conditions
- facilitating access to the labour market for all categories of migrants (also in the context of the post-COVID-19 recovery of the selected sectors of the Cypriot economy, such as hospitality)
- involving LRAs in the implementation of the integration strategy and ensuring continuity of their actions through the provision of necessary financial resources

2.2. Greece: Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece – as of 2011 its municipal area was 19.307 km^2 and was inhabited by 325,182 people, its urban area was 111.703 km^2 and had a population of 824,676, and its metropolitan area – 1,285.61 km^2 and 1,030,338 people[37]. Historically speaking, the city has a long and well documented history of inward migration, including a history of accepting large numbers of refugees. That said, recent migration flows (from 2011 onwards) have put a significant strain both on the city and Greece in general, as Greece is one of the first-entry EU MS for migrants who hoped it would be a transit country. However, in many cases, it became their destination.

Indeed, Thessaloniki is seen as a transit hub for migrants on their way to wealthier countries with lower unemployment rates. However, this second or third stop (after the Edirne/Turkish coast and Athens), attractive to migrants because of its international humanitarian presence on the one hand, and connection to smugglers on the way to Bulgaria and North Macedonia, sometimes becomes a more permanent place for the migrants. To access the EU legally, some attempt to gain permanent Greek residence, which requires four steps: 1) receiving an asylum card ("White Card"); 2) registering at the Diavata Camp 7 kilometres outside Thessaloniki (one hour by bus from the city centre); 3) being accepted in the urban housing programme; and 4) receiving social security (AMKA) and tax (AFM) numbers. This, however, often means only the beginning of a new struggle as the Greek economy, especially in Thessaloniki, lacks the capacity to accommodate the migrants. Moreover, the Greek government is unwilling to see Greece as a

[37] 2011 census, data collected by the Hellenic Statistical Authority [in Greek]: http://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/1210503/resident_population_census2011rev.xls

destination country instead of a transit hub. Its official policy is meant to provide migrants with temporary relief only while they await permanent resettlement, hence the 2020-2021 speeding up proceeding of applications, and in the relocation of migrants from overcrowded camps in the islands to 28 new mainland camps throughout Greece, which are of a transit character by design. From approximately 60,000 recognized refugees and asylum seekers in mainland Greece no more than 10,000 live in or near Thessaloniki. In June 2021, 58,757 individuals from 90 points throughout Greece received cash assistance under UNHCR program, but only 15% (roughly 8,814 persons) were in Central Macedonia, i.e. Thessaloniki greater region.[38] The renewed Diavata camp has capacity of 924 people and occupancy rate of 93,40% (863 people).[39]

Despite speeding up the process, every level seems to be overburdened, as confirmed by NGOs, UNHCR, and migrants. For instance, arranging a Skype interview with Greek Asylum Services in the camps could take months, with overloaded connections and only a few available slots, which forces migrants to renew their police notes multiple times – theoretically illegal, but a frequent practice, which in turn overburdens police authorities[40] and causes conflicts along national, ethnic, and religious lines (Afghans, Yazidis, Arabs, and Kurds). Being registered provides eligibility to the urban housing programme in Thessaloniki/UNHCR Urban Housing Program, through which they can receive free housing in a furnished apartment in Thessaloniki or a nearby town with vulnerable groups (elderly, ill, women with children) prioritised, which despite the conditions in Diavata camp, is not accepted by everyone, because some migrants fear being pushed into the free market and facing uncertainty in regard to living conditions. This is especially so since the economic situation in Thessaloniki is not particularly favourable not only to migrants, but to Greek nationals as well.

The organisational structure of units cooperating with migrants at the municipal level changed in 2021. The system noticeably evolved into a joint state-local municipality partnership, in which local municipalities respond more to the government policy toward migrants than independently. In Thessaloniki, the REACT21 (Refugee, Assistance, Collaboration, Thessaloniki) programme[41] under the auspices of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and the EU funding

[38] UNHCR. Greece Cash Assistance (June 2021). https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87854
[39] IOM data as of 30.06.2021.
https://greece.iom.int/sites/greece/files/__Merged%20Mainland%20June_21_compressed%20%28CR%29.pdf
[40] M. Kasra, A. Khatri, O. Mohammad, R. Saad, and I. Terzi, "To integrate or to move on? A Case Study of Refugees in Towns Thessaloniki, Greece", in: Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Feinstein International Centre, Tufts University, March 2020,
https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RITReportThessalonikiGreece-2.pdf, p. 9.
[41] RE.A.C.T. "Στεγαστικό πρόγραμμα για αιτούντες διεθνή προστασία" – Δήμος Θεσσαλονίκης (thessaloniki.gr)

scheme was introduced – its aim is to secure housing for migrants across all the municipalities that compose the greater metropolitan area of Thessaloniki. This means an attempt at the dispersed integration of refugees and preventing ghettoization. The REACT programme is part of the ESTIA housing programme: funded by European Commission and run since 2020 by the UNHCR and the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum to provide cash assistance and housing to migrants. In 2020 ESTIA assisted 87,471 eligible asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection by distributing direct cash assistance. In addition, 30,044 migrants received accommodation, and 16,600 urban accommodation places were transferred to the Greek government[42]. The 2021 aim was to transfer the ESTIA programme to the Greek government, thus reprioritising the UNHCR mission in Greece from an emergency operational engagement to an institution building approach focusing on integration[43], and the REACT programme is an element of this approach on the municipal level.

Similarly, the unification of policies under state authorities is visible in the decision of 2021 shifting the Municipal Council for the Integration of Migrants in Thessaloniki (SEM)[44] under the Directorate of Social Protection and Public Health, Department of Support and Integration of Immigrants and Refugees. The 2012 Law (No. 3852) required each municipality to create a SEM: an advisory body to the municipality composed of five to 11 members designated by the city council appointed from municipal councillors and representatives of immigrant organisations. Since 2015, the Municipality of Thessaloniki has begun cooperating with the Ministry of Immigration in the central government, international organisations, neighbouring municipalities, and local community organisations. Participation in the council was honorary and unpaid, therefore professionalisation of the body seems to be a good step regarding the importance and gravity of its tasks. Centralisation of the body might raise its effectiveness and ensure funding, but it also will remove some of the flexibility in its activities. When it comes to the provision of educational services, the public schools of Thessaloniki are available to minors under 18, and they teach the Greek language, which offers grounds for further integration. However, teachers have reported violence from refugee children toward Greek children, which results in growing distance between the two groups[45]. The Greek educational system is underpaid and ineffective even towards its own citizens, so systemic programmes are largely non-existent and the integration of children depends on the good will of teachers[46]. The language barrier and the uncertainty of the intended stay in Greece prevent

