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The Role of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in Enhancing Social Cohesion in European Cities

The European Policy Dialogue Forum
brings together religious leaders, policy-makers and experts to discuss pertinent issues of social cohesion in Europe.

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Executive summary

This policy paper examines the consequences of an increasing emphasis in humanitarian and development work on multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs); the implications of increased migration and integration in urban and city environments; and the roles of religious and multireligious actors in supporting inclusive and effective MSPs when working on migration and social cohesion initiatives.

The use of MSPs as a tool to respond to increased migration and enhanced social cohesion in urban areas can be extremely effective when addressing the complex needs and issues required to support migrants and refugees in a sympathetic and appropriate way, whilst also acknowledging the needs of local communities.

However, the advantages and function of MSPs are not self-evident for all stakeholders. The following steps are therefore recommended.

— Better education on the process of initiating MSPs, their advantages and management responsibilities is required.
— Clear guidelines for achieving and maintaining parity for all stakeholders in MSPs, with an emphasis on the equal inclusion of refugee community organizations (RCOs) and refugee-led organizations (RLOs), should be developed and widely disseminated.
— Greater recognition needs to be given to the important role that community groups and networks play in supporting migration and social cohesion, and more effort made to include informal organizations as key stakeholders in the delivery of migrant support and social cohesion projects.

The challenges brought about by the increased religious, cultural and ethnic diversity of many European cities and communities are not new. However, the

scale of population movement is unprecedented. Migrants tend to relocate (either by choice or lack of alternatives) to urban and city environments, and if we are to build and maintain peaceful societies in Europe, we need clear strategic planning to cultivate cohesive, inclusive city and urban environments.

— Local and city authorities should be encouraged and supported in developing urban and city planning which incorporates how increased migration and social cohesion will be managed effectively and sensitively. There are some excellent existing examples of this which should be made widely available and used as a basis for local plans.
— Plans should include greatly enhanced opportunities and resources for face-to-face engagement between refugees, migrants and host communities, as direct interaction is key to mitigating fear and insecurity for migrants and host communities, and supporting social cohesion and harmony.
— When new opportunities are created to support migrants and refugees, a proportion of support should also be made available to local residents to ensure equity of opportunity and to avoid creating resentment.
— The opportunity of participating in formal education must be given to all refugees and migrants at the very earliest opportunity, and resources allocated to ensure this happens.
— Opportunities for migrants and refugees to receive direct support for jobs and business creation should be greatly enhanced – as opposed to through third-party CSOs/NGOs.

Whilst the European context is often perceived as an increasingly secular space, there is significant evidence to show that faith-based actors continue to play a vital role in humanitarian and development efforts, including migration and social cohesion. These should be fostered.

— Specific funding streams should encourage the development of multireligious networks and projects which encourage cross-faith collaborations and model interreligious and multireligious cooperation to migrants, refugees and local communities. This will also help avoid perceptions of favouritism towards certain religious/ethnic groups.
— Multireligious platforms can be an excellent mechanism for facilitating engagement between migrants and refugees, host communities and other relevant stakeholders, and therefore should be resourced.
— Publicly acknowledging the important, and significant amount of work, faith-based organizations carry out in the areas of migration and social cohesion will help increase trust and good will, and help realise the significant potential faith-based actors have for supporting governments in managing increased numbers of refugees and migrants.

Introduction

Increased migration into and across Europe in recent years has resulted in new and more complex challenges.[1] Nurturing and sustaining equitable and sympathetic responses to migrants[2] has been made difficult by a rise in populist political movements that have promoted anti-immigration, and at times, openly xenophobic agendas. This has contributed to a rise in misinformation about the impact of migration, negative attitudes towards migrants and refugees, hate speech and sometimes violence. Additional factors such as unhelpful media narratives, the influence of social media, the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic security, the rising cost of living and the war in Ukraine have also played a part in increasing negativity towards migrants, particularly to those coming from outside Europe.

The challenges brought about by the increased religious, cultural and ethnic diversity of many European cities and communities are not new. However, the scale of population movement is unprecedented.[3] It is widely accepted that migrants tend to relocate (either by choice or lack of alternatives) to urban and city environments,[4] and as a result, migration is a key factor in driving the global trend towards urbanisation.[5] The UN's 'New Urban Agenda' has recognised the unique challenges and advantages that migration brings to urban environments, and the increasing necessity to include migration as a factor in planning and managing cities.[6]

It has been argued that supporting often extremely traumatised and vulnerable people from hugely diverse backgrounds in a sensitive and positive way, whilst also showing consideration and respect for the concerns of local communities, and the challenging social, economic and political environments they live in, requires a holistic response that can only be achieved by a range of stakeholders working closely together – multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs).

