Driving Migrant Inclusion through Social Innovation

Lessons for cities in a pandemic

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Lessons for cities in a pandemic

By Liam Patuzzi

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Executive Summary

The spike in migrant and refugee arrivals in 2015–16 marked a tipping point for many European cities' approach to inclusion. Faced with large numbers of newcomers with complex needs, many localities were forced to experiment with new models of service provision, including working with non-governmental actors and relying more heavily on communities themselves to support the newly arrived. As a result, many cities have developed a fragile ecosystem of social innovation, made up of untraditional partnerships between government, businesses, and grassroots organizations. A number have explored innovative models of financing integration measures; inclusive strategies for engaging migrants and refugees in the design and delivery of services; creative approaches to community engagement; and human-centred, holistic service models.

As European cities begin to re-open after the lockdowns forced by the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020, a major question is how they will support their migrant and refugee populations amid ongoing social distancing orders and other measures

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to contain the spread of the virus. In this "new normal", cities facing rising social challenges and the difficulty of supporting vulnerable groups, all while grappling with tight budgets, may find that the social innovation infrastructure born out of the 2015–16 crisis could be the ticket to a more cost-effective and politically viable response. Yet these nascent structures also risk crumbling under the tough economic situation and impending budget cuts, and much of what makes them work – personal interactions – has been rendered extremely difficult by social distancing measures. The pandemic could thus be a make-or-break moment for this innovative architecture for social inclusion. It is also a major test of European cities' crisis resilience, and numerous lessons can be drawn from the experiences of the 2015–16 period.

Many of the social innovations developed since 2015–16 fall into four broad categories:

▶ **Supporting hard-to-reach populations.** Some newly arrived immigrants are poorly served by the logic of traditional services or fall through the gaps of traditional service provision. Efforts to reach these groups can be seen in Palermo, Italy, and Thessaloniki, Greece, where civil society organizations have played a key role in creating extensive networks to provide holistic services to unaccompanied children. Learning from the experiences of cities in Northern Europe and North America, the Italian city of Milan has developed an effective model that incorporates rapid access to housing and targeted counselling to reduce the exclusion of the most vulnerable, homeless, and marginalized groups. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic poses a major threat to such services: in the short term, the challenge is that these services generally revolve around in-person interactions, and in the long run, it is that they are expensive and focused on intensity rather than scale, which may make them hard to sustain as governments prepare to address soaring needs with slashed resources. Still, some of the smartest ideas, such as matching refugees with volunteer and civic engagement opportunities to build skills, confidence, and social capital – as explored by projects in Warsaw, Poland; Thessaloniki, Greece; or Ghent, Belgium – may gain in importance. Such initiatives can give migrants and refugees the opportunity to engage in productive activity

in times of soaring unemployment, while also allowing local governments to enlist everyone's contributions to address growing social needs.

▶ **Engaging receiving communities.** Encouraging communities to feel they have a stake in receiving newcomers is an important dimension of social cohesion and can help mitigate feelings of loss of control that often lie at the root of resistance and political contestation. One way for cities to promote informal ties of trust between newcomers and established residents is to tap into the localized identities and shared responsibilities that come from living in the same neighbourhood. Examples of this approach include plans by the City of Gdansk, Poland, to build onto the existing structure of its Neighbourhood Houses to allow residents to develop their own activities related to cohesion and inclusion, and in Malaga, Spain, the participatory neighbourhood assemblies that work to improve the living conditions of all local residents. Many cities also rely on volunteers to reinforce local services – as in the case of volunteer guardians for unaccompanied children in Palermo and Milan. The pandemic has led to a surge of community engagement that is often hyper-localized, particularly during the most acute phase of the lockdowns when many people's daily reality shrunk to the size of their neighbourhoods. Cities may find creative ways to use this heightened local solidarity to advance inclusion. However, volunteer-based approaches have long raised concerns that they are a shortcut to budget cuts for official services – a debate that may grow louder in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, as the pandemic has exposed the pitfalls of government disinvestment from key public services.

▶ **Building untraditional partnerships.** Cities have become adept at working with a diverse set of partners, including research institutes, international organizations, grassroots non-governmental organizations, charities, social entrepreneurs, and businesses both large and small. An important element of this shift has been for cities to move away from seeing non-governmental partners primarily as implementors of policies or programmes and towards a more peer-to-peer relationship that involves them in shaping services as well. This is evident, for example, in how city governments in Palermo, Thessaloniki, and Antwerp (Belgium) have partnered with civil society to develop innovate solutions to protect and support unaccompanied children. But this shift has not been without gaps and risks. Direct partnerships between local governments and businesses are still a rare breed; instead, private companies sometimes take on a greater role as integration service providers where public engagement is limited, as in the case of Mastercard providing financial inclusion trainings in Bucharest, Romania. Moreover, city authorities used to collaborating with larger and more established parts of civil society often struggle to form meaningful partnerships with more informal, community-based groups – local players that may emerge as key actors as communities need to adapt to COVID-19-related challenges. Migrant associations in particular often find themselves side-lined or pigeonholed and only tapped for expertise on immigration and integration projects. Involving such organizations as providers of municipal social services – as is done in Milan and in Warsaw – can help them build confidence and an image as key strategic partners within the local social economy, rather than just cultural institutions.

▶ **Co-creating services.** Involving beneficiaries of services in their design and delivery – an approach known as "co-creation" – is based on sound logic: it helps cities better understand the (sometimes invisible) hurdles migrant and refugees face on their integration journeys and design smarter, more streamlined services. Examples range from Palermo's "validation groups", a panel of potential service users who help a network of local service providers and city authorities design initiatives for unaccompanied children, to an effort in Antwerp to include the voices of refugees in the process of defining and evaluating the success of a co-housing programme. But while co-creation

is a popular idea, its application has thus far been limited. This approach can also inadvertently favour the involvement of better educated and more articulate members of a target population. Still, applying co-creation methods locally to design solutions to COVID-19-related challenges could help cities promote community cohesion across the usual group boundaries, while also ensuring the needs of migrants and refugees are reflected in general relief and stimulus measures. Although many cities are under pressure to provide rapid and assertive responses, potentially creating incentives to skip this step, doing so may mean missing a valuable opportunity to strengthen inclusive local identities around a sense of shared responsibility.

Community-based reactions to the public health crisis and related lockdowns – for example, the uptick in volunteerism and forms of neighbourhood solidarity such as food drives – point to as yet untapped potential for European cities looking for innovative, whole-of-community approaches to social inclusion. In an extremely tough economic reality, some localities will have no choice but to hope that other, non-governmental actors step in to plug gaps in public services. But as the recession touches more groups, this may place pressure on the stores of social capital and goodwill on which social innovation ecosystems are based. At the same time, impending budget cuts threaten to wipe out resources that small civil society organizations need for survival.

In this rapidly changing social and economic landscape, local efforts to promote innovation for migrant and refugee inclusion will have to shift gears. In particular, cities will need to tackle the hard questions of effectiveness, sustainability, efficiency, and scalability if social innovation is to turn from a novelty into a robust tool for transforming local government. Cities can support social innovation in many ways – including by giving migrants and refugees a central role in designing the roadmap to recovery, thus moving from social innovation for inclusion to inclusive social innovation. And with civil society actors likely to face significant challenges in rebounding from the pandemic, cities may find that this is the right moment to apply the tools of social innovation within city hall – incorporating them into their institutional DNA – rather than viewing them as a prerogative of their non-governmental partners.

1   Introduction

The rapid arrival of more than 2 million asylum seekers in Europe in 2015–16[1] caught many local governments unprepared. Within two years, Berlin received more than 70,000 humanitarian newcomers,[2] putting the local administration and service providers under severe strain, creating huge backlogs, and driving the city to deploy untested and creative measures to find accommodations for new arrivals, such as renting rooms in youth hostels and repurposing gym halls and old airport spaces.[3] In Rome, thousands of asylum seekers had no other choice but to stay in vacant buildings as emergency shelters overflowed.[4] Similarly, many asylum seekers waiting to register at the Brussels Immigration Office in late 2015 were left without a place to sleep and had to camp in a nearby park as authorities

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1   Eurostat, "Asylum and First Time Asylum Applicants by Citizenship, Age and Sex. Annual Aggregated Data (Rounded) [migr_ asyappctza]", updated 15 October 2019.

2   Berlin State Office for Refugee Matters, "Zahlen und Fakten", accessed 27 July 2020; World Economic Forum, *Migration and Its Impact on Cities – An Insight Report* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2017).

3   City of Berlin, "Derzeit fast 650 Flüchtlinge in Berliner Hostels", updated 3 February 2016; City of Berlin, District Office Tempelhof-Schöneberg, "Unterkünfte für Geflüchtete in Tempelhof-Schöneberg", accessed 5 August 2020.