[42] https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/14851?y=2021#year
[43] https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/14851?y=2021
[44] Συμβούλιο ένταξης μεταναστών – ΣΕΜ – Δήμος Θεσσαλονίκης (thessaloniki.gr)
[45] M. Kasra, et.al., op.cit., pp. 14.
[46] M. Kasra, et.al., op.cit., pp. 16-17.

good contacts between Greek teachers and children and refugees. To tackle this problem, some NGOs (Arsis[47], Caritas, The Red Cross, Solidarity Now) offer language classes to adults and minors under the ESTIA programme framework. Under the REACT programme, children are enrolled in schools. While the enrolment rates are high and in 2020 reached 91%, in absolute numbers this means that only 291 migrant children (out of 319 beneficiaries of the programme) attended school. It is noteworthy that the percentage of enrolment applies to fewer than 300 children for the year in reference[48]. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns, REACT and Arsis have provided children and youth with electronic devices such as tablets to facilitate education and contact, however, the scale was also not sufficient[49].

Summary of key challenges:

- lack of economic capacity to absorb migrant workers
- not enough funds to implement housing and schooling programs effectively on a larger scale
- centralized system of management of migration and integration, resulting in limited role of LRAs

2.3. Italy: Milan

The reception system for migrants in Italy operates on two levels: first reception, where migrants are identified and cared upon their arrival to Italy, and second reception, which includes the SAI (Reception and Integration System, formerly SIPROIMI [before October 2020] and SPRAR [before 2018]) and the CAS (Extraordinary Reception Centres). The Municipality of Milan is mostly involved in the second reception of migrants (SAI), where an integration-oriented approach is implemented. The Ministry of Interior assigns the management of the second reception centres of the SAI system to Italian Municipalities that choose to join the system by applying to an always open public notice for ministerial funds. The ownership of the projects is assigned to local authorities that receive three-year funding and that voluntarily activate and implement them in collaboration with non-profit organisations, selected through tendering procedures, which must fulfil the basic principle of the system: integrated reception, namely the establishment of a local network to ensure integration into the local community and social fabric. The local integration strategy designed to achieve the full inclusion of migrants consists of specific services to integrate newcomers. The range of the offer goes

[47] Association for the Social Support of Youth also covers social inclusion and child protection programs in cooperation with the Municipality, www.arsis.gr

[48] Interviews.

[49] Interviews.

from education services and language courses, legal assistance to obtain residence permits, health insurance, and residence certificates, to services for placement into the labour market through a tailored orientation (CELAV offices). Institutions must identify the accommodation in which to place beneficiaries, where refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection may remain for six months, extendable for a further six months, a period during which they are accompanied to find their own accommodation. In addition to housing, the managing bodies are required to provide a range of goods and services: hygiene; food; clothing and basic personal hygiene products; a telephone card and/or mobile top up; and a subscription to public transport.

In 2019[50], a total of 738 people were hosted in Milan through the SIPROIMI system (currently SAI): a flow figure that includes people who were already present in 2018 (359) and the number of entries that registered during the year (379 people). The ratio of the persons hosted to the 422 available places shows that an average of 1.75 people have been hosted per bed. At the end of 2019, there were 380 people actually present, 5.8% more than the previous year[51].

The SPRAR system (currently SAI) experienced in 2018 a restriction of users and of services provided[52]. Among the guests of the reception centres of the (formerly) SIPROIMI system, asylum seekers were not admitted during the year 2020 but remained eligible for the CAS. However, although the CAS system has higher numbers of reception, people benefiting from it are excluded from some of the services of integration that are offered through the SIPROIMI system. Among the big cities, Milan is by far the one with the highest average capacity: 119.3 places available, on average, in each CAS. As of 31 December 2019, the Municipality of Milan had 14 active CAS, with a capacity of 1,670[53]. Like the SAI, the CAS are also financed fully by the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services but are managed by Prefectures. However, while the average daily expenditure on reception accounted to around EUR 35 per individual, after the change experimented in 2019, funds available for CAS were significantly reduced, which led to significant cuts in all services for integration and the professional staff available for this purpose[54]. For this reason, some non-profit organisations have contributed with their own private funds to the implementation of their projects or have received co-financing from other realities from the third sector like Caritas

[50] Interviews.
[51] Statistical report on the SIPROIMI project in Milan: analysis of sources and data. 10th report (2019 data), Municipality of Milan
[52] Following the regulatory changes introduced by Legislative Decree 113 of 4/10/2018, converted on 01/12/2018 into law (L. n. 132). The system was modified again with the Legislative Decree 130 of 21/10/2020.
[53] https://www.openpolis.it/i-comuni-dove-vengono-offerti-piu-posti-nei-centri-di-accoglienza/
[54] No data are available for 2020.

Ambrosiana. The experience of non-profit organisations in building a strong network of cooperation between each other, exchanging skills (both informally and through co-managing SIPROIMI's projects), and cooperating with the Municipality has proved to be a practice useful in filling the gaps in national reception and integration policies[55].

The Municipality of Milan has launched another project, in addition to those foreseen in the national system, to promote the individual autonomy of migrants, language training, work orientation and essential public services. This is the case of the WeMi initiative, the services centre of the Municipality of Milan, which has been running since 2018 and was co-financed with European structural and investment funds, funds from the Municipality administration, and the fund "PON Metropolitan Cities". WeMi consists of a digital platform and a series of physical territorial infrastructures shared with the third Milanese sector. With the aim of fostering inclusion, the centre targets all citizens, not only migrants (regardless of their administrative situation), and offers information and guidance on a range of specialised services provided in collaboration with the third sector. Third sector entities that want to offer their services through WeMi can apply to a public call and are selected by the Municipality based on checks of their quality standards for services. In 2019, in the framework of WeMi, a centre for family reconciliation opened. Among its services are school guidance, legal advice, and language learning. The rationale behind the project is to concentrate in one place the services of support to all foreigners (including EU nationals) who reside permanently in Milan and are planning to start a path for family reunification, or who have recently reunited their families, to facilitate their integration and access to the opportunities offered by the city. In this way, a network in the city is created, and integration fostered.

In 2020, the system outlined above faced new challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the city in different ways. In 2020, data on stocks did not change significantly, while flows diminished, especially with reference to the arrivals of unaccompanied minors, which have been growing again in May and June 2021[56]. In 2020, requests for family reunion halved, and mobility was generally suspended. Migrants were among the most affected workers, namely employees in the catering sectors (dishwashers, waiters) and personal care (caretakers)[57], and therefore incomes supporting entire households were lost. The Municipality and the third sector, in particular, noticed a problem of food poverty.