MSPs typically aim to involve partners from civil society, public and private sectors, as well as emphasising the full and equal participation of target communities. As a result, MSPs are considered to increase democratisation of humanitarian and development initiatives. However, the inclusion of private sector actors has also been perceived as detrimental to the underpinning principles and ethos of just and sustainable human development.[7] Despite any reservations, MSPs became a key pillar of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, enshrined in SDG 17, 'Strengthen the means of

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1   European Parliament. (12 July 2022). Migration in Europe. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/priorities/migration/20170629STO78632/migration-in-europe

2   This paper uses the definition of "migrants" as proposed by the EU Commission. Migration and Home Affairs. (n.d.). Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/migrant_en

3   UNHCR UK. (2001–2022). Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html

4   Eurocities. (2 December 2020). Cities and Migrants: What's Happening at the Local Level. Available at: https://eurocities.eu/latest/cities-and-migrants-whats-happening-at-local-level/

5   UN Human Settlements Programme. (2012–2022). Available at: https://unhabitat.org/gccm-cities-and-migration

6   Ibid.

7   Pattberg, P. & Widerberg, O. (2016). Transnational multistakeholder partnerships for sustainable development: Conditions for success. *Ambio* 45, 42–51. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-015-0684-2

implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development'. The Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees of the Urban Agenda for the EU is a pertinent and important example of the increasing prevalence of MSPs.[8]

Whilst the European context is often perceived as an increasingly secular space, faith-based actors continue to play a vital role in humanitarian and development efforts, including migration and social cohesion.[9] Consequently, this paper will seek to better understand the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in supporting migration and social cohesion initiatives. In keeping with a focus on multi-stakeholder engagement, the primary and secondary data for this policy paper was gathered from migrant and refugee communities and organizations, the public and private sectors and faith representatives. Data collection took place through a desk review of existing literature, a two-day consultative workshop and one-to-one interviews.

In summary, this policy paper examines:

— the consequences of an increasing emphasis in humanitarian and development work on multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs);
— the implications of increased migration and integration in urban and city environments;
— the roles of religious and multireligious actors in supporting inclusive and effective MSPs when working on migration and social cohesion initiatives.

The paper will identify the most pressing gaps, challenges and needs in these areas, and make recommendations for policymakers and religious leaders seeking to work on the successful and respectful inclusion of migrants and refugees in host communities and societies.

It is important to accentuate that the issues and ideas presented in this paper are opinions and perceptions of a wide variety of stakeholders, and whilst many are the result of direct personal and professional experiences, they are not intended to be seen as generalisable "facts" but rather indicative of a range of problems and opportunities in different contexts, and under different circumstance.

Challenges in forming and maintaining multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) on migration and social cohesion

Language and practice related to MSPs tend to identify groups in relatively broad terms, e.g., private sector, civil society, public sector and beneficiaries. Whilst this can be overly simplistic

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8   European Commission. (n.d.). Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees of the Urban Agenda for the EU. Available at: https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/urban-agenda/inclusion-migrants-and-refugees.

9   The concept and practice of social cohesion has a long and contested history. For the purpose of this paper we adopt Fonseca et al.'s recently revised definition of social cohesion. Fonseca, X., Lukosch, S., & Brazier, F. (2019). Social cohesion revisited: a new definition and how to characterize it. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 32(2), 246. https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2018.1497480.

and ignore the sometimes-significant variances within each group, it is reasonable to suggest that many of the perspectives, challenges and opportunities are related to stakeholder group identities. As a result, adopting this approach is a useful mechanism for presenting and understanding the challenges related to each stakeholder when attempting to initiate and sustain effective MSPs to support migrants and social cohesion in urban contexts in Europe.

GOVERNMENTS, LOCAL AUTHORITIES, AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

It is self-evident that some governments in Europe have little appetite for welcoming migrants and worse still, some governments actively encourage nationalistic identities and tendencies, and a rejection of migrants. It is therefore unsurprising in these contexts that the legislation, support and conditions simply do not exist to develop and support MSPs on migration and social cohesion. This can be attributed to political ideology, but also to the increasing political tendency to be responsive to whatever constituency/narrative will provide the most votes.

Many city and urban authorities do not yet have inclusive or responsive plans for supporting refugees, or established mechanisms to effectively engage with multiple stakeholders. The failure to take migration needs into account during urban planning can result in ghettoization, alienation, negative stereotyping and a breakdown in social cohesion that can take generations to improve. The lack of an existing action plan can also mean authorities are too slow and bureaucratic to respond to the dynamic nature of migration.