4   Mattha Busby and Carlotta Dotto, "I Love Rome, but Rome Doesn't Love Us: The City's New Migrant Crisis", *The Guardian*, 19 February 2018.

scrambled to deal with soaring backlogs.[5] Starting in 2014, Milan saw a spike in the number of unaccompanied migrant children in the city, with around 800 of them in municipal accommodations by late 2017 – a number that challenged its capacity to meet the needs of this vulnerable group.[6] Smaller localities also faced significant challenges: Kufstein, an Austrian town near the German border, became a transit point for asylum seekers on their way to Germany and other countries in Northern and Western Europe.[7]

Crises often act as a magnifying glass for existing limitations in government operations.

The ways in which communities adapted to these intense, localized challenges hold lessons that continue to resonate today, particularly as countries in Europe and elsewhere face a dual public health and economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic that has similarly wrought havoc on local service provision. Indeed, crises often act as a magnifying glass for existing limitations in government operations. In 2015–16, localities struggled to support the diverse needs of large numbers of – often vulnerable – newcomers and were forced to fill gaps in national support services, from reception and early medical assistance for asylum seekers to mental health and labour market supports. The period since then has shown how long the tail of a crisis can extend, with many cities and communities still working to help newcomers find their feet and thrive in their new country, while tempering the swell of public anxiety and polarization around immigration issues.

The spike in arrivals in 2015–16 also precipitated another shift, away from seeing government as the sole or primary locus for community-building and service provision and towards a more decentralized approach to inclusion and social cohesion. Since then, European cities have made huge progress in improving their infrastructure for dialogue and lesson-sharing on migrant inclusion – for example, through the creation of the Urban Agenda Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in 2016.[8] Meanwhile a newly gained sense of confidence has allowed localities to carve out a stronger role in shaping migration and integration policymaking at higher levels of governance.[9]

This period has seen European cities become agents and places of social innovation[10] – originators of unconventional solutions to meet society's needs, both in response to rising diversity and leveraging it to enhance communities' capacity to act.[11] Through partnerships with non-governmental actors, cities have tapped into new perspectives, ideas, and resources, from grassroots organizations' first-hand experience with target groups to private companies' international networks. The potential of local stakeholders to innovate in support of migrant and refugee inclusion has been recognized and encouraged at the EU level as well – for example, through the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) initiative

5   Hanne Beirens, *Cracked Foundation, Uncertain Future: Structural Weaknesses in the Common European Asylum System* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2018).

6   Fabiana Ortugno and Diana Balena, *Il Tutore Volontario: Opportunità e Criticità* (Milan: City of Milan, Office of the Ombudsman for Children's and Adolescents' Rights, n.d.); author interview with Barbara Lucchesi, Unaccompanied Minors Team Coordinator, Unit for Inclusion and Immigration Policies, City of Milan, 9 September 2019.

7   Author interview with Bernhard Kapfinger, Mobile Counsellor, Emergency Shelter Kufstein, Tiroler Soziale Dienste GmbH, 3 September 2019; Tirol ORF, "Hunderte Flüchtlinge an der Grenze Kufstein", TIROL ORF, 4 November 2015.

8   Christiane Heimann and Janina Stürner, *Evaluation Report: Urban Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees* (N.p.: Urban Agenda for the EU, 2019).

9   Janina Stürner, Christiane Heimann, Petra Bendel, and Hannes Schamann, "When Mayors Make Migration Policy: What Role for Cities in EU Migration and Integration Policymaking?" (policy brief, European Policy Centre, Brussels, 4 March 2020).

10   Urban Innovative Actions (UIA), *How Are UIA Migrants and Refugees Integration Projects Implementing Innovative Ways for Better Managing Inclusion?* (Brussels: UIA, 2019).

11   Social Innovation Community, "What Is Social Innovation?", updated 17 April 2018.

launched by the European Commission in 2015 to support cities across Europe in identifying and testing new solutions for urban challenges, including in the area of migrant inclusion.[12]

The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened this budding infrastructure and risks unwinding the achievements of recent years. It has further highlighted and exacerbated deep inequities and vulnerabilities that immigrant and minority communities face[13] – from more limited access to health care among migrants and refugees to the vulnerabilities of people living on the knife-edge of poverty or working in the informal or precarious economy. Moreover, it has forced the suspension of many government and non-profit services that act as a lifeline for these groups and made it more difficult for many to tap into informal support structures at community centres, libraries, churches, and mosques.

As cities begin to re-open in Europe, local governments face the longer-term challenge of supporting diverse populations amid slashed budgets that could make it politically more difficult to invest in support for those not seen as "genuine" community members. Yet at the same time, an outpouring of community engagement similar to what was seen in 2015–16 is taking place – albeit under the constraints of social distancing. This moment thus represents a large-scale experiment in community resilience: how will communities innovate to plug the holes caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and can the bonds of social cohesion be preserved and strengthened as a result?

The experiences of 2015–16 offer much instruction in this regard. Cities that were cash-strapped or received an especially large number of arriving refugees and migrants, as well as those newer to integration issues, had to reinvent their modes of working – particularly by involving non-governmental partners and local residents in designing and delivering services. This report analyses innovative approaches that have emerged since 2015 and reflects on how these models could help cities address new challenges, and how they would need to be adapted to do so. While the pandemic threatens multiple facets of migrant and refugee integration, it is also an opportunity to capitalize on hyper-local forms of solidarity as a force for inclusion – particularly as the daily reality of many people around Europe has shrunk to the size of their neighbourhood. To do so, however, it is essential that cities master the ropes of social innovation and learn from past mistakes.

This report is mainly based on research conducted as part of the ADMin4ALL project on "Supporting Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Migrants in Europe" (see Box 1) in cities and towns in Southern as well as Central and Eastern Europe that have faced particularly challenging situations, from high levels of spontaneous arrivals in 2015–16 and limited integration experience or service infrastructure to restrictive national policies and strained economies. This analysis also includes examples from other European urban centres that have devised innovative solutions to handle the pressures of 2015–16 and promote lasting inclusion of newcomers in the local fabric of society. The report starts by examining the potential of social innovation to support migrant and refugee inclusion (Section 2) before exploring

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12   UIA, "Integration of Migrants and Refugees", accessed 29 June 2020.
13   Roald Høvring, "10 Things You Should Know about Coronavirus and Refugees", Norwegian Refugee Council, 16 March 2020. In Europe, non-EU migrant workers are much more vulnerable than nationals or EU workers to the labour market disruptions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic; they are much more likely than native workers to hold temporary work contracts (48 per cent higher chance), more likely to be employed in jobs that cannot be performed virtually/remotely, and at a higher risk of poverty and lacking a financial cushion that could help them weather a drop in income. See Francesco Fasani and Jacopo Mazza, *A Vulnerable Workforce: Migrant Workers in the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Brussels: Joint Research Centre, 2020). Similarly, research from the United States has shown that immigrants and Latinos (both native and foreign born) are over-represented in industries that are central to the COVID-19 response as well as those most immediately affected by mass layoffs; see Randy Capps, Jeanne Batalova, and Julia Gelatt, *COVID-19 and Unemployment: Assessing the Early Fallout for Immigrants and Other U.S. Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2020).

promising practices and persistent challenges (Section 3). The final section offers reflections on how these lessons can help diverse cities advance inclusion and social cohesion in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and amid the associated economic, social, and political uncertainty – in short, how to use social innovation to put local communities at the centre of recovery efforts.

BOX 1
About the ADMin4ALL project

This research was conducted as part of the ADMin4ALL project on "Supporting Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Migrants in Europe". The project, which is implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and funded by the European Commission, aims to enhance the capacity of local governments to develop sustainable strategies and inclusive services for the successful social and economic integration of migrants.

This study draws its findings from a review of the relevant literature as well as semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe, either in person or via telephone, with representatives of Kufstein, Austria; Thessaloniki and the neighbouring municipalities of Kalamaria and Neapoli-Sykies in Greece; Milan and Palermo, Italy; Malta; Gdansk and Warsaw, Poland; Bucharest, Romania; and Malaga, Spain. These cities offer an interesting range of examples, given how they differ in terms of population size, the framework of national policies and resources, and their experiences as immigrant destinations. Interviewees included local authority officials and public service providers as well as non-governmental local stakeholders, such as civil society, migrant organizations, social enterprises, and the private sector.

For more information on the ADMin4ALL project, see: https://admin4all.eu/.

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2 Social Innovation: Hype or hope?

Innovation often comes as a by-product of emergency. As numerous European cities found themselves facing a sharp uptick in mixed migration while still grappling with the effects of the economic crisis that started in the late 2000s, many with little infrastructure, regulatory authority, or money to respond to newcomers' immediate needs or make longer-term integration investments,[14] these constraints drove some to see their roles in a new light: as mobilizers and coordinators of local resources, rather than as the sole providers of official services and support.

Closer exchange with civil society, the private sector, and wider local communities created ecosystems of social innovation for migrant and refugee inclusion. While "social innovation" has become a buzzword with varying definitions depending on context, it essentially describes the development of new products, services, or processes that meet a social need while also optimizing the use of resources and relationships available in a society.[15] As such, it involves two primary dimensions – one answering the question "what?" (new solutions), and the other answering the question "how?" (widening the pool of resources and using them more efficiently).

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14   Liam Patuzzi, *European Cities on the Front Line: New and Emerging Governance Models for Migrant Inclusion* (Brussels and Geneva: Migration Policy Institute Europe and International Organization for Migration, 2020).
15   Social Innovation Community (2018), op. cit.