[55] Interviews.
[56] Interviews.
[57] https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2021/04/08/commercianti-partite-iva-cassintegrati-chi-sono-i-nuovi-poveri-del-covid-da-milano-a-palermo-lurgenza-non-e-piu-il-cibo-ora-chiedono-aiuto-per-affitti-bollette-e-computer-per-la-dad/6153701/

COVID-19 had a two-folded impact on the reception and integration of migrants. The pandemic has led to a change in the methodology and to a switch to online service provision. However, integration processes inevitably slowed down since it impeded the development of certain activities. Economic integration, for instance, was interrupted, since internships and job placements were harder to find due to the economic recession. Moreover, the available funds had to be redirected to focus on health monitoring, sanitisation of the centres, courses on hygiene, tests, and vaccination, which led to cuts to other integration activities[58].

On the other hand, COVID-19 had a positive impact on one of the most pressing problems encountered by the Municipality. Self-sufficient migrant communities in Milan struggle to recognise the Municipality as the entity to which to directly relate for the development of their needs. They rather turn to the intermediation of their community, which creates, in the long term, the risk of a closed community, with social and economic repercussions such as the ethnicization of jobs and a lack of social mobility. During COVID-19, the Municipality was the only present institution on which to rely for support, and it was not possible to work through intermediaries due to security measures and closures. This resulted in the creation of more direct links between the Municipality and migrants[59].

Summary of key challenges:

- providing housing for migrants during and after the second reception
- presence of self-reliant, closed migrant communities that are reluctant to cooperate with authorities
- lack of EU long-term funds to finance structural policies

2.4. Malta: South-East Region

The South-Eastern Region is one of five regions of Malta[60] and includes the south-eastern part of the main island of Malta, including the capital Valletta. Its total area is 36.2 km^2 with population of around 100,000. With almost 1,600 inhabitants per km^2, Malta has one of the highest population densities of the EU regions[61]. Relative to the size of the resident population, Malta recorded the

[58] Interviews.
[59] Interviews.
[60] Please note that the numbers provided in this section relate in general to Malta; access to exact numbers regarding the South-East Region only is limited due to the design of statistical records.
[61] By NUTS 2, as of 1 January 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tgs00024/default/table?lang=en

highest rates of immigration in the EU in 2019 (56 immigrants per 1,000 persons)[62].

Compared to the same period in 2020, substantially fewer migrants reached Malta during the first five months of 2021. According to UNHCR data, a total of 147 migrants have arrived in Malta between January and May 2021, compared to 1,281 arrivals in the same period last year. In total in 2020, 2,281 persons were rescued at sea and disembarked on Malta, which constitutes a 33% decrease compared to 2019 sea arrivals (3,406). More than 500 unaccompanied and separated children originating mostly from Sudan, Somalia, Bangladesh, and Eritrea reached Malta in 2020 (24% of all arrivals). In the first six months of 2021, the main nationalities of sea arrivals were Sudanese, Syrian, and Eritrean.

In 2020, a total of 2,482 applications were lodged with the International Protection Agency[63] (a 39.3% decrease compared to 2019). Most of the applicants were citizens of African countries (77.8%), with the largest proportion being Sudanese citizens (18.1%), followed by Bangladeshi, Eritrean, and Nigerian citizens (10.6%, 9.1% and 8.9%, respectively).

Allegedly, since May 2020, the Armed Forces of Malta carried out fewer rescues and more push backs to Libya, as part of the Malta-Libya deal[64]. In May 2020, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Malta and Libya to set up a coordination unit in each country to assist in operations against illegal migration. Practically all irregular migrants that reach Malta by boat are undocumented.

Regarding reception, the number of migrants residing in open centres and other institutional households[65] increased in 2020 by 23.3%, compared to 2019. Although the living conditions in open centres have improved in recent years, they

[62] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Migrant_population:_23_million_non-EU_citizens_living_in_the_EU_on_1_January_2020
[63] https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/MHAS-Departments/International%20Protection%20Agency/Pages/Refugee.aspx
[64] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Lethal Disregard". Search and rescue and the protection of migrants in the central Mediterranean Sea, May 2021. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/OHCHR-thematic-report-SAR-protection-at-sea.pdf.
[65] https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/MHAS-Departments/awas/Pages/Open-Centres.aspx

generally remain extremely unfavourable[66]. Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions also relate to detention[67] and other facilities[68].

The biggest challenges in the integration of migrants lie in access to fair employment, affordable housing, and an inclusive society. Moreover, migrants are disheartened by the restrictive path to naturalisation and lack of access to family reunification for persons enjoying subsidiary protection. Language and cultural barriers are also obstacles to integration, including access to basic services, in particular medical services in the country's main hospital, Mater Dei[69]. Additionally, one of the main impacts of COVID-19 on refugees in Malta was the loss of employment (with the further consequences of potential homelessness and poverty).

In December 2017, Malta adopted its first ever integration strategy "Integration = Belonging" (Migrant Integration Strategy & Action Plan, Vision 2020), which was accompanied with a three-year action plan[70]. As a follow up, a Local Integration Charter was launched in December 2019 by the Maltese Ministry for European Affairs and Equality, with the Integration Unit of the Human Rights and Integration Directorate (HRID), the Local Councils Association, and several councils (Cospicua, Msida, Mtarfa, Pembroke, Sliema, San Pawl il-Bahar, and Birkirkara) as participants.[71] It was planned as a tool for local councils to support each other and respond to the integration needs of residents, upon the government's recognition of the fact that local councils already manage some minor integration-related activities (local multicultural fairs, language lessons etc.), without its support or guidance.

The "I Belong" Programme offered by the Human Rights Directorate is a key component of intercultural inclusion in Malta. It is part of the integration strategy and provides a holistic approach to intercultural inclusion, offering Maltese and English language and Cultural Orientation courses at two stages[72]. To date,

[66] https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/malta/reception-conditions/housing/conditions-reception-facilities/
[67] Malta's treatment of detained migrants 'inhuman', says watchdog, InfoMigrants, 12 March 2021, https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/30831/malta-s-treatment-of-detained-migrants-inhuman-says-watchdog.
[68] Sertan Sanderson, Reports of dire conditions in Maltese camp as government plans change in migration approach, InfoMigrants, 19 March 2021, https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/30984/reports-of-dire-conditions-in-maltese-camp-as-government-plans-change-in-migration-approach.
[69] Interviews.
[70] https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/integration-belonging---migrant-integration-strategy-action-plan; https://humanrights.gov.mt/en/Documents/Integration%20Equals%20Belonging%20EN.pdf
[71] https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/local-integration-charter-launched-in-malta.
[72] For more about the courses, please go to: https://humanrights.gov.mt/en/Pages/Intercultural%20and%20Anti-Racism%20Unit/I-Belong-Courses.aspx.

approximately 2,060 individuals have been allocated to class, and the demand for such services remains high.