Governments and local authorities often have "preferred partners" they choose to work with, and this is also evident for faith-based actors. Often, larger and legally constituted FBOs are seen as acceptable stakeholders, whereas small religious communities and informal organizations and networks are not seen as trusted or legitimate. This may be down to concerns about accountability but can also be due to insecurities about being seen to favour a particular religious community, or even inadvertently supporting proselytisation.

The implicit presumption that MSPs are understood and accepted by all stakeholders is flawed and can be an oversight that produces resentment and opposition to participation. For a variety of reasons, stakeholders can believe that MSPs simply produce more complications and work, without obvious benefits – this is especially true of organizations that have a long history of experience and delivery.

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Many of the issues that prevent or discourage migrants from playing a full and active role in MSPs are intrinsically tied to the realities, perceptions and feelings of being welcomed in a community or society. The lack of basic needs such as advice services, language learning support, psychosocial services, education, housing, skills training and financial packages lead to alienation and lost opportunities for successful inclusion. The proliferation of hate speech and negative political and public narratives about migrants and refuges also contributes significantly to this problem. Many of these issues can be seen to originate in inadequate legislation and under-resourcing, and result in undermining the confidence of refugees to build bridges with other stakeholders and host communities.

Relatedly, a lack of opportunities for migrants to get actively involved in designing and implementing policies that have a direct impact on their welfare and opportunities contribute to this dilemma. This can be the result of a lack of political will and poor communication with migrants, as well as between the specialist agencies themselves.

That said, not all migrants (or people in general) have the skills or experience to enable them to participate in stakeholder forums and networks and present their views in a confident and coherent way.

Colonial legacies can play a role in migrants' attitudes towards other stakeholders who want to "help" them, and indeed concepts of integration and social cohesion can be seen to reinforce traditional colonial power structures and diminish a willingness to engage with other stakeholders.

Furthermore, the emphasis on, and rhetoric about, social cohesion and integration can be seen as problematic in and of itself, with many migrants and refugees (perhaps understandably) more concerned with immediate needs such as clothing, food, housing and supporting loved ones left behind in volatile and dangerous contexts. Social cohesion and integration may not be seen as a priority and could be considered a concern of more privileged stakeholders.

LOCAL AND HOST COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

An unwillingness to engage in partnerships can be caused by the realities or perceptions of inequalities in access to support and services. Migrants have traditionally gravitated towards poorer areas and communities in cities, where local communities are more sensitive to the possibility of unequal support.

Any negative impact on existing services and opportunities is also hugely detrimental to social cohesion processes. Whilst inaccurate and politically motivated narratives about the negative impact of migrants undoubtedly proliferate, the pressures on schools, hospitals, infrastructure, economies and employment can be a reality if the investment and support in communities receiving migrants is not sufficient.

Ignorance feeds fear, and in turn negative stereotypes, dehumanisation and in worst case scenarios, hate. A lack of opportunities to meet and interact with migrants can initiate and perpetuate a negative cycle of ignorance and fear. This can be further compounded by negative narratives perpetuated on traditional and social media, and by political opportunists.

FAITH-BASED ACTORS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Whilst much progress has been made in the acceptance of religious actors as legitimate and vital partners, negative perceptions do persist. For example, even large, reputable FBOs are sometimes under suspicion that the motivation for their work is proselytization and conversion. This presumption is even more likely with informal, local and community organizations and religious leaders. This suspicion can lead to funders being unwilling to support the work of local faith actors.

Relatedly, community faith organizations are often assumed not to have the professionalism, knowledge and expertise required to support effective and sustainable social cohesion initiatives. This can be the case if certain elements of social cohesion are prioritised. However, as will be evident when exploring opportunities, this perception could also be attributed to biases and preconceptions about integration needs and requirements of migrants, as opposed to the reality on the ground.

The treatment of faith-based actors as synonymous with other civil society organizations can be problematic, and faith actors frequently believe that their religious identity, doctrines and beliefs offer different, sometimes intangible, benefits. A lack of appreciation

from other stakeholders about this fundamental belief and motivation can lead to misunderstanding, a perceived lack of respect and an unwillingness to engage.

In contexts where one religion is in a significant influential majority, it can lead to the belief that there is no need/advantage to engage with other stakeholders, including minority religious groups and civil society actors that do not share their beliefs or objectives.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Private sector involvement in humanitarian and development work is often treated with suspicion from other stakeholders, usually due to the simplistic understanding of businesses as only interested in profit and money. Whilst this may be true in some cases and to some extent, this type of broad generalisation overlooks the huge diversity among private sector organizations, and the variation in motivation for engaging in business.