Approaching challenges of inclusion and diversity through a social innovation lens can offer cities many advantages. In particular, it can help them move beyond the view of integration as just another regulatory area, an administrative matter that mainly takes place between public authorities on one side and migrants and refugees on the other. While applying a social innovation logic to integration and inclusion challenges has resulted in a diversity of concrete solutions, some of which will be discussed in Section 3, it has also led to the identification of cross-cutting approaches that promise to bring new tools to bear on inclusion issues. These include:

While "social innovation" has become a buzzword with varying definitions depending on context, it essentially describes the development of new products, services, or processes that meet a social need while also optimizing the use of resources and relationships available in a society.

► **Forging partnerships to tap expertise, networks, and resources outside government.** Engaging a cross-section of social partners in designing and delivering services for migrant and refugee inclusion can help public administrations overcome some of their limitations – including those that stem from their large size, strongly engrained institutional cultures, and formally regulated procedures. For example, local authorities can join agile organizations such as social enterprises and grassroots civil society groups in "smart networks" – non-hierarchical, flexible systems in which a diverse set of partners collaborate around a shared goal.[16] Partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector can help cities ensure key services are accessible to communities with which it may be difficult for government actors and public service providers to build the necessary level of trust,[17] including those who have a general mistrust of public authorities (sometimes as a result of experiences in countries of origin) and those who fear that interacting with public institutions may negatively affect their legal status. Such partnerships can also help cities incorporate non-public services into a broader infrastructure of support, which is especially important where cities have limited resources. Meanwhile, collaborating with businesses can open up new ways to sustain services through market-driven financing models, and potentially help local authorities tap into the pools of global expertise that larger corporations have access to. In Bucharest, for example, the engagement of private sector actors in the financial and legal fields has allowed the city to provide migrants and refugees training on financial topics[18] and on their rights to access certain services.[19]

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16   Liam Patuzzi and Alexandra Embiricos, *Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion Conference Report: Maintaining Momentum and Creating Lasting Change* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2018); Jeffrey Goldstein, James K. Hazy, and Benyamin B. Lichtenstein, "Leading through Smart Networks", in *Complexity and the Nexus of Leadership*, eds. Jeffrey Goldstein, James K. Hazy, and Benyamin B. Lichtenstein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

17   Author interview with Bogdan Patru, Head of Public Policy Romania, Mastercard, Bucharest, 19 November 2019.

18   The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Mastercard launched a partnership in 2018 to provide financial education for vulnerable groups in Romania, which led to the development of tailor-made financial products for migrants and refugees. Author interview with Bogdan Patru, Head of Public Policy Romania, Mastercard, Bucharest, 19 November 2019; IOM, "Mastercard, UN Migration Agency Team Up to Help Vulnerable Migrants, Refugees in Romania", updated 7 March 2018.

19   In 2019, the Romanian office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the National Romanian Council for Refugees, and global business law firm DLA Piper started cooperating within the Know Your Rights Project in Bucharest. They jointly developed a nine-week legal education programme for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, including modules on entrepreneurship and navigating local bureaucracy. Implementation of the course was due to start in early 2020, but it had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Author interview with Carolina Marin and Gabriela Leu, Senior Protection Associate and Communications Associate, UNHCR Romania, Bucharest, 30 November 2019; UNHCR, "Legal Education Program for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees in Romania", updated 9 December 2019.

► **Co-creating solutions with migrants to better reflect their experiences and meet their needs.** In the past five years, many local initiatives have emphasized the value of engaging refugees and migrants in designing integration solutions – a model known as "co-creation". This approach originated in the 1960s and 1970s in the IT industry before spilling over into urban planning and other fields.[20] In the area of migrant and refugee inclusion, it has been driven mainly by civil society, particularly new social ventures, but it has slowly made its way into city administrations. This approach elicits the first-hand expertise of migrants and refugees on the arrival and settlement process to develop more effective services. By softening the line between service providers and recipients and treating immigrants as active players who add value, co-creation also reduces power imbalances. Moreover, it can help highlight their contribution to receiving communities, especially if migrants and refugees have opportunities to engage on more than just immigrant integration. And when old and new residents join forces in search of new solutions to shared social challenges, this can create strong ties around a sense of common purpose. In Palermo, internationally linked civil society organizations such as the European Centre of Studies and Initiatives (CESIE) have helped the city successfully apply participatory approaches to learning – for example, by building on migrants' and refugees' culturally specific health practices and knowledge to help them navigate the health-care system of the receiving society.[21]

► **Involving receiving communities to strengthen bonds between neighbours.** For city authorities, especially where resources are scarce, making inclusion a community effort can (1) leverage the energy of volunteerism, which risks being lost if it is not given adequate support, recognition, and structure; (2) give all local residents a sense of stake in and ownership of the issue, while avoiding feelings of loss of control that lie at the root of resistance and political contestation; and (3) advance integration by building relationships between old and new residents. Involving broader communities can also foster social capital and thus advance integration in spheres that strongly depend on informal networks – such as work and housing – but to which authorities can generally only regulate formal access. Cities have an advantage over other levels of government when it comes to community involvement because they can more easily foster a shared identity among residents around place-based challenges rather than more abstract notions of belonging. Community-based initiatives can also lower the bar for participation in integration activities by providing informal spaces for dialogue and exchange, such as through leisure activities. In Milan, for example, the migrant association Sunugal has actively tried to subvert common narratives about migrants (both hostile and benevolent-but-paternalistic ones) by collaborating with non-migrant civil society groups and building a strong reputation as a service provider for all residents, including through an International Neighbourhood Centre that offers a range of cultural events, courses, and skill-building activities.[22] Similarly, the City of Kufstein has sought to promote positive encounters between locals and newcomers through low-threshold activities such as language cafes and gardening projects.[23]

► **Adopting a human-centred approach to streamline services.** In the context of migrant and refugee inclusion, social innovation does not necessarily involve creating new tools and services;

20 Stephanie Gioia, "A Brief History of Co-Creation", Medium, 24 August 2015.
21 Author interview with Roberta Lo Bianco, Coordinator of Migration Unit, European Centre of Studies and Initiatives (CESIE), Palermo, 28 November 2019; CESIE, "VIM - Vitality Interventions for Migrants", accessed 26 May 2020.
22 Author interview with Modou Gueye, President of the Association Sunugal, Milan, 6 January 2020; Centro Internazionale di Quartiere (CIQ), "Attività", accessed 25 May 2020.
23 Author interview with Meral Sevencan, Integration Commissioner, City of Kufstein, 19 September 2019; author interview with Bernhard Kapfinger, Mobile Counsellor, Emergency Shelter Kufstein, Tiroler Soziale Dienste GmbH, 3 September 2019.

it may instead entail identifying blind spots, dead-ends, and interruptions in integration pathways and closing them by better connecting the dots between available offerings. These obstacles often have their roots in an institutional understanding of services that creates artificial separation between spheres of life that do not correspond to the lived experiences of newcomers. For migrants and refugees with complex and interconnected support needs, it may be necessary to combine different types of support and to provide services in a more holistic way. This often requires strong upfront investments to overcome long-standing divisions between services, but successful coordination can maximize integration outcomes by exploiting synergies between types of support; for example, the sense of stability that comes with adequate housing, the sense of self-worth that comes with meaningful social interactions, and the sense of autonomy and independence that comes with employment can mutually reinforce one another.

► **Applying interdisciplinary knowledge to multifaceted challenges.** Another key advantage of a social innovation approach to migrant and refugee inclusion is that it encourages cities to tap into wider pools of knowledge. This can help city administrations view inclusion as more than an administrative matter. Indeed, inclusion has economic, social, psychological, political, and technical dimensions that are deeply interconnected. Bringing multidisciplinary insights and cutting-edge advances in from a range of fields, such as digital technologies, social psychology,[24] and behavioural science may deepen understanding of how to best promote integration. Like other destinations across Europe, the City of Milan has actively tried to involve the local tech community in developing solutions for migrant and refugee integration; in March 2018, it promoted a hackathon that eventually resulted in the development of an app – in collaboration with a technical university and the local prefecture – to inform migrants about the possibility of and procedure for family reunification.[25] And in Warsaw, the city-run Centre for Socio-Educational Innovation and Training applies state-of-the-art research in education and child psychology to improve the capacity of local educators to teach in diverse classrooms and improve the educational outcomes of migrant children.[26]

Despite the growing appetite for social innovation among immigration and integration policymakers, the field is still rather new and has not yet fully lived up to its potential.[27] Even where promising practices have emerged at the local level, the stakeholders involved may not identify the success factors that would allow the model to be scaled up or applied in different cultural, social, institutional, or economic contexts – a limitation due in part to the fact that many integration initiatives have limited experience with conducting evaluations of their work.[28] The many different understandings and definitions of social innovation can also complicate exchange between local actors.

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24 Meghan Benton, Antonio Silva, and Will Somerville, *Applying Behavioural Insights to Support Immigrant Integration and Social Cohesion* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2018).