The implementation of the strategy, and also of the EU-funded project related to integration, is managed centrally. As noted by one of our interviewees, LRAs are not perceived as key implementing partners of integration projects. This is mainly due to the relatively small sizes of LRAs and the resulting limited coverage.
There are, however, capacity building projects addressed to municipalities. One of them is the ADMIN4ALL programme[73]. Its main aim is to increase the capacity of local governments in promoting the socio-economic inclusion of migrants. The project is financed by the European Commission Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and managed by the IOM Coordination Office for the Mediterranean. Under the programme, knowledge-building trainings for local councils are offered, especially on the different legal statuses of migrants, among other things. The Local Councils' Association is one of the key stakeholders engaged in the project.

The centralised, government-led implementation of EU-funded projects might pose certain risks. As one of our interviewees argued, EU financial support (via programmes such as AMIF) is used inefficiently as it does not reach the end beneficiaries who have been struggling with the lack of access to basic services and social support. There are numerous NGOs which offer in-kind help and social assistance to migrants and refugees, but these activities are dependent on donations from charities and private donors rather than the government or local councils' funding.

As the economy of Malta has been opening up again in 2021, the private sector has been struggling to find and engage employees due to the COVID-19-related outflow of foreign workers. Indeed, over the first half of 2020, many economic migrants working on the island returned home because of the pandemic, leaving the country with labour shortages in certain crucial sectors. Still, the country's economic outlook has been dependent on cheap and flexible labour. At the same time, the Ministry for Home Affairs has introduced a new policy denying certain categories of asylum seekers the right to work for a period of nine months after arrival in Malta. Despite this, migrants have now more possibilities to find a job and the demand for job-seeking services – such as those provided within the

[73] https://admin4all.eu/.

framework of the Jobsplus-led project "Supported Employment Services for Migrants"[74] – has been dropping.

According to the majority of our interviewees, a mutual agreement on burden sharing between all EU MS should be in place as irregular migration is an EU problem and should be tackled on the EU level.

Summary of key challenges:

- reception of migrants arriving to Malta and providing them with decent living conditions
- facilitating access to fair employment for the benefit of both migrants and the Maltese economy
- involving LRAs and their associations in the implementation of the integration strategy and ensuring continuity of their actions through the provision of necessary financial resources

2.5. Spain: Barcelona

Although the Municipality of Barcelona does not have competences in asylum and refugee policies, which are the key responsibility of the state, it has developed several initiatives and programmes – in particular, since 2015 when the so-called refugee crisis commenced – with the objective to provide a coherent and comprehensive response at a local level to an increasing influx of migrants and to target those whose legal status excludes them from national programmes.

A Citizens' Rights and Participation Councillor oversees the municipal strategies and actions for migrant's reception and integration. The approach of the municipality of Barcelona towards the integration of migrants is governed by the principles of collaboration, inclusiveness, cultural diversity, and mutual adaptation. Two pluriannual plans, the Citizenship and Immigration Plan 2018-2021[75], which argues for a paradigm shift from "integration" to "citizenship

[74] The project is co-funded from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020 and focuses on increasing the employability of migrant jobseekers through the provision of guidance services for migrants, job brokerage, and training courses.

[75] The plan is structured around three main axes of work, each including specific objectives and lists of activities to be developed: 1) equity policies: from reception to citizenship; 2) full citizenship; and 3) diversity, interculturality / dialogue. The activities conducted are regularly monitored and evaluated. See more at Pla de Ciutadania i Immigració de la ciutat de Barcelona 2018-2021 at https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/novaciutadania/sites/default/files/documents/1._pla_immigracio_i_ciutadania.pdf. The new Plan is currently under preparation and will be released next year.

rights", and the Barcelona Interculturality Plan 2021-2030[76], conceived as a "dynamic and evolving plan, adaptable to the constantly changing context", guide the integration policies implemented through a multi-actor and multi-sectoral approach. An emphasis is placed on the actions which normalise cultural diversity as an intrinsic and essential element of society and a factor behind innovation and growth[77].

A comprehensive welcome system constitutes the backbone of Barcelona's integration strategy. It is guided by the conviction that rapid and integrated reception is key to preventing social exclusion[78]. It is worth noting that, contrary to the national programmes, all migrants, regardless of their status, are eligible for reception services. Moreover, all migrants arriving to Barcelona, regardless of their legal status, can register in population register ("padrón"), which is essential to have access to education and municipal social services. Migrants without a permanent address are registered in the nearest social care centres. This unrestricted approach allows the municipality to reflect the social reality in Barcelona and adapt reception and integration programmes accordingly.

The welcome system includes centralised and territorialised services. SAIER – the Service for Immigrants, Emigrants, and Refugees, a centralised municipal reception hub, offers comprehensive counselling and service provision (legal advice, housing, language learning, social care, psychological help, healthcare, and work skills) to migrants who have been living in Barcelona for less than two years[79]. The Service cooperates with entities with expertise in specific sectors through contracts and agreements[80]. Since 2015, the number of persons attended to by SAIER has increased by 60%, with 19,001 persons attended to in 2020, only 8% less than in 2019[81]. This high number, despite mobility restrictions related to COVID-19, was due to the increased socio-economic hardships of migrants

[76] The Plan identifies several challenges faced by migrants and ethnics groups in the municipality of Barcelona and includes 26 objectives and 106 measures to resolve them. See more at Plan Barcelona Interculturalidad 2021-2030 at https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/bcnacciointercultural/sites/default/files/pla-barcelona-interculturalitat-2021-2030.pdf.
[77] Pla de Ciutadania i Immigració de la ciutat de Barcelona 2018-2021. Ajuntament de Barcelona. May 2018.
[78] Pla de Ciutadania i Immigració de la ciutat de Barcelona 2018-2021. Ajuntament de Barcelona. May 2018.
[79] Migrants who live in the municipality of Barcelona for more than two years are eligible for help and support from municipal social services.
[80] The entities contracted by SAIER are ABD, which works in the first line of care, analysing the needs of migrants and redirecting them to specialised services in or outside SAIER and ACCEM, which provides legal advice. Five entities with agreements signed with SAIER are: Red Cross, which provides attention to vulnerable people, ICAB – Barcelona Bar Association, which provides legal advice on migration issues, CITE (Information Center for Foreign Workers), in charge of labour insertion issue, AMIC (Association for Mutual Aid for Immigrants in Catalonia), working on the educational issues and homologation of titles, as well as Consortium for the Linguistic Normalisation.
[81] Marc Serra presenta el balanç de l'activitat del SAIER durant el 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVvbfzn9eP0.

already established in Barcelona, in particular as a result of the pandemic recession effects on employment, notably on the tourism and hospitality industry, as well as the domestic sector. The emergency context has required the adaptation of work dynamics and the types of assistance provided, with over 30% of resources allocated to food and housing provision. Overall, in 2020, 80% of persons attended to by SAIER were in an irregular administrative situation, with 37.9% going through the administrative procedures. The main nationalities attended to among the total number of TCNs were Colombian (3,658, an increase by 22% in comparison to 2019), Venezuelan (2,460, a decrease by 17% in comparison to 2019), Honduras (1,970, an increase by 11%), and Peru (1,845, an increase by 30%)[82]. The territorialised services include SOAPI, the Guidance and Accompaniment Service for Immigrants, which provides support and information to migrants at the district level on procedures, access to the healthcare system, learning languages, social life in the municipality, as well as family reunification services.