Private sector stakeholders can sometimes view public and voluntary sectors as indulgent, wasteful, unresponsive, antiquated and inflexible. Business responds to market demand, and what can be seen as a user, bottom-up approach to problem solving and satisfying needs. However, in the development sector there is often a tension between what beneficiaries want/need and funders' criteria and desires.

MEDIA PLATFORMS

Traditional and new media have played a key role in perpetuating and disseminating negative narratives and "hate speech" about migrants and refugees across Europe. The democratisation of social media, and the lack of agreed and consistent regulation, has also meant that extremist views are more prevalent, and more easily spread.

The proliferation of media outlets has meant that competition for audiences is ferocious. As a result, more extreme narratives are promoted for their "shock value" to attract readers/users.

THE NATURE OF MSPs ON MIGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

Whilst MSPs have become commonplace and encouraged within human development, the inherent nature of the development sector (including migration and social cohesion) is competitive. Collations of stakeholders compete against each other for recognition, legitimacy and funding. Organizations rely on external funding to exist, which is finite, and if stakeholder interests and expertise overlap, it is not necessarily desirable, or financially viable, to work together in partnership.

Due to diverse perspectives on what constitutes social cohesion good practice, there can conceivably be a lack of common ground and understanding between stakeholders, making some partnerships unviable.

Whilst a persuasive ideal, the practical complexities of MSPs can be very different in delivery, often with many competing interests, ideas and values. Negotiating interests and complex multi-stakeholder partnerships can require significant compromise and management, and related resources. This can lead organizations to the conclusion that it is easier to work alone to achieve organizational goals and objectives, which can be predetermined by foundational principles and non-negotiable.

An insistence on MSPs can be seen to suggest a "one-size-fits-all" approach, when in fact the wide variety of variables in migration and social cohesion experiences means that initiatives need to be context specific and responsive. Migrants and migration experiences vary hugely, depending on factors such as reasons for migrating, cultural and religious

backgrounds, available resources and migrants' personal conditions. Consulting migrants can reveal very different expectations about reception and social cohesion.

In addition, narratives and attitudes towards migrants can vary significantly depending on background and reasons for migrating, as the response to the more recent migration from Ukraine when compared with the 2015 migration "crisis" has aptly demonstrated.[10]

Whilst becoming increasingly popula;r, there exists some ambiguity over how migrant and refugee-led organizations should be included in some MSPs. Whilst the dominant narrative is that they should always participate as equals, some organizations believe there is a discernible lack of trust, especially when it comes to funding. Furthermore, equal participation to some extent undermines CSOs' roles in MSPs, and therefore they are not always welcome.

SUMMARY

The challenges of building and sustaining MSPs for migrants in urban environments are extremely complex and vary for each stakeholder. It is imperative not to ignore the evident challenges, but to see them as opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding and build more competent and inclusive MSPs. Effective mechanisms and platforms for openly acknowledging contradictions and tensions are vital, from the conception and initiation of MSPs, through to delivery and final evaluation. The concerns of all stakeholders, including migrants and refugees, need to be acknowledged and responded to throughout the collaboration process.

Opportunities for realising more effective and inclusive MSPs for migration and social inclusion

MSPs have proven to be an effective tool for responding to a wide range of humanitarian and development issues, and there are numerous examples of where they have successfully aided migration and social cohesion initiatives. The following section presents views from a range of practitioners, migrants, refugees and faith-based actors about existing opportunities and what actions might be taken to further enhance the viability and impact of MSPs in the areas of migration and social cohesion.

GOVERNMENTS, LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Whilst, traditionally, governments and local authorities may have been wary of working with some other stakeholders (such as the private sector, FBOs and even migrants and refugees) more inclusive models of working have become the norm, and this creates significant opportunities for forming networks and MSPs.

Increasing recognition of the need for urban plans and strategies that take account of migration have been acknowledged by the EU, and some national governments and city authorities.

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10   Network for Dialogue. (2021 June). Building trust through dialogue in local communities: a key ingredient for social cohesion. Network for Dialogue Policy Brief #2. Available at: https://network4dialogue.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/N4D-PolicyBriefs-02-Trustbuilding-Final.pdf; Network for Dialogue. (n.d.). Resources. Available at: https://network4dialogue.eu/resources/.

The tragic war in Ukraine has brought with it an opportunity to challenge negative narratives about migrants and refugees. Many governments across Europe have, in the past, been wary of the political consequences of being seen as "pro-migration". Building on the current goodwill and compassion for Ukrainians, governments (and media) could make a concerted effort to remind the public that many migrants and refugees are escaping conflicts around the world. This could conceivably generate the will to attribute more resources to supporting migration and social cohesion processes.