25 The app My Journey is expected to be available soon for free download at the website wemi.milano.it. Author interview with Rosanna Sucato, Social Assistant, Department for Rights, Inclusion and Projects, Unit for WeMi and Project Development, City of Milan, 9 September 2019; Samuele Maccolini, "Le App Salveranno i Migranti: La Nuova Era dell'Integrazione Inizia Online", *Linkiesta*, 8 August 2018; Comune di Milano, *Benvenuti a Milano. Guida per i Nuovi Arrivati* (Milan: City of Milan, 2019).

26 Author interview with Malgorzata Zasunska, Project Coordinator, Warsaw Centre for Socio-Educational Innovation and Training, 27 September 2019.

27 Liam Patuzzi, Meghan Benton, and Alexandra Embiricos, *Social Innovation for Refugee Inclusion: From Bright Spots to System Change* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2019).

28 J-PAL's European Social Inclusion Initiative is one example of a project that seeks to promote evaluation capacity and a culture of evidence among local-level initiatives for migrant inclusion. See J-PAL, "European Social Inclusion Initiative", accessed 25 May 2020.

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the measures put in place to contain it … have disrupted much of the public infrastructure that supports migrant and refugee integration.

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the measures put in place to contain it – such as lockdowns and social distancing orders – have disrupted much of the public infrastructure that supports migrant and refugee integration, and it is uncertain when operations will be fully restored.[29] With the pandemic casting a dark shadow over the global economy, and European societies bracing for high unemployment and slashed budgets, local governments' scope to invest in immigrant integration risks becoming more narrow in the next few years – financially as well as politically. At the same time, a spike in community solidarity[30] and a resurgent appetite for cross-stakeholder solutions based on multidisciplinary know-how could make this a historic opportunity for social innovation to strengthen community resilience. While this is a very different situation than the one Europe faced in 2015–16, local governments can capitalize on several lessons learnt – first and foremost, the value of taking a step back, identifying resources and potential allies at the local level, and rethinking the power relationships that exist between them and local authorities and ways to build durable trust.

3   Social Innovation in Diverse Cities

Social innovation often has greatest value when it brings new perspectives to bear on old challenges, helps public services cater more effectively to the needs of the populations they assist, or plugs gaps in existing service provision. This section analyses innovative approaches to inclusion described by interviewees during the ADMin4ALL project, including their benefits and drawbacks. There is considerable variation in these models, in part because, as some interviewees noted, there are disparate understandings of what qualifies as "innovative", at times based on personal intuition rather than rigorous criteria.[31]

A.   *Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and hardest to reach*

One of the main promises of social innovation is in offering new ways to counter the exclusion of highly vulnerable groups – such as unaccompanied children, asylum seekers who are homeless or experiencing mental illness, illiterate newcomers, and disadvantaged refugee and migrant women. Often, innovative approaches do so by plugging gaps in standardized (and therefore less flexible) or underfunded systems of mainstream support. As the COVID-19 crisis throws the vulnerability of many migrant and refugee populations into sharp relief – both due to short-term health risks and to second-order economic and social effects, such as unemployment and stigmatization[32] – the need for such services may soon be greater than ever, even as financial pressures may make them harder to sustain. While governments

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29   Solidar Foundation, "Protecting the Most Vulnerable in Society: Migration and COVID-19" (policy brief no. 95, Solidar Foundation, Brussels, 2020).

30   Ylenia Gostoli, "Coronavirus in Italy: Solidarity in the Time of Disease", *Deutsche Welle*, 18 March 2020.

31   One civil society interviewee in Warsaw expressed this blurriness pointedly as she talked about a successful project to engage, upskill, and empower Ukrainian migrant women (Ukrainian Women's Club): "I find it hard to characterize it as 'innovation', because it simply responds to people's needs; for me, it is normal. But Ashoka contacted me and asked me to present the model at a conference on social innovation, so I had to think about what makes us innovative." Author interview with Myroslava Keryk, President of the association *Fundacja Nasz Wybor* (Our Choice Foundation), Warsaw, 27 September 2019.

32   Hans Henri P. Kluge et al., "Refugee and Migrant Health in the COVID-19 Response", *The Lancet*, 2020; Høvring (2020), op. cit.; Aviva Hope Rutkin, "Why Some People Are More Vulnerable to Catching Coronavirus", *National Geographic*, 13 March 2020.

across different levels can improve formal access to services through regulatory changes – and in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, many have moved quickly to ensure their migrant populations have continued access to essential services[33] – other hurdles are best addressed by rethinking how services are designed and delivered.

A holistic approach to services

While public services often address particular needs (for example, pertaining to employment, housing, or training) in isolation, reflecting administrative structures, some innovative approaches aim for simultaneity of support – using the beneficiary's experience as their main point of reference rather than institutional divisions. In Palermo, the project *Ragazzi Harraga* (Harraga Guys), run between 2017 and 2019 by a regional alliance that includes non-profit partners alongside the municipality, aimed to promote the autonomy and skills of unaccompanied children by developing new models and tools to link up service providers who worked with them.[34] Such an approach reduces the risk that beneficiaries get trapped in a web of referrals, or that progress in one area is stifled by obstacles in others. A holistic approach to services may be particularly beneficial in cities with large vulnerable populations; in Milan and Thessaloniki, for example, interviewees stressed how the urgency to meet the needs of large numbers of unaccompanied children led to the development of multi-service models.

Holistic services may gain in importance in the wake of COVID-19. Lockdowns and social distancing orders in some jurisdictions are still disrupting access to services,[35] and in places that have begun to re-open, referral chains may take a long time to get back up to speed due to massive backlogs and some service providers having to reduce capacity or even close shop. This may further delay already lengthy integration pathways, possibly leading to longer-term scarring effects on newcomers' employment and income. Yet integrated or "wrap-around" services tend to be expensive and often focus on quality and intensity rather than scale – casting some doubt over their sustainability as local governments prepare to address soaring needs with slashed resources.

Fostering autonomy around a sense of home

Finding affordable, good-quality housing is one of the most pressing challenges many newcomers face.[36] This can be particularly difficult for refugees who are leaving public reception facilities and may not be prepared to navigate local housing markets,[37] as well as for irregular migrants with very limited

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33   In March 2020, Portugal granted all migrants, including asylum seekers with pending applications, full access to social security, unemployment allowances, and health care. See European Web Site on Integration, "Portuguese Government Gives Temporary Residence to Immigrants with Pending Applications", updated 28 March 2020. Meanwhile, the government of Barcelona launched a fast-track procedure to regularize all migrants with pending residence applications and work authorizations. See Council of Europe, "Intercultural Cities: COVID-19 Special Page", accessed 26 May 2020.

34   The project, which ran from 2016 to 2019, was founded by Cariplo Foundation. To facilitate better communication between support providers working with unaccompanied children, stakeholders in Palermo created a circulating digital folder (*cartella sociale del minore*) – the first of its kind in Italy – that records and links together all support measures for individual children, their educational progress, and administrative procedures to help them pursue their personal ambitions. Author interview with Roberta Lo Bianco, Coordinator of Migration Unit, CESIE, Palermo, 28 November 2019; Never Alone, "Harraga Guys: Social Inclusion Paths for Unaccompanied Migrant Children in the City of Palermo", accessed 25 May 2020; Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati, "La Cartella Sociale del Minore Non Accompagnato", accessed 25 May 2020.

35   Anna Knoll and Amanda Bisong, "Migration, Mobility and COVID-19: A Tale of Many Tales", European Centre for Development Policy Management, 30 March 2020.

36   Patuzzi (2020), op. cit.

37   Author interview with Irida Pandiri and Nefeli Pandiri, Social Workers, Association for the Social Support of Youth (ARSIS), Thessaloniki, 17 September 2019; author interview with Paolo Pagani, Coordinator, and Paolo Grassini, Head of Social Housing, Cooperative Farsi Prossimo, Milan, 10 September 2019; author interview with Dominik Wach, Senior Social Work Specialist, Warsaw Family Support Centre, 26 September 2019.

access to public support.[38] These and other barriers often force migrants into overcrowded housing and remote, disadvantaged, or poorly connected areas of the city – conditions that stifle their access to social interactions as well as educational and employment opportunities. In the worst cases, housing barriers can lead to homelessness, triggering a spiral of marginalization.

In recognition of its importance, housing often plays a central role in urban models to prevent or counter migrant exclusion, such as in "housing-first" and "housing-led" approaches.[39] The housing-first model provides accommodation as a first step in cases of intense marginalization or destitution, fostering a basic sense of stability as a foundation for further integration investments. For example, Milan's Central Station Help Centre – a service point for homeless, destitute, and marginalized

Milan's Central Station Help Centre ... has built on this model with positive results, providing an immediate street-to-home transition for homeless migrants and other residents with addictions, mental health conditions, and relational and cognitive issues.

residents run jointly by the city and civil society organizations – has built on this model with positive results, providing an immediate street-to-home transition for homeless migrants and other residents with addictions, mental health conditions, and relational and cognitive issues.[40] Housing-led approaches, on the other hand, create a more gradual pathway to independent housing for clients with less intensive support needs.