In addition to those services, two programmes targeting migrants with specific needs have been created by the municipality. The Nausica programme, launched in 2015, complements the national international protection programme and targets asylum seekers in situations of vulnerability due to their health situation or sexual orientation, offering housing and social support during a period of between 12 to 18 months on average. Nausica, funded solely by the municipality and with a total budget for 2020 amounting to EUR 1,530,000 (a 50% increase in comparison to 2019)[83], almost doubled its capacity, increasing the number of places from 75 to 120 throughout 2020[84]. The success rate of the programme is very high, with 46% of attended to persons obtaining employment, though with short-term contracts prevailing[85].

The second programme, New Families, targets migrants arriving to the city as a result of family reunification. Although the approval of the reunification petition is the responsibility of the sub-delegation of the government in Barcelona, New Families accompanies the applicants before and after the reunification process, through legal advice, as well as social orientation and workshops targeting women, youth, and parents. In 2019, 3,774 persons were attended to, out of which 1,119 were reunified with their families. In 2020, the number of persons who benefitted from the programme slightly decreased, with 2,905 attended to and 842 persons regrouped[86]. The decrease in the number of persons attended to is said to

[82] Ibidem.
[83] El 46% dels refugiats atesos en el programa Nausica troben feina. ARA. https://www.ara.cat/societat/refugiats-atesos-programa-nausica-troba_1_1125540.html.
[84] Interviews.
[85] Interviews.
[86] Interviews.

be mainly due to the "digital divide", with many migrants unable to reach out for online assistance during the pandemic as a result of limited access to technological devices and the Internet. The principal minorities who benefit from the programme are from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India.

In addition to the adaptation of municipal services and programmes, which, despite the pandemic, have been faced with similar burdens, the municipality of Barcelona offered support to address the humanitarian crisis faced by the Canary Islands in 2020 with the arrival of more than 15,500 migrants. As a result of an agreement with the national government, over 70 people, mostly Mauritanians, were transferred to the city of Barcelona and allocated in a centre provided by the municipality and overseen jointly with a non-profit entity ACCEM, which receives funding from the state to manage the centre. Although many of these70 persons want to continue their migration route, those who want to settle down in Barcelona receive assistance from the municipality related to the registration process.

The role of associations and non-state actors in reception and integration strategies and actions before and during the pandemic has been fundamental in complementing municipality efforts in the field of integration, by providing language classes, legal and employment advice, offering spaces for exchanges, dialogue, and intercultural activities, and to respond to the continuously growing needs. The municipality has secured continuous exchanges with those entities through networks and platforms, including the Municipal Council of Migration[87] and the Network of Welcome and Support for Migrants. The entities belonging to the network have played a crucial role during the pandemic, serving as a bridge between migrants and municipal social services, which are not adapted to the cultural diversity of the city[88], as well as securing emergency food provision and assistance to families with orders of eviction[89].

The members belonging to the network receive yearly grants from the municipality for the development of reception and integration-oriented projects. Although, according to the interviewees, this form of funding could be improved, as short-term grants involve a demanding administrative process related to the preparation of the application, impeding small organisations relying on volunteers from applying and breaking the continuity of some projects, membership in the network has been evaluated as being overall very beneficial, due to several reasons. First, it facilitates the connection between various non state actors

[87] Consultative body, composed of representatives of migrant associations, social agents, municipal political groups. Its work is structured along four axes: (i) full citizenship, (ii) interculturality, (iii) promoting and supporting associations, and (iv) internal running.
[88] Interviews.
[89] Interviews.

working in the field of reception or integration, thus allowing joint efforts. Second, the exchanges allow for a detailed radiography of activities undertaken, which helps avoid duplication. Third, the network fosters best practices and knowledge sharing on integration approaches, leading to the continuous improvement of the help and services provided by its members. Last, it ensures regular connection with professionals working in the field of reception and integration in the City Council, leading to cooperative work and the co-creation of policies[90].

Summary of key challenges:

- lack of human resources to efficiently deal with ever growing influx of migrants
- delivering adequate and affordable housing
- municipal services offered do not take into consideration the cultural diversity of migrant´ citizens

[90] Interviews.

3.Assessment

Key takeaways:

→ the key role that LRAs play in reception and integration systems in not always adequately recognised in the legislation

→ cooperation between LRAs and the third sector helps to address gaps that exist in the reception systems in the EU MS

→ access to services was limited for migrants because of pandemic-induced lockdowns

→ deterioration of the socio-economic situation among the host populations led to an increase in anti-migration sentiments

→ provision of adequate housing, education, and healthcare for migrants constitutes one of the biggest challenges for LRAs

→ accurate and up-to-date data on migration is in most cases not available, which impedes the design of efficient and effective policies as well as the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of existing ones

→ EU funding is not always sufficient and/or efficiently disbursed and spent due to red tape, resource-consuming application processes, and mismatches between funding priorities and local (fast-changing) needs

3.1. Reception

Capacity to receive migrants varies between the LRAs under study depending on their size and wealth, the division of powers within the country, as well as the geographic location and related number and profile of migrants that arrive in their territories.

For instance, both Cyprus and Malta are relatively small islands which were faced with considerable migrant flows. In both countries, central-level authorities are responsible for the development and implementation of migration and asylum legislation and policies, although in the former district, authorities must coordinate the implementation of migration-related administrative tasks (e.g., citizenship applications)[91]. Similarly, in Italy there is a mismatch between the crucial role that LRAs fulfil in migrant reception activities and their limited role

[91] https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Cyprus-Immigration-and-asylum.aspx

in the management of relocations of migrants from the first reception centres to various municipalities within the state.