> Initiatives such as the UN's New Urban Agenda takes into account migration and social cohesion, whilst Barcelona's intercultural approach to migration governance has been heralded as a key factor in preventing conflict and promoting social cohesion even in times where the social and economic conditions are unfavourable. The intercultural approach is a combination of practices, public policies and private/third-sector efforts, aiming at governing diversity through mitigation of the potential conflicts emerging from it. Barcelona is also using the MareNostrum supercomputer to help model future urban planning, and avoid unintended consequences.

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Authorities and organizations are increasingly accepting the imperative to see migrants and refugees as genuine and equal partners, as opposed to beneficiaries, who bring with them a wealth of knowledge and expertise in many areas, and who can play a full and vital role in addressing the challenges of migration and social cohesion. It could even be argued that given their experience, and often the volatile and complex contexts in which they have lived, they have more experience than many other stakeholders engaged in migration and social cohesion processes.

Advocacy training, rights awareness, networks and platforms are all vital for enhancing the opportunities for migrants to gain equal access to stakeholder forums. There is an increasing number of organizations delivering these services; although there is always a need for greater capacity.

The existence and integral role of refugee community organizations (RCOs) and refugee-led organizations (RLOs) is increasingly being acknowledge and promoted. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles paper 'Refugee-led organizations in Europe: Policy contributions, opportunities and challenges',[11] and the EU-funded report on 'Migrant-led advocacy across Europe'[12] are two pertinent examples.

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11   Torfa, M. (2019). Refugee-led organisations in Europe: Policy contributions, opportunities and challenges. European Council on Refugees and Exiles Working Paper. Available at: https://ecre.org/ecre-working-paper-refugee-led-organisations-rlos-in-europe-policy-contributions-opportunities-and-challenges/.

12   European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM). (2019). Migrant-led advocacy across Europe. Available at: https://www.epim.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Migrant-led-advocacy-across-Europe-Report.pdf.

The Greek Forum of Refugees is a non-profit association run by migrants and refugees living in Athens. The organization was started by a small group of refugees living on the streets of Athens, and has developed into a well-respected and successful organization working to give a voice to migrants and refugees in Athens and beyond. The Greek Forum of Refugees has worked with local private sector organizations on employability and helped to found a city-wide stakeholder forum where migrants are equal partners in discussing and deciding policies and strategies that directly impact their support and future. A principle aim of the organization is to provide opportunities for refugees, migrants and existing members of local communities to come together and get to know and help each other, and to build strong bonds starting with local community engagement.

LOCAL AND HOST COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

It is sometimes instinctive to label anyone that expresses a fear of migrants or the consequences of migration as xenophobic or bigoted. However, this can prove counter-productive, and whether the concerns of local communities are real or perceived, it is more constructive to listen, respect and address fears and concerns as opposed to simply dismissing them. Evidently this needs to be done in a way that is never seen to justify extremist or racists views, and preferably by skilled facilitators.

Despite the proliferation of populist, negative narratives about migration, it is vital to remember that extremist views often represent small minorities in communities and societies. Rarely are whole communities anti-migration, even if they express fears and concerns. The large majority of people in European communities support values of human dignity, freedom, equality and the rule of law. Many are open to learning about other cultures and societies, and are kind, compassionate people sympathetic to the plight of refugees and migrants.

God's House is an association between the Church of Sweden, the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm and the Muslim community, based in Fisksätra, outside Stockholm. For almost 20 years, God's House has been developing different inclusion activities ranging from language learning and peace prayers to community building. God's House promotes dialogue and learning about other religions and cultures and holds an annual cultural festival that brings people together form across Sweden and internationally. Currently, work is being undertaken on a new building which will consist of three parts – a church, a mosque and a glazed central atrium linking the two. Once complete the building will offer a dedicated space for dialogue and learning, so that fear and mistrust can be overcome, and bridges and alliances built. God's House has worked with similar FBOs and secular organizations as part of its inclusion work, and architects and other private sector supporters in the design and development of the new building.

FAITH-BASED ACTORS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Numerous internationally renowned humanitarian and development organizations have faith-based foundations and principles. These organizations can act as "gatekeepers" for smaller, less formal FBOs and help overcome the challenge that some stakeholders will only work with large legally constituted organizations.

That said, faith-based actors of all types are increasingly being recognised as important and legitimate partners in MSPs and migration and social cohesion processes. A World of Neighbours[13] has clearly demonstrated the vital role informal networks can play in knowledge sharing, advocacy and innovation around migration and social cohesion.

Religious leaders are also increasingly called on by non-faith-based stakeholders and governments to act as key advisors in understanding the sometimes unfamiliar religious/cultural requirements of migrants and refugees. Religious leaders are also asked to help support migration initiatives, and where necessary, convey to their communities what can be done to help immigrants and refugees settle.