The public health crisis that swept across Europe in 2020 is further exposing vulnerabilities related to inadequate housing – including those affecting asylum seekers living in overcrowded public facilities, migrant families living in cramped accommodations due to their limited income or discrimination, and irregular migrants without access to shelter.[41] Civil society groups have often been the first to step in: in Brussels, Doctors Without Borders (*Medecins Sans Frontieres*) has opened a 50-bed medical shelter for homeless and irregular migrants, where those who have tested positive for COVID-19 can receive initial care and be referred to hospitals if their symptoms worsen.[42]

While such solutions can provide important stopgaps, many of the challenges migrants and refugees face in urban housing markets have their roots in protracted public underinvestment in (social) housing, rather than integration barriers alone. Models such as housing-first may gain further traction as city governments seek to manage a likely spike in destitution and homelessness as a result of the economic downturn and thinner safety nets. Yet their effectiveness and political feasibility will depend on whether it is possible to scale them up, and this will only work if social innovation is backed up by strong structural investments to keep housing affordable for everyone. The City of Helsinki has applied the housing-first principle consistently over the past decade and managed to achieve remarkable reductions

38 European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), "The State of Emergency Shelters", *Homeless in Europe Magazine* (Spring 2019).

39 There is some variance in how "housing first" and "housing led" are defined. While some present the two models as alternatives, others consider the housing-first model as a subcategory of housing-led approaches to homelessness. For the former understanding, see Homeless Link, *"Housing First" or "Housing Led"? The Current Picture of Housing First in England* (London: Housing Link, 2015). For the latter, see Isabelle Wutz, "Tackling Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in Europe: State of Play", Families Europe, 30 September 2019.

40 This was inspired by the success of this model in other parts of Europe and North America. Author interview with Miriam Pasqui, City Official, Unit for the Coordination of Social Emergencies, Municipality of Milan; Alessia Cattaneo, Coordinator of CASC; Claudia Martinez and Massimo Petrignani, Social Workers, CASC, Milan, 10 September 2019.

41 Camille Baker, "Conditions for Migrants Are So Dire That COVID-19 Isn't Even Their Deadliest Threat", *Quartz*, 9 April 2020.

42 European Parliament Multimedia Centre, "Infoclip: COVID-19 - MSF Medical Shelter for Homeless and Undocumented Migrants with COVID-19", accessed 26 May 2020.

in homelessness; but this success has rested on important investments in broader housing policy – including new construction – which allowed the city to build a large and growing stock of social housing units.[43] Other cities may wish to focus on regulating the spread of short-term holiday rentals,[44] including through platforms such as Airbnb, that can make affordable housing hard to find; in Barcelona, for example, an excess of short-term rentals has led to an increase in rents of more than 7 per cent in some neighbourhoods.[45] However, as the COVID-19 pandemic is severely affecting the tourism and hospitality sector in countries around the world, the medium-term effects on such rentals and urban housing prices remain to be seen.[46]

Exploring the potential of migrant volunteering

Some newcomers' profiles may be far from what is in demand in local labour markets, in terms of language skills, literacy, and digital competences, for example, or due to mental or physical disabilities. In these cases, volunteerism may provide an opportunity for newcomers to be active in their communities, gain self-confidence, and build skills.[47] In recent years, public and non-governmental stakeholders across Europe have shown an increasing interest in the potential of alternatives to traditional employment.[48] In 2016, the City of Warsaw produced a multilingual guide and organized workshops to encourage active citizenship and engagement among the city's diverse residents.[49] In Thessaloniki, the municipal Centre of Migrant Integration (KEM) launched a weekly radio show in 2019 that is staffed by refugee volunteers[50] – a model that works both to promote voluntary engagement and to make information more accessible to other newcomers.[51] And in Ghent, the project Refu Interim matches refugees with voluntary work opportunities in the cultural, social, and leisure sectors to help them build a sense of self-reliance.[52]

These approaches hold promise in a time of soaring unemployment. Cuts in public spending may make local governments keener to tap into community engagement to maintain key services and support structures, from elder care to education. Moreover, highlighting the contributions of migrants and refugees to receiving societies may promote greater intergroup trust, leveraging the sense of unity around a shared challenge that COVID-19 has sparked in many communities. Many examples of

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43 In Finland, the housing-first policy has been estimated to cost around 250 million euros, but also to produce annual savings of approximately 15,000 euros per homeless person, mainly from reduced spending on social services, emergency health care, and the justice system. See Jon Henley, "'It's a Miracle': Helsinki's Radical Solution to Homelessness", *The Guardian*, 3 June 2019.

44 Monica Bernardi, "The Impact of Airbnb on Our Cities: Gentrification and 'Disneyfication' 2.0", LabGov, 2 October 2018.

45 Miquel-Àngel Garcia-López, Jordi Jofre-Monseny, Rodrigo Martínez Mazza, and Mariona Segú, "Do Short-Term Rent Platforms Affect Housing Markets? Evidence from Airbnb in Barcelona" (working paper no. 96131, Munich Personal RePEc Archive, Munich University, June 2019).

46 According to Airbnb chief executive Brian Chesky, the company's revenue for 2020 is forecasted to be less than half the revenue of 2019. The future of short-term holiday rentals is likely to depend on rebuilding customer confidence, such as through improved cleaning protocols and the full digitalization of host-guest interactions. See Lauren Chadwick, "Coronavirus: Hotels and Airbnb Plan 'Fundamental Shift' after COVID-19 Lockdowns", Euronews, 8 May 2020.

47 Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, *Beyond Work: Reducing Social Isolation for Refugee Women and Other Marginalized Newcomers* (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2020).

48 Banulescu-Bogdan (2020), op. cit.

49 City of Warsaw, *Essential Guide for Active Citizens: How to Get Involved in Activities in Your City* (Warsaw: City of Warsaw, 2016); author interview with a representative of the Social Communication Centre, City of Warsaw, 26 September 2019.

50 This initiative was part of the EU-funded VALUES project (Volunteering Activities to Leverage Urban and European Social integration of migrants). See Eurocities, "Refugee Radio in Thessaloniki - Cities Work with Volunteers in New VALUES Project", updated 27 March 2019.

51 Author interview with Eleni Tsaousakou, Legal Officer; Evaggelia Tsilivarakou, Social Worker and Centre Coordinator; Eva Theodosiadou, Psychologist; and Rozy Panagiotou, Cultural Mediator, Centre of Migrant Integration (KEM), Thessaloniki, 17 September 2019.

52 The project includes an initial assessment of interests, skills, and experience; training sessions; and leisure group activities. See Ghent Refugee Taskforce, *Anticipating the Exodus* (Ghent: City of Ghent, Community, Welfare and Health Department, 2018).

Highlighting the contributions of migrants and refugees to receiving societies may promote greater intergroup trust.

this type of solidarity can be seen across Europe – from the Vietnamese community in Poland producing and donating medical supplies to local hospitals,[53] to migrant associations in Italy supporting vulnerable families by distributing food or providing educational support,[54] to Syrian refugees in the English county of Dorset signing up as volunteers to help elderly and vulnerable neighbours[55] – that may give a lasting boost to community cohesion. When experimenting with these models, however, cities and their local partners will have to make sure that voluntary activity is planned as a meaningful step towards building skills, confidence, and social capital within a coherent integration pathway. Insisting too heavily on voluntary engagement (as opposed to employment) risks reinforcing a paternalistic approach to integration and discounting immigrants' skills and experience, or even taking advantage of barriers they may face in local labour markets or a lower awareness of their rights.[56]

B.   An ear on the ground: Mobilizing and sustaining community engagement

In cities across Europe, the energy and enthusiasm shown by citizens in support of newcomers helped local authorities manage considerable pressures as mixed migration peaked in 2015–16. Learning to engage productively with local communities is one of the key elements of social innovation that cities can leverage. For one, it allows them to translate local solidarity into structured, coordinated, and quality-assured support, channelling it to where it is most needed. Secondly, and especially in places where immigration is a politically charged issue, it helps local authorities mitigate tensions by promoting regular dialogue with and between residents. Yet achieving effective engagement is far from easy: communicating successfully with communities is more complex than exchanging information with formal organizations, as their internal structures, dynamics, and power relations are often less transparent and more prone to change. And without careful planning and prolonged effort, investments in community engagement may never attain the level of credibility needed to reach beyond the circle of residents who are already in the loop.

Neighbourhood-specific approaches

Several innovative approaches to inclusion tap into the physical proximity, common experiences, shared sense of responsibilities, and micro-identities that come with living in the same neighbourhood to

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53   European Web Site on Integration, "The Vietnamese Community in Poland Supports Fight against COVID-19", updated 30 March 2020.

54   The programme A.MI.CO. (*Associazioni Migranti per il Co-sviluppo*, or Migrant Associations for Co-development) has been run by IOM Italy since 2011 to support migrant associations' role, especially in international cooperation, through training and grants. In 2020, the A.MI.CO award was granted to 17 migrant associations, many of which run activities to support migrant and non-migrant communities during the COVID-19 response at local level. See, for example, IOM Italy, "Le associazioni migranti e il COVID19 – Le attività sul territorio di 'Generazione Ponte'" (video, 21 April 2020). For more information on the A.MI.CO. programme, see IOM Italy, "Civil Society Support", accessed 18 August 2020.