A good practice in this regard is cooperation between LRAs and third sector actors (NGOs, CSOs, charities, international organisations), which help to address any existing gaps in the reception system; here the "WEMI – Milan for Inclusion" project has been highly rated by the interviewees. On the other hand, in Thessaloniki, cooperation between LRAs and civil society has been curbed due to legislative reforms imposed by the central government, which, among others, restricted the role of refugees in decision making (i.e., through councils which used to work alongside the municipalities) and imposed restrictions on NGOs and volunteers working in the refugee camps[92].

3.2. Integration

As far as the integration of non-EU migrants is concerned, the countries explored as case studies vary significantly in their approach and capacities. According to the Mipex Integration Policy Index 2020[93], Spain has the most favourable policies among them; immigrants in Spain, as well as in Italy, "enjoy more opportunities than obstacles when it comes to integration". In Malta, there are as many obstacles as opportunities, while in Greece and the worst performer, Cyprus, immigrants face more obstacles than opportunities for integration. Our findings confirm this assessment. In general, countries that view themselves as transit rather than destination countries have fewer internal incentives to invest in integration policies. As for good practices, in the Barcelona Municipality, for instance, SAIER, NAUSICA, and the New Families Programme can be highlighted. At the same time, even there the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted existing vulnerabilities (such as the digital divide) among certain groups of migrants, who were not able to access the services provided by the authorities due to them being moved online in line with social distancing rules. Likewise, in Thessaloniki, the pandemic hindered LRA access to migrants in the integration phase (housing programme/education).

Even before the pandemic, however, LRAs in many cases have not been active in the field of integration. In Thessaloniki, for instance, there are few if any integration policies that promote active citizenship among migrants, as well as intercultural contact (lack of cultural mediators, interpreters, events) – even

[92] As per law of 30 November 2020.
[93] https://www.mipex.eu/.

though the planning and implementation of integration programmes lies within prerogatives of municipal authorities[94]. In Malta and Cyprus, in turn, LRA activities are mostly project-based and focused on the organisation of events such as cultural festivals, lacking long-term strategy and actual involvement in both the development and implementation of integration policies.

On top of that, racism and discrimination against non-EU migrants have been identified as serious issues. This problem has been further exacerbated by the pandemic, as a spill over from the deteriorating levels of socio-economic wellbeing both among the host populations and migrants.

3.3. Provision of public services

In general, LRAs find it challenging to provide public services, especially those of quality, to migrants. In places where camps are located, they usually operate far above their capacity and under suboptimal conditions. Moreover, the pandemic further deteriorated this situation for example in Cyprus, where due to sanitary measures and the nationwide lockdown, asylum seekers living in independent accommodation were forced to move to the Pournara First Reception Centre in Kokkinotrimithia near Nicosia (and forced to remain there even after the lockdown ended).

Outside of the camps, the provision of accommodation constitutes a big challenge as well. For instance, in Milan, this is an issue not only at the initial stage when migrants are hosted in the SAI system, but also once they leave it. In Barcelona, the demand to access the reception shelter is so high that migrants are prioritised based on their vulnerability. Despite that, the waiting period to access the facility is six months on average. At the time, it is often the third sector that has to step in to assist migrants with securing accommodation. However, as the interviews with representatives of NGOs operating within the geographical area of the municipality of Barcelona demonstrate, the entities find it increasingly challenging to respond to the ever-growing needs. As a result, migrants have been taking matters into their own hands and occupying buildings that had been abandoned for example by businesses that had not survived the pandemic, which is the case in Nicosia and Barcelona.

Providing education to migrant children is a challenge due to limited human resources, language differences, cultural barriers, as well as prejudices existing

[94] https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Greece-Immigration.aspx.

among parents and teachers alike (which usually translates into their prevalence among the children themselves as well). As many of the migrant children had faced various traumas, it might be particularly difficult for them to accommodate to new education systems – and for LRAs to secure the professional help they need. Amid the pandemic, participation in online classes constituted an additional difficulty due to a lack of electronic devices and/or a sufficient quality broadband connection – despite attempts at addressing this problem like in, for example, Thessaloniki through the REACT and Arsis programmes.

As for healthcare services, in most cases throughout the pandemic they were heavily overburdened and struggled to address the needs of both local and migrant communities. In Greece, for instance, this resulted in a suspension or delay in access to healthcare and the initial exclusion of migrants from vaccination schemes, a policy which however was altered fairly rapidly and currently enables vaccination for irregular migrants. In Barcelona, the need for mental health assistance among the migrant community has increased exponentially, which has created an additional burden on the already saturated services.

3.4. Data and information on residing TCNs and migrant flows

Access to accurate and up-to-date data and information about their residents, including TCNs, is a challenge to LRAs. In some cases (e.g., Milan, Barcelona), general data on cities' foreign population might be extracted from the registers of the resident population. In other instances, the numbers of TCNs residing in a given area, the composition of the migrant population, and the scale of inflows and outflows of foreign nationals to and from cities and regions are far less recognised. The latter concerns especially small states with still centralised systems of administration (Cyprus, Malta). In general, data on irregular migrants residing on their territories is not available to LRAs (see Annex 2 for definitions and Table A1.2 in the Annex for details).

Limited access to accurate data on migrant stocks and flows and information on the needs of residing migrant communities affects the LRAs' ability to develop and implement targeted policies, including those relating to reception and integration. Moreover, the majority of administrative systems of data collection do not allow for the tracing of migrants' paths and thus of capturing the socio-economic situation of an individual in a given time (general numbers and information on those benefiting from services are available). It affects the abilities

of central governments and LRAs to monitor and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of their migrant reception and integration policies.

3.5. EU funding

The issue of the effectiveness of EU funding concerned all studied cases. On the one hand, some of our interviewees argued that the amount of funding, especially for integration projects, from EU and other international sources, is sufficient but that funds are spent inefficiently on projects with limited impact and are not adjusted to the needs of migrants. This concerns especially Cyprus and Malta, where the role of LRAs in project implementation is relatively limited. Other interviewees pointed out that limited funding for reception and integration policies remains a key challenge (e.g., Barcelona), and in some other cases (Milan), insufficient national funding was identified as an issue as well.

Another factor which limits the effective spending of EU (and other) funds is the delayed reception of such funds due to lengthy disbursement processes from the national to the local level, often via the regional level. Further, while submitting applications in response to calls for proposals, LRAs (and other applicants) are expected to meet the criteria of such calls, which often do not respond to their real needs. Project-based funding is also not efficient in terms of financing long-term structural policies of inclusion due to the short-term nature of projects.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1. Reception and integration

LRAs should be more engaged in the design of reception and integration policies and regulations[95]; at the very least, they should provide feedback to the central level on a regular basis. The active and real engagement of the non-governmental sector and civil society – including organisations run by migrants – is also recommended. At the same time, better coordination between the numerous different stakeholders would help to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of migration-related activities.