Faith-based actors have often been the principal support for migrants and refugees in crisis situations, have significant experience and can be extremely valuable partners. There are many ways that faith-based actors and communities have helped in migration processes, including: providing materials such as food, clothes and housing; acting as a "bridge" into host communities by using existing networks to connect migrants to legal advice, health services, employment, etc; and as a source of spiritual and psychological support.[14] Religious communities are often significantly involved in the reception and inclusion during the early stages of a migrant's experience in the host country.

Despite being categorised together, migrant communities are often very diverse. FBOs, and more specifically multireligious organizations, can and have played an important role in bringing migrants and refugees together by modelling interreligious/intercultural cooperation, coexistence and acceptance, and can be vital partners to stakeholders who are attempting to reach out to diverse migrant communities.

Multireligious organizations can also help overcome the dilemma of governments and funders who may be wary of being seen to favour some religious communities or faith-based actors over others.

Many faith-based actors believe that their faith perspectives and religious beliefs give them a dedication and passion that. whilst intangible, is an invaluable factor in helping support migrants, refugees and social cohesions processes.

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13   A World of Neighbours. (2021). Available at: https://aworldofneighbours.org/.

14   Lyck-Bowen, M. & Owen, M. (2018). A Multi-Religious Response to the Migrant Crisis in Europe: An Initial Examination of Potential Benefits of Multi-Religious Cooperation on the Integration of Migrants. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 45(1), 21–41. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1437344

The Metropolitan Cities project is a partnership between the multireligious organization Religions for Peace Europe and the Berlin Senate. The Metropolitan Regions Project aims to bring together faith-based organizations and multi-religious networks, civil society organizations and local and city government representatives to exchange knowledge on the growing challenges of urban environments, including the growing diversity of religions and cultures driven at least in part by increased migration. The project is in the process of building a network of European metropolitan regions across Europe and beyond, in order to create a mechanism for sharing vital information on the transformational and cultural potential of religious communities for peace, sustainability, social cohesion and compassionate urban development.

PRIVATE SECTOR

With increased social consciousness, and a greater emphasis on corporate social responsibility, many private sector organizations can be seen as legitimate and valuable partners in MSPs. Their skills, expertise, innovation, acumen and ability to respond quickly and flexibly has the potential to offer significant contributions to the challenges of migration and social cohesion. Arup is an example of a staff-led company that designs "safe, inclusive and resilient communities, infrastructure and cities"[15] with a goal to help city planners anticipate and prepare for the challenges and benefits migration can bring. Furthermore, big corporations such as Airbnb gave significant donations for accommodation for Ukrainian refugees; as did local hoteliers in many countries such as Poland and Hungary.

It is imperative not to generalise about the private sector, and recognise it is a diverse sector with many opportunities for working with businesses. It is also worth noting that divisions between sectors can be relatively artificial, and many religious actors, or public sector workers, are also involved in the private sector. MSPs can benefit from the unique skills in the business community without compromising humanitarian values and principles. It is important to challenge simplistic presumptions about private sector involvement in humanitarian and development work.

The private sector thrives on, and nurtures, innovation, creativity, responsiveness, understanding users and productivity, amongst many other positive attributes, that if integrated correctly can, in the right circumstances, significantly enhance existing practices in migration and social cohesion.

Making profit is often equated by other stakeholders, particularly FBOs and CSOs as immoral and violating humanitarian principles. At the same time, FBOs, CSOs and migration practitioners primarily see the private sector as a source of funding. Whilst controversial, profit making could be seen as a win-win situation, with more money for companies as well as humanitarian work.

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15   Arup. (2022). Planning cities for migration. Available at: https://www.arup.com/perspectives/planning-cities-for-migration.

Entrepreneurship and business development can be a hugely important source of employment, which can result in not only money to help migrants and refugees support themselves, but also increased self-respect, a sense of normality and social capital – vital elements for effective and sustainable social cohesion.

Salam Lab (Peace Lab) is a faith-based organization based in Kraków, Poland, that began by working with a range of actors on countering Islamophobia. The Peace Laboratory is a registered NGO established in November 2021, although operating more informally since 2021. Its mission is to "Give a voice to the oppressed and excluded, and build bridges between communities of various nationalities and religions." During the Ukrainian refugee crisis, Salam Lab worked with Crimean Tatars on the border of Poland, local authorities in Kraków, local hotel businesses and international corporation Airbnb to find and provide accommodation for Ukrainians escaping the war, and to channel them to other reception services across the city.