55   Diarmuid MacDonagh, "Coronavirus: Syrian Refugees in Dorset to Help the Vulnerable", Dorset Echo, 1 April 2020.

56   For an overview of potential challenges surrounding (migrant) volunteerism, see Alexander Wolffhardt, "Operationalising a Comprehensive Approach to Migrant Integration" (discussion brief, Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum, n.p., September 2019). For a discussion of some of the problematic aspects of volunteering as a form of unpaid labour, see Charlotte Overgaard, "Rethinking Volunteering as a Form of Unpaid Work", *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2019): 128–145.

promote ties between social groups. On the more formalized end of the scale, initiatives may promote participatory decision-making and activity-planning processes, leveraging existing structures. The City of Gdansk, for example, is planning to channel funds into its recently established Neighbourhood Houses[57] to allow residents to plan their own activities around migrant inclusion and intercultural cohesion.[58] And in Malaga, the low-income district of Palma-Palmilla established participatory neighbourhood assemblies in 2005, with residents meeting on a monthly basis to improve local living conditions. While there is a specific assembly dedicated to intercultural matters, migrants also participate in thematic assemblies across the board (e.g., on youth, women, and urban security), and as such they have become known as agents of neighbourhood development.[59]

Lower-threshold solutions may help immigrant service providers and minority-based associations gain the trust of local residents who, particularly in less affluent urban areas, may see targeted support for immigrants as a diversion of resources away from the native born. Milan's Central Station Help Centre, located in a low-income district with a growing right-wing political orientation, is planning to open its space for film nights and cultural events to contribute to the neighbourhood's entertainment landscape and counter some residents' concerns that the centre's presence jeopardizes public safety and decorum.[60]

Community-based volunteer opportunities

Over the past five years, growing displacement and increasing public attention to the plight of refugees have led to an outpouring of volunteer activities in many European destination communities. This has encouraged public authorities to seek ways to cultivate the role of volunteers as a complement to specialized service providers – especially in communities facing resource bottlenecks.[61] In 2015–16, volunteers provided crucial support to overwhelmed local authorities, helping them organize the initial response to newcomers' most pressing needs and supporting the improvement of local services in the medium term, all against the backdrop of resource gaps.[62] In Italy, a 2017 change in national legislation has allowed cities receiving large numbers of unaccompanied children to recruit volunteers as guardians.[63] In Palermo, this has provided essential relief to the city as previously, civil servants would each be responsible for hundreds of children; the volunteers have also drastically improved the

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57 The City of Gdansk has established these Neighbourhood Houses in partnership with civil society, following British and Irish examples, as community meeting places, platforms of co-creation and incubators of citizen-driven initiatives to drive social innovation. See ISSUU, "Case Study: Gdansk, Initial Steps towards Responsibility Sharing, URBACT II Capitalisation", updated 16 March 2017.

58 Author interview with Paulina Wlazlak, Inspector, Department of Social Development, City of Gdansk, 12 November 2019.

59 Author interview with Alberto Rivera de la Puente, Director of Social Services, District of Palma-Palmilla, City of Malaga, 3 December 2019.

60 Author interview with Miriam Pasqui, City Official, Unit for the Coordination of Social Emergencies, Municipality of Milan; Alessia Cattaneo, Coordinator of CASC; Claudia Martinez and Massimo Petrignani, Social Workers, CASC, Milan, 10 September 2019.

61 Susan Fratzke and Emma Dorst, *Volunteers and Sponsors: A Catalyst for Refugee Integration?* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2019).

62 Author interview with Bernhard Kapfinger, Mobile Counsellor, Emergency Shelter Kufstein, Tiroler Soziale Dienste GmbH, 3 September 2019.

63 Italian Law 47/2017 (known as the "Zampa Law" after the measure's first signatory, Senator Sandra Zampa) was approved in March 2017 and introduced the figure of the "voluntary guardian", allowing local and regional authorities to recruit and train guardians for unaccompanied migrant children among private citizens. See Save the Children, *Guida per i Tutori Volontari dei Minori Stranieri non Accompagnati* (Rome: Save the Children Italia, 2018); Initiatives and Studies on Multiethnicity (ISMU) Foundation, *At a Crossroad: Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Their Transition to Adulthood in Italy* (Rome: United Nations Children's Fund, UNHCR, and IOM, 2019).

quality of guardianship and support unaccompanied children receive, as each volunteer is allowed to be responsible for three children at most.[64]

In Kufstein, for example, as refugee arrivals and transit flows subsided, local authorities repurposed some of their resources ... to cultivate the town's volunteer ecosystem.

Since 2016, however, as media and public focus on new arrivals has waned, some local governments have had to adjust to dwindling community engagement. To give volunteer-based initiatives a more durable foundation – and to keep these community-engagement "muscles" in shape for future challenges – some localities have taken steps to incentivize volunteering and ensure that volunteers have a rewarding experience. In Kufstein, for example, as refugee arrivals and transit flows subsided, local authorities repurposed some of their resources from tackling immediate newcomer needs to cultivate the town's volunteer ecosystem – for example, by introducing networking and skill-building opportunities for volunteers.[65]

Volunteerism should not, however, be viewed as a silver bullet for migrant and refugee integration as doing so carries significant risks. One is that it becomes an excuse for public budget cuts – a recurrent cautionary note in the debate around "big society" and "whole-of-community" models of service provision.[66] Another risk, particularly when supporting vulnerable groups, is that volunteers generally lack the specialized skills and level of knowledge professionals can offer. If not adequately monitored and supported, volunteers may become overwhelmed and lose motivation, while also creating frustrating or even potentially harmful situations for newcomers.

Coordinating and sustaining community-based responses hold significant promise in responding to the challenges brough by COVID-19. Harnessing volunteerism may be able to help cities weather service bottlenecks and tight budgets.[67] But doing so successfully will require local authorities to test approaches that take into account new questions, such as how to engage, motivate, and coordinate volunteers remotely in a situation of (partial) social distancing, and how to keep them safe from simmering health risks while engaging with their neighbours.[68] Initiatives born out of neighbourly solidarity may provide a starting point for more structured, durable engagement if city authorities take steps to map, acknowledge, and support it – financially, politically, and professionally. What is more, channelling resources into place-based initiatives may turn out to be one of the more efficient and less controversial ways to continue addressing the specific needs of refugees and other vulnerable groups as targeted measures for such populations may become harder to fund and justify politically in a tight budgetary environment.

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64   Author interview with Roberta Lo Bianco, Coordinator of Migration Unit, CESIE, Palermo, 28 November 2019. After Lombardy, the region of Sicily (of which Palermo is the capital) had the most unaccompanied migrant children in 2017; in Palermo alone, there were about 500 such children. See Sara de Carli, "Palermo, Ecco i Primi 54 Tutori Volontari di Minori non Accompagnati", Vita, 30 August 2017. Palermo was also the first Italian city to train and work with voluntary guardians, and a frontrunner in setting up a Monitoring Office for Guardians, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to supervise and support participating volunteers in performing their functions. See Comune di Palermo, "In Primo Piano", updated 25 June 2019.

65   Author interview with Meral Sevencan, Integration Commissioner, City of Kufstein, 19 September 2019.

66   See for instance: Francesco Grisolia and Emanuele Ferragina, "Social Innovation on the Rise: Yet Another Buzzword in Time of Austerity?", Salute e Società (2015): 71–84; Patuzzi, Benton, and Embiricos (2019), op. cit.

67   Some governments have already started repositories of community-based, local-level practices that have emerged in response to the virus. See Carrefour des Innovations Sociales, "Territoires Engagés", accessed 26 May 2020.

68   Betsy McFarland, "Supporting Volunteer Efforts during Coronavirus", Energize, May 2020.

C.   *Joining forces in testing times: Multi-stakeholder partnerships*

The sharp increase in refugee and migrant arrivals in 2015–16 fuelled new multi-stakeholder partnerships at the local level – involving public institutions, research institutes, international organizations, grassroots NGOs, established charities, social entrepreneurs, large businesses, and small- and medium-sized enterprises. Ensuring that partnerships outlast the sense of crisis and become long-term projects, however, requires ongoing investments in dialogue and coordination, a common sense of purpose, and a mutual understanding between partners of one another's incentives and constraints.[69] Local authorities have often been successful at rethinking their partnerships with civil society groups with whom they have established ties on more equal terms, but there is significant room for growth in how they engage with smaller initiatives (including migrant associations) and the private sector.