National-level reception and integration policies should be flexible to allow for adjustments to local circumstances. For instance, policies supporting the inclusion of migrants into the local labour market should be tailored specifically to the local needs and realities. Everywhere, language classes for both children and adults should be a key part of integration practices. On a related note, services for migrants should be provided in multiple languages and take into consideration the digital divide. Moreover, access to social services should be open to all migrants, regardless of their administrative situation. Special attention should be given to the most vulnerable groups of migrants, including unaccompanied children and pregnant and nursing women.

As shown in the case of Barcelona, the unrestricted/open registration approach to all newcomers regardless of their legal status helps not only to more effectively assist migrants, but also to gather data helpful in designing evidence-based policies.

When it comes to battling racism and discrimination, LRAs could invest in awareness raising and cultural activities. Integration programmes should be conceived as not only targeting migrants, but also the region and city´s citizens, to increase their awareness of the benefits related to migration and promote intercultural dialogue. Moreover, networks, composed of diverse actors countering stereotypes and negative discourses, could be promoted by LRAs, as with Xarxa Antirumors, promoted by the municipality of Barcelona.

[95] As indeed stressed as well in the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027).

Finally, as stressed in the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027), migrants should be "fully informed about their rights"[96].

4.2. Benefitting from integration strategies

Migrants can help to fill labour market gaps and shortages, not only in the tourism and hospitality sector, which is currently coming back to life after the pandemic-induced lockdowns (and where workers are needed e.g., in Malta, Cyprus, and Spain). Many migrants are highly skilled and if helped for example with language skills, labour permits, and the nostrification of their diplomas, they could "reach their full potential"[97], be a valuable source of labour, and contribute to the local budget by paying taxes (also if working online). They can also help to revive the villages, smaller cities, and regions adversely affected by urbanisation and demographic changes such as low birth rates.

As for cultural gains, they can be significant if supportive and well-tailored policies are in place, especially if the culture and traditions of the migrant population vary to a large degree

[96] https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/the-ec-presents-its-eu-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027.
[97] https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/the-ec-presents-its-eu-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027.

from that of the local population (and indeed within the migrant community as well).

As one of the interviewees underlined, skills partnerships between host countries and countries of origin could be created in order to benefit both the former (filling labour shortages) and the latter (skills, knowledge, and technologies transfer).

4.3. EU funding[98]

The use of EU funds for reception and integration policies by LRAs should be further promoted. The facilitation of LRAs' access to funding resulting in cities and regions being able to respond to the recognised needs with the necessary flexibility and timeliness should also be considered. Regarding the required documentation, our interviewees pointed at the necessity to simplify the justification part of project applications, reconsideration of award criteria (e.g., the introduction of new criteria related to the inclusion of migrants in project development and implementation), and introduction of longer-term opportunities to accompany structural policies.

In order to minimise the risk of implementing projects disconnected from real-life problems and not responding to the needs of their beneficiaries, a bottom-up approach in the development and implementation of projects led by LRAs should be promoted. In this context, migrant and migrant community engagement is crucial as it enhances project ownership and success.

Last but not least, the capacities of the LRAs to develop both policy strategies and related projects should be strengthened. This encompasses providing training for LRA officials on general migration issues and integration policies (knowledge building), project development and implementation (know-how), and anti-discrimination.

Regarding Cyprus, Malta, and Greece, the national government should provide more independence for LRAs, and more state funding for the cities and regions under study. State authorities can also benefit from LRAs' presence in national projects as they can bring to the table more stakeholders, such as, for example, local businesses.

[98] For current list of funding available to support integration of TCNs see: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/main-menu/financing/eu.

Some of our interviewees underlined that it is expected that the new EU Asylum Agency will have a more substantial role and will provide additional support to MS, especially those on the front line. Regarding integration, the new EU funding tools for the period 2021-2027, including the European Social Fund+ (EUR 99 billion)[99] and the AMIF (EUR 9.88bn)[100], are expected to play a crucial role in the effective implementation of national policies. In this context, the creation of an autonomous integration and development fund which would allow municipalities participating in the EU relocation programme to receive direct funding for the reception and integration of refugees as well as the implementation of their own development and integration projects should be further discussed[101].

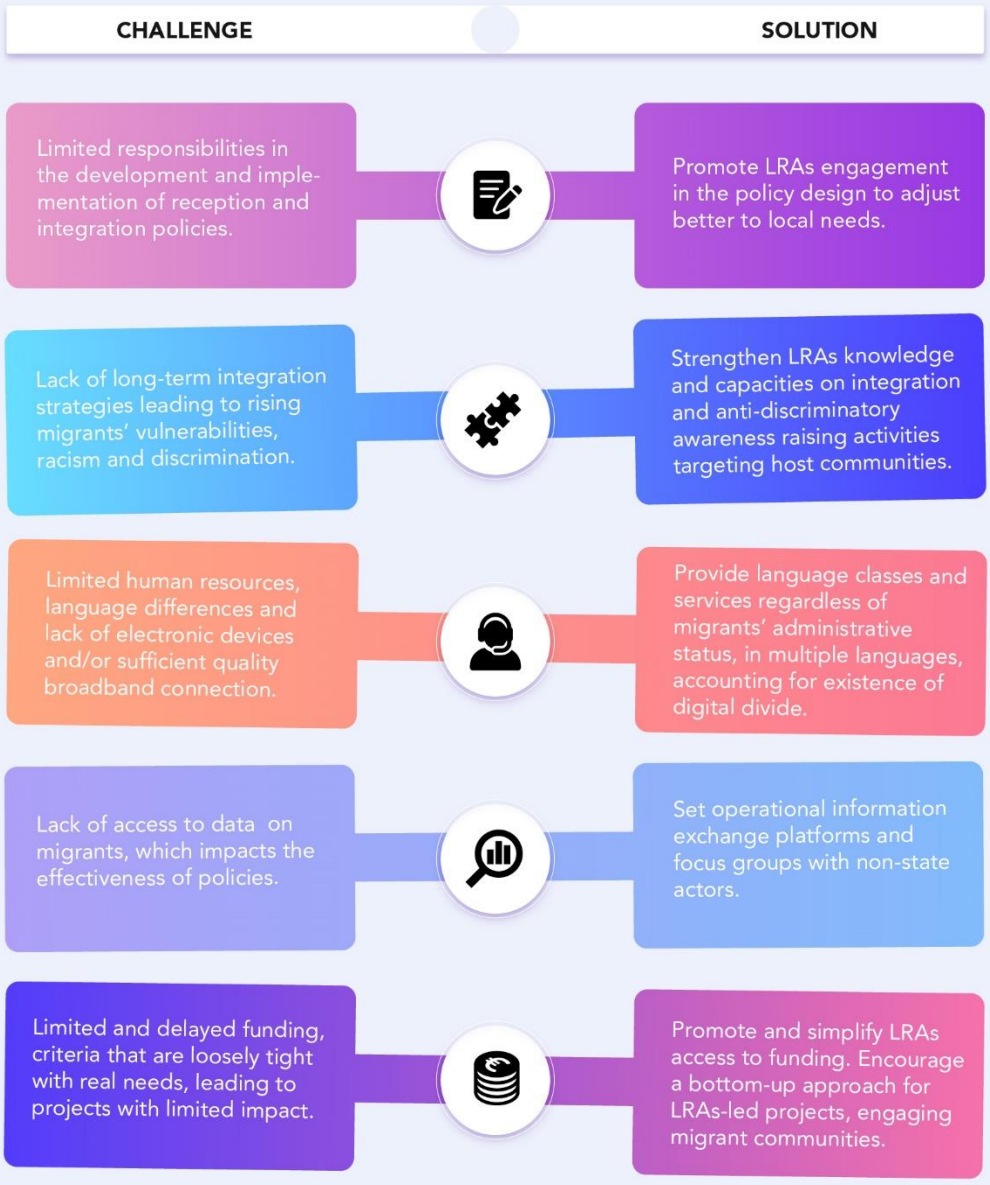
4.4. Data and information on residing TCNs and migrant flows