MEDIA PLATFORMS

There are many initiatives that promote responsible journalism and attempts to offer counternarratives to negative stories about refugees and migrants on social media. These need to be supported and promoted, and examples of good practiced disseminated more widely. For example, a series of films called "We are Bristol"[16] have been produced to showcase diversity within the city in the UK, with the aim of strengthening relations between people with different backgrounds, faiths and cultures within the community. The European Interfaith Youth Network,[17] in partnership with UNICEF, has developed a toolkit to help individuals and organizations produce counternarratives to hate speech against refugees and migrants on social media.

A World of Neighbours is an informal network of migration and social cohesion experts and practitioners, launched with the support of the Church of Sweden in response to increased migration into and across Europe. It is focused on developing a community of learning, knowledge sharing and building a network of practitioners who can support and help each other in their work. Inviting people to join as individuals, as opposed to organizational representatives, means that traditional power dynamics and inequalities are avoided. New members are interviewed to ensure that their motivations for joining the network match their ethos and principles of inclusion, respect for diversity and religious difference, and a willingness to work with migrants and refugees from all backgrounds. As the first phase of the network is coming to an end it is transitioning to an independent network owned and run by members.

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16   Bristol City Council. (2020). #We are Bristol. Available at: https://www.wearebristol.co.uk.

17   Religions for Peace, Europe. (n.d.). European Interfaith Youth Network. Available at: https://rfpeurope.org/the-european-movement/european-interfaith-youth-network/.

THE NATURE OF MSPs ON MIGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

Research on MSPs shows that they are not always effective, and therefore a comprehensive and informed analysis process assessing the issues and stakeholders should be carried out and play a large role in determining the necessity and nature of MSPs. Organizations that work alone should not by default be penalised. Proper assessments can also help identify the specific role(s) of each stakeholder and create a clear division of tasks and responsibilities.

MSPs need to be designed and implemented in a way that recognises and mitigates traditional power inequalities between actors – e.g. between service providers and "beneficiaries". Whilst this is often a stated ideal, the way in which funding and accountability work, and the fact that CSOs need "beneficiaries" to justify their existence, reinforces unequal relations and an unwillingness to accept migrants as full partners. This is an issue that must be openly discussed during the formation and implementation of MSPs, and every effort must be made to overcome it.

Conclusion

Multi-stakeholder partnerships can be particularly effective, and indeed necessary, when addressing the type of complex needs and issues required to support migrants and refugees in a sympathetic and appropriate way, whilst also acknowledging the needs of local communities that are often struggling with social and economic challenges and insecurities. Evidently, different stakeholders have a variety of skills and perspectives and it is imperative to recognise and value the different, but often complementary, skills of each individual stakeholder. This might include the "softer skills" faith-based actors might have in spiritual and psychological support, and the commercial and productivity dimensions private sector stakeholders can offer. Not everyone can be responsible or skilled at every aspect of a social cohesion initiative, and to build respectful, trusted and impactful collaborations it is important to acknowledge expertise and be clear about the division of roles and responsibilities. Equity in the supply and distribution of resources and opportunities is also key to good practice and can prevent perceptions of inequality amongst refugees and migrants, and between them and host communities. Finally, public acknowledgement of the significant amount of work carried out by different actors – from refugee-led organizations to faith-based organizations and private sector contributions in the areas of migration and social cohesion – increases trust and good will of the stakeholders involved. This also helps facilitate the participation of different actors in MSPs and can help strengthen the reputation and potential of MSPs themselves.

Recommendations on social cohesion and MSPs

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Enhance communication and knowledge about social cohesion initiatives to local communities and stakeholders

Increase resources for MSPs that provide opportunities for face-to-face and digital engagement between refugees, migrants and host communities. Knowing the "other" is the key to mitigating fear and insecurity and supporting social cohesion and harmony. Local authorities in cities and urban areas should provide a dedicated space, and sufficient resources, including online resources, to enable migrants and host communities to meet, socialise and get to know each other as human beings.

Communicate the support being offered to refugees and migrants clearly and transparently. Clear and transparent communication is vital to counter perceptions within local communities that they are not receiving the same benefits and opportunities as newcomers. If new opportunities are created, a proportion of support should also be made available to local residents, to ensure equity of opportunity and to avoid creating resentment.

Support refugees' and migrants' capacity to contribute to communities and societies in urban environments

Ensure participation in formal education for all migrants and refugees (and local community members) – this is a fundamental element in enhancing social cohesion and inclusion, stimulating appreciation for cultural difference and economic prosperity. The opportunity of participating in formal education must be given to all refugees and migrants at the very earliest opportunity, and pressure should be placed upon European countries that restrict access to education for migrants.