Rethinking collaboration with civil society

Local services for migrant and refugee inclusion often rest on effective collaboration between local authorities and civil society. The events of 2015–16 encouraged some rethinking of these partnerships, with some cities moving from a client–supplier model to one in which civil society groups have a more equal footing in project conceptualization and design while civil servants are more directly involved in service provision. In Milan, the *Centro Mediazione al Lavoro* (Work Mediation Centre), which provides targeted employment support for refugees and other groups struggling to enter the labour market, works with mixed teams of public servants and civil society service providers. While different institutional cultures have led to some tension, the combination of the municipality's institutional weight and the NGOs' expert advice and assistance when matching refugees and other centre clients with work placements has proven attractive to companies.[70]

> *While different institutional cultures have led to some tension, the combination of the municipality's institutional weight and the NGOs' expert advice and assistance when matching refugees and other centre clients with work placements has proven attractive to companies.*

Jointly designing and providing services can be an ideal vehicle for rethinking collaboration with civil society. However, it risks strengthening the position of well-established groups – those more likely to win public tenders for service provision – while excluding smaller and younger initiatives, which may hold significant potential for innovation as they are often less bound by institutional structures and legacies. As some interviewees pointed out, this can be exacerbated by the fact that city administrations often fail to map the landscape of stakeholders and projects around migrant and refugee inclusion on a rolling basis, instead turning to groups with which they are already familiar.

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69 Patuzzi, Benton, and Embiricos (2019), op. cit.
70 Author interview with Ornella Villella, Director, and Angela Guma, Operator/Counsellor, *Centro Mediazione al Lavoro* (Work Mediation Centre), City of Milan, 6 October 2019.

BOX 2
Social entrepreneurship and COVID-19: A good time for game changers?

Next to traditional NGOs and charities, social enterprises have established themselves as players in the landscape of migrant and refugee inclusion initiatives, especially since 2015–16. Often, their ambition is to not only fill service gaps but to change the lens through which social challenges are understood. Their promise is at the same time technical, institutional, and philosophical:

1   applying interdisciplinary expertise and technology to social challenges;

2   relying on a more agile, start-up-like institutional structure, allowing for flexible responses and adaptation;

3   questioning traditional understanding of "integration" and "inclusion" to emphasize the agency and active contribution of "target groups"; and

4   using alternative business models to tackle social challenges, gaining greater autonomy from public funding and reducing their exposure to budget cuts.

In the 2010s, many European cities, facing both austerity and high numbers of newcomers, showed interest in the potential of social enterprises to provide innovative and cost-effective responses to local challenges. Specialized incubators and accelerators cropped up in many metropolises, often with direct support from local authorities (e.g., Milan's FabriQ). And in 2017, Eurocities published guidelines to help cities promote and partner with social enterprises. This period also saw the launch of specialized incubators that support refugees in designing solutions for inclusion, such as SINGA Business Labs in Berlin and Stuttgart. It also led to the creation of Hello Europe, a programme that aims to identify local solutions and explore their potential transferability and scalability, which is run by social entrepreneurship pioneer Ashoka in cooperation with the company Zalando.

As cities redefine inclusion infrastructure in light of COVID-19, social enterprises could be essential partners, given that the crisis calls for responses based on interdisciplinary knowledge, experimenting with untested approaches, and familiarity with navigating constrained funding and political landscapes. Harnessing this potential will require overcoming the hurdles that often put a brake on cooperation between local authorities and social entrepreneurs – for example, due to social enterprises' small size, business volatility, and unconventional models that may be at odds with regulations and certification requirements.

Sources: Eurocities, *The Role of Cities in Promoting Social Entrepreneurship* (Brussels: Eurocities, 2017); Hello Europe, *Major Challenges and Pathways for Solutions during and after COVID-19: A Conversation with Ashoka's Hellopreneurs* (Brussels: Ashoka, 2020); Hello Europe, "Our Story", accessed 26 May 2020; Jarrod Ormiston, "Refugees Are Helping Others in Their Situation as Social Entrepreneurs", *The Conversation*, 13 July 2017; SINGA, "Business Lab", accessed 22 July 2020.

Supporting migrant associations, and not just financially

In the increasingly diverse landscape of local stakeholders for migrant and refugee inclusion, migrant and diaspora organizations have gained more visibility in recent years. Yet they often still struggle to be viewed as equal partners, or they are pigeonholed and consulted only on "ethnic" issues, leading to paternalistic forms of exclusion.[71] Some cities have seen efforts to reverse this. In Warsaw, the organization *Fundacja dla Somalii* (Foundation for Somalia), which currently co-runs the city's Multicultural Centre, operated an EU-funded incubator programme for migrant associations in 2014–15.[72] But according to one civil society interviewee, although the programme was met with enthusiastic

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71   Author interview with Modou Gueye, President of the Association Sunugal, Milan, 6 January 2020.
72   Foundation for Somalia, "About Incubator", accessed 26 May 2020.

participation, many of the associations it launched ended up being short-lived, as structural barriers prevented them from accessing funding and networks.[73]

Revising municipal calls for tenders and procurement procedures may make them more accessible to migrant associations as well as other civil society "new entrants" (including social enterprises), who may otherwise fail to compete with established NGOs that have more extensive administrative capacities and experience. In Italy, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, together with the Foundation Charlemagne and the Foundation for Africa, supported the launch of a Diaspora Summit to strengthen diaspora associations' knowledge of and capacity to play a role in development cooperation.[74] Similar steps could be taken at a local level to promote migrant associations' participation in inclusion initiatives – especially if complemented by capacity-building measures to strengthen their business and administrative know-how, fundraising ability, project management skills, and networks.[75]

However, dedicating resources to help migrant organizations professionalize their operations can in some cases fuel fears of competition among other civil society players. One interviewee in Milan suggested that as the migrant organization he leads gained standing thanks to partnerships with the city and the private sector – thus making strides towards subverting paternalistic narratives of migrants as receivers not providers of services – this generated some resistances and discontent.[76]

Partnering with the private sector

In the last five years, the growing – if somewhat mercurial – involvement of the private sector has been an important driver of innovation for migrant and refugee inclusion globally, nationally, as well as at the local level. Businesses have played a role as donors and investors, hubs of technical expertise, and employers.[77] In cities that are relatively new to immigrant integration, those with limited service infrastructure, and those facing funding gaps, large companies can leverage their technical expertise, global networks, and financial resources to help design and provide services. In Bucharest, for example, Mastercard has partnered with IOM to provide financial education and inclusion training to migrants and refugees, while also starting projects such as prepaid cards for refugees to simplify the transfer of benefits.[78]

Small and medium-sized enterprises are also key partners at the local level – particularly in their role as employers. In collaboration with the City of Milan, the charity Farsi Prossimo has implemented an initiative (taking place within its *centri diurni*,[79] or daytime centres) that engages with local companies to design pathways into work for refugees, starting from language training and leading all the way to placement, based on businesses' skills needs.[80]

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73   Author interview with Elmi Abdi, President of the Foundation for Somalia and Member of the Multicultural Centre Warsaw, Warsaw, 27 September 2019.

74   The Diaspora Summit was launched in 2017, emerging from the working group on migration and development of the Italian National Council for Cooperation and Development. The project, currently run by the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development in partnership with the Charlemagne Foundation, Fondazioni for Africa, and the government think tank Studiare Sviluppo, aims to promote the role of migrant associations in development cooperation, in line with Italian law on development cooperation. The project includes the following activities: trainings for leaders and members of migrant associations, meetings with migrant entrepreneurs, national diaspora summits, and cultural events. See Summit Nazionale delle Diaspore, "Chi Siamo", accessed 26 May 2020; author interview with Roberta Lo Bianco, Coordinator of Migration Unit, CESIE, Palermo, 28 November 2019.

75   Author interview with Roberta Lo Bianco, Coordinator of Migration Unit, CESIE, Palermo, 28 November 2019.

76   Author interview with Modou Gueye, President of the Association Sunugal, Milan, 6 January 2020.

77   Patuzzi, Benton, and Embiricos (2019), op. cit.

78   Author interview with Bogdan Patru, Head of Public Policy Romania, Mastercard, Bucharest, 19 November 2019.

79   Farsi Prossimo, "Centro Diurno Rifugiati 'Il Filo dell'Aquilone'", accessed 26 May 2020.

80   Author interview with Paolo Pagani, Coordinator, and Paolo Grassini, Head of Social Housing, Cooperative Farsi Prossimo, Milan, 10 September 2019.

BOX 3
Digital innovations and the ongoing quest for sustainability

Since 2015, there has been an explosion of technology-based responses to integration challenges, including solutions to reduce cumbersome administrative practices, improve access to information and training, and match newly arrived refugees with jobs and internships. The social venture SkillLab, for example, developed an app that promises to create comprehensive skill profiles for refugees and help employers tap into this pool of human capital, and it has partnered with European cities such as Amsterdam and Helsinki to help newcomers find their feet in local labour markets. And as mentioned in Section 2, the City of Milan collaborated with a technical university and the local prefecture in 2018 to launch an app that guides newcomers through the family reunification process.

Yet creativity has partly come at the expense of sustainability. In the initial enthusiasm to develop new solutions, social ventures and developers often failed to coordinate their efforts, and many lacked a proper assessment of their users' needs. Moreover, a sizable portion of these innovations have failed the test of time: only 39 per cent of digital projects launched during or after 2015–16 to support refugees were still active in 2019, according to a study by betterplace lab. In the words of refugee tech expert Ben Mason, the field has been plagued by "solutionism" – the proliferation of simplistic answers to highly complex challenges. And as noted by a civil society interviewee in Palermo, the appetite for digital tools – including on the part of project funders such as the European Union – is often not in line with migrants' and refugees' learning preferences and digital skills.