While the improvement of administrative and statistical data collection systems is purview of national governments, LRAs can still play an important role in gathering useful insights on their migrant populations. Obtaining quantitative data on migrant stocks and flows (e.g., via service providers contracted by LRAs), although usually quite costly, might provide the essential baseline knowledge for relevant policy development and implementation. Less fund-consuming qualitative data gathering methods, such as focus groups or panels comprised of migrant residents, might complement or even substitute for costly quantitative research for LRAs with limited resources. In this context, cooperation between LRAs and local NGOs, including those led by migrants, should also be strengthened as the latter are a valuable reservoir of knowledge on their beneficiaries and clients.

As data and information on migrant populations gathered by LRAs can also better inform national reception and integration policies (and vice versa) and relevant EU responses, all levels of governance should aim to establish operational mutual information exchange platforms.

[99] For more information, please go to: https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en.
[100] For more information, please see: EU Parliament adopts two funds for asylum and border policies, Press release, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210701IPR07514/eu-parliament-adopts-two-funds-for-asylum-and-border-policies.
[101] INTEGRATIONS- & ENTWICKLUNGS-FONDS Rechtsgutachten zur Umsetzbarkeit einer EU-geförderten kommunalen Integrations- und Entwicklungsinitiative, April 2021, http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bruessel/17884.pdf.

Boosting the role of LRAs in migration-related policies



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Annex 1 – Selected macroeconomic and demographic indicators

Table A1.1 Selected key indicators, data as of 2020 unless indicated differently

	Thessaloniki	Barcelona (city)	Milano (municipality)	Cyprus	Malta	EU average
area	1,285.61 km2 [metropolitan area]	101.35 km2	181,7 km2	9,251 km2	316 km2	-
population	1,030,338 [metropolitan area]	1,666,530	1,406,242	888,000	514,564 [2019]	-
population density [2019, persons per square kilometre]	310.6	726.5	2,088.3	95.7	1,595.1	109
median age of population	44.5	43.5	45.8	37.3	42.6	43.9
GDP per capita	EUR 14,273 [2018]	EUR 48,500 [2019]	EUR 43,610	EUR 23,050	EUR 19,840	EUR 66,800 [2019]
unemployment	18.4% [Central Macedonia Region]	11.8%	6%	9.9% [May 2021]	3.7% [May 2021]	between 1.8% and 27.8% in the EU regions [NUTS 2, 2020]
poverty rate	21.7% [Central Macedonia Region]	18.1% [2018]	13.6% [2019]	22% [2019]	7.3% [2019]	21.1% [2019, AROPE]

Source: Eurostat, 2021.

Table A1.2 Selected data on migration

	Thessaloniki	Barcelona (city)	Milano (municipality)	Nicosia District (incl. Strovolos)	South-East Region (incl. Bormla, Kalkara &Valetta)
non-EU immigrant/migrant population	reliable data is not available	252,679 [as of January 2020]	23,000 [Province of Milan, 2019]	161,000 / 18,1% [end of 2019]	103,200 / 20,1% [January 2020]
main countries of origin of non-EU migrant population	Afghanistan 504 (46,6%) Somalia 283 (26.2%), DRoCongo 116 (10,7%), others 82 (7,6%), Syrians 45 (4,2%), Palestinians 17 (1.6%) [most common nationalities of sea arrivals since 1 January 2021]	Pakistan (22,749), China (22,477), Morocco (15,659), Colombia (15,215), Honduras (14,140), Venezuela (13,073), Peru (12,399), Philippines (9,656)	Morocco	Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Somalia	Somalia, Libya
no of irregular migrant arrivals 2019	74613 in Greece	32,513 in Spain	11,471 in Italy	12,695 new asylum applications were submitted in 2019	3,406 persons who disembarked at the port of Valetta
no of irregular migrant arrivals 2020	15,696 in Greece	41861 in Spain	34,154 in Italy	7,036 new asylum applications were submitted in 2020	2,281 in Malta
no of irregular migrant arrivals as of end of June 2021	7,798 in Greece	13,176 in Spain	approx. 13,700 in Italy	approx. 500 in Cyprus	244 in Malta

Source: UNHCR, IDESCAT, AJUNTAMENT, IERMB, ELSTAT, Statistics.gr.

Annex 2 – Key terms and definitions

Asylum seeker

"A person who seeks protection from persecution or serious harm in a country other than their own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments."
(Source: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary/r_en)

Beneficiary of international protection

"A person who has been granted refugee status or subsidiary protection status."
(Source: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary/r_en)

Irregular migrant

"A person who, owing to irregular entry (crossing borders without complying with the necessary requirements), breach of a condition of entry or the expiry of their legal basis for entering and residing, lacks legal status in a transit or host country." (Source: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary/r_en)

Migrant

"An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons."
(Source: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf)

Refugee

"Either a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned before, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to

return to it." (Source: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary/r_en)

Residence

"The act or fact of living in a given place for some time; the place where one actually lives as distinguished from a domicile. Residence usually means bodily presence as an inhabitant in a given place."
(Source: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf)

Resident

A person who lives in a given place for some time.

Third country national

"Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union […] and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement."
(Source: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/third-country-national_en)

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