Ensure participation in formal education for all refugees and migrants (and local community members). Access to and participation in education is a fundamental element in enhancing social cohesion and inclusion, stimulating appreciation for cultural differences and economic prosperity. The opportunity of participating in formal education must be given to all refugees and migrants at the very earliest opportunity. Pressure should be placed upon European countries that restrict access to education for refugees and migrants.

Encourage and empower refugee and migrant entrepreneurship and participation within societies and communities. Refugees and migrants are often highly motivated to be entrepreneurial due to the lack of alternative opportunities, yet often lack the direct support necessary for job and business creation. Small businesses run by refugees and migrants have the potential to create employment opportunities for other local residents, and contribute to local and national economies. Mechanisms should be created, such as

government guaranteed loans, to allow refugees and migrants (as well as local community members) to receive backing for business start-ups.

Develop urban and city planning to incorporate increased migration and social cohesion. There are some excellent existing examples of local and city authorities incorporated increased migration into their urban and city planning to achieve improved social cohesion. These examples should be made widely available and used by local and city authorities as a basis for the development of urban and city plans, in order to effectively and sensitively manage increased migration and social cohesion.

Distribute resources to realise the potential of MSPs on social cohesion

Create mechanisms through which refugee and migrant-led organizations, and community faith-based organizations can access funding and resources and be a part of MSPs. Legal issues notwithstanding, excluding potentially significant and important stakeholders in MSPs can only be of detriment to social cohesion efforts, and to all those who stand to benefit from effective MSPs and inclusion processes. Engaging migrant, refugee, and religious groups that are generally marginalised in MSPs raises their societal reputation and helps overcome prejudice. Furthermore, including and empowering youth and children from these groups as stakeholders facilitates youth leadership while ensuring intergenerational interaction.
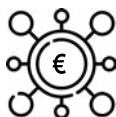
Initiate specific funding streams to encourage the development of multi-religious networks and initiatives. Multi-faith and multi-religious organizations and networks help to avoid perceptions of favouritism towards certain religious and ethnic groups. They also encourage cross-faith collaborations and model interreligious and multi-religious cooperation to refugees, migrants, and local communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS ACTORS AND FBOS

Maximise the benefit of faith engagement

Facilitate engagement between refugees, migrants, host communities, and other relevant stakeholders. Religious people are not only religious – they often have skills, expertise and contacts which cut across many sectors, including government, private sector and civil society. They are therefore uniquely placed to build bridges between different stakeholders and be at the heart of building effective MSPs. Faith actors should provide the resources and opportunities to facilitate engagement between refugees and migrants, host communities and other relevant stakeholders. This includes making existing resources and facilities more available to diverse groups.

Integrate interfaith engagement. Religious actors need to work together across religions to address the needs of refugees and migrants. It is just as important for actors from minority religions to proactively engage as for those from the majority religion.

Additionally, majority religion FBOs that have relationships with government and political powers need to be proactive in engaging the smaller religions and FBOs to build government ties in an interfaith manner.

Communicate religious commitments and beliefs to both members and non-religious actors. Compromise is essential for collaboration. Faith-based actors need to balance between communicating their own religious commitments and beliefs to members of their religion, and speaking the "language" of other non-religious stakeholders. Engaging with other stakeholders in a language, and way, that is familiar to them (project requirements, indicators, objectives, etc.) need not diminish an individual's beliefs or tradition. Faith-based actors must be particularly vociferous in reassuring potential partners that they are not carrying out work for the purposes of proselytisation.

Enhance the equity and quality of partnerships in MSPs on social cohesion

Establish clear guidelines for achieving and maintaining parity for all stakeholders in MSPs. The advantages and function of MSPs are not self-evident for all stakeholders, and better education on the process of initiating MSPs, their advantages and management responsibilities are required. It should not be a condition that only formally constituted organizations be the principal stakeholders in the delivery of migrant support and social cohesion projects. The inclusion of refugee community organizations and refugee-led organizations should be emphasised.

Encourage FBOs to create coordinating bodies. Coordinating bodies, provide a clear and attractive route to engagement for other stakeholders. The existence of a coordinating body actively increases the chances of engagement in MSPs in urban and city environments. FBOs and faith-based communities should be encouraged, where possible, to create coordinating bodies, which are mandated to form alliances with other MSP partners and stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CSOS

Actively seek out dialogue and cooperation with policymakers and other partners. Proactive engagement in dialogue builds the trust needed to create and maintain effective MSPs and their initiatives. CSOs, NGOs, and FBOs should reach out to policy makers to engage in dialogue to facilitate cooperations. This should also be done with partners, who are generally not engaged with or included in MSPs, such as media and cultural institutions, the private sector or refugee and migrant-led associations.

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