The challenges emerging as a result of COVID-19 may drive a new wave of interest in digital solutions as integration stakeholders adapt to ongoing social distancing restrictions. Some national governments, such as Germany and France, have turned to online learning and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to allow them to continue offering integration courses. Meanwhile, some civil society groups have taken up virtual tools to organize engagement and reach their target groups. For example, the Swedish non-profit *Kompis Sverige* (Buddy Sweden), which since 2014 has cooperated with the municipality of Botkyrka to promote migrant integration through a buddy programme, quickly moved its socializing, mentoring, and language learning activities to a web platform.

Learning from 2015–16, cities and their partners should be mindful of joining the tech-enthusiast bandwagon too readily or naively. Pervasive digitalization of integration and other services risks further marginalizing the most vulnerable migrants and refugees, who often lack digital skills. By cutting out non-verbal communication, digital interactions may also amplify language barriers and intercultural distance. And informal, low-stress interactions, a well-documented success factor in promoting community-building, may be harder to reproduce in the digital space, which generally requires greater structure and moderation.

Sources: Meghan Benton, "Digital Litter: The Downside of Using Technology to Help Refugees", *Migration Information Source*, 20 June 2019; betterplace lab, *Refugee Tech: The Hype, and What Happened Next* (Brussels: European Commission, 2019); Intercultural Cities Programme, "Intercultural Cities: COVID-19 Special Page", accessed 28 July 2020; Samuele Maccolini, "Le App Salveranno i Migranti: La Nuova Era dell'Integrazione Inizia Online", *Linkiesta*, 8 August 2018; SkillLab, "Pathways to Employment through Technology", accessed 26 May 2020; author interview with Roberta Lo Bianco, European Centre of Studies and Initiatives (CESIE), Palermo, 28 November 2019; author interview with Ben Mason, digital innovation expert, former Project Lead at betterplace lab, Berlin, 29 April 2020; participant discussion during the Integration Futures online meeting Solidarity in Sickness: Identifying Pressing Integration Implications of COVID-19, hosted by MPI Europe on 1 April 2020.

Despite some progress in the past few years, interviews with local actors revealed that direct partnerships between local governments and businesses for the provision of integration services remain the exception rather than the rule, and companies are still not regarded as an obvious partner in this area.[81] While some companies may engage in the field of migrant and refugee inclusion primarily out of a sense of social responsibility, collaboration with the private sector (and especially with small- and medium-sized enterprises, which may lack dedicated resources for corporate social responsibility) will remain precarious if it is not grounded in sound business logic. This is even more likely to be the case as European economies look set to head into a recession in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 will rock the foundations of civil society, but may bring less visible partners to the fore

Even with important progress in recent years – thanks in part to EU incentives encouraging cities to engage stakeholders and communities beyond the circle of "usual suspects"[82] – multi-stakeholder partnerships for migrant and refugee inclusion are still a delicate breed, and even seemingly small issues such as differences in organizational culture, complicated bureaucracy, and divergent communication preferences can undermine trust. Tensions originating from (real or perceived) power imbalances between public authorities and NGOs may worsen in the near future, as large segments of civil society find themselves in a precarious position, with social distancing upending traditional modes of engagement and the prospect of budget cuts threatening their future. And while one silver lining of the current crisis is the vibrant landscape

Cities used to partnering with more professionalized civil society groups may find it challenging to build effective ties to less well-established, smaller-scale, and informal players.

of informal and localized engagement, cities used to partnering with more professionalized civil society groups may find it challenging to build effective ties to less well-established, smaller-scale, and informal players.[83]

The COVID-19 pandemic has also thrown into sharp relief the key role of migrant associations in ensuring a coordinated, whole-of-community response to crisis – as exemplified by Oslo's vice mayor for diversity holding weekly digital meetings with minority-based NGOs to discuss immigrant communities' needs and improve compliance with safety rules.[84] Migrant associations will not be spared by the strain that the pandemic will place on civil society as a whole, yet their long-standing difficulties accessing public funding and the related need to seek more creative and diversified funding portfolios may prove valuable in supporting their resilience. The Warsaw-based Ukrainian migrant organization *Nasz Wybor* (Our Choice), for example, responded to a lull in EU funds for integration (due to disbursement delays at the national level) by approaching companies likely to view migrants as an interesting client pool, such as phone providers and money transfer firms, and convinced them to financially support a range of social activities.[85]

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81   See also Teressa Juzwiak, Elaine Mcgregor, and Melissa Siegel, *Migrant and Refugee Integration in Global Cities. The Role of Cities and Businesses* (Maastricht: The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration, Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, 2014).

82   UIA (2019), op. cit.

83   Saskia Brechenmacher, Thomas Carothers, and Richard Youngs, "Civil Society and the Coronavirus: Dynamism Despite Disruption", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21 April 2020.

84   Council of Europe (accessed 26 May 2020), op. cit.

85   Author interview with Myroslava Keryk, President of the association *Fundacja Nasz Wybor* (Our Choice Foundation), Warsaw, 27 September 2019.

Lastly, while cooperating with the private sector is more essential than ever – including to explore business-driven models to finance social services amid a drop in public budgets,[86] or to mobilize employers through public campaigns that showcase migrants' and refugees' contribution[87] – (local) governments will need to acknowledge the risks and limitations of public-private partnerships. The response of different health-care systems in the current crisis has shown how an excesses of privatization in the name of "efficiency" can severely limit public authorities' capacity to manage emergencies.[88] Maintaining government oversight and core public capabilities is crucial in the area of integration, which (especially in cases of severe marginalization) does not easily lend itself to a business-driven logic of profitability. What is more, sustaining employer engagement for migrant and refugee inclusion may become more complicated in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Confronted with recession and a drop in revenue, businesses may cut back on corporate social responsibility activities (a category within which many still frame inclusion initiatives). And in a context of skyrocketing unemployment across societies, they may pivot their efforts away from an explicit focus on migrants and refugees, fearing backlash.

D.   Co-creation: Involving beneficiaries in designing and providing services

By involving service beneficiaries in the search for solutions to societal challenges, co-creation transforms them from passive users to agents of change – both in how they see themselves and in how they are perceived by others.[89] Some service providers, especially non-profit organizations that are more immersed in the vernacular of social innovation, have integrated "validation groups" into their service design processes. In essence, these are panels of potential service users who offer a reality

In its evaluation of the co-housing project CURANT … the University of Antwerp systematically included refugees' views on what project success would look like.

check on whether the goals behind an approach are met. This model has been at the core of the *Ragazzi Harraga* project serving unaccompanied children in Palermo, run by a network of civil society organizations in collaboration with the municipality; a panel of eight children was closely involved in both the design and implementation phases.[90]

Involving beneficiaries in the design of services fosters a stronger sense of ownership and limits the risk of avoidable design errors resulting in disappointing uptake and a waste of resources. Co-creation also weaves more diverse perspectives and expectations into the project, thus questioning prevalent power dynamics. In its evaluation of the co-housing project CURANT – which from 2017 to 2019 housed unaccompanied young refugees with young Flemish buddies who supported their integration – the University of Antwerp systematically included refugees' views on what project success would look like.

86   For a discussion on social impact bonds, see Patuzzi, Benton, and Embiricos (2019), op. cit.

87   In 2020, the Tent Partnership for Refugees, a global alliance of businesses committed to improving the inclusion of refugees, launched a public campaign to highlight refugees' contributions through work during the COVID-19 crisis to keep receiving-country communities "safe, healthy, and nourished" during the pandemic. See Tent, "World Refugee Week 2020: Tent Launches Campaign to Showcase Refugees' Contributions during COVID-19", accessed 27 July 2020.

88   Mariana Mazzucato and Giulio Quaggiotto, "The Big Failure of Small Government", *The Japan Times*, 20 May 2020.

89   Ben Webster, "How Can Refugee Communities Be Engaged in the Co-Design of Education Opportunities? And Why Does This Matter?", Medium, 3 October 2017; Ari Harima and Julia Freudenberg, "Co-Creation of Social Entrepreneurial Opportunities with Refugees", *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* 11, no. 1 (2020).

90   CESIE, "Ragazzi Harraga - Social Inclusion Processes for Unaccompanied Minors in the City of Palermo", accessed 22 July 2020; author interview with Roberta Lo Bianco, Coordinator of Migration Unit, CESIE, Palermo, 28 November 2019.

This revealed some tensions between the expectations of participants and those of project partners, which could then be addressed.[91]

Yet, while co-creation has become an increasingly popular concept, it is still only used sparingly and generally by smaller, explicitly innovative projects. In addition, the "rules of engagement" of existing co-creation formats often implicitly reflect what receiving-society players regard as valuable expertise – an inbuilt bias that risks favouring better educated and skilled members of migrant and refugee populations.

Faced with large-scale and unanticipated challenges, such as those brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, some local authorities under pressure to deliver swift and assertive responses may naturally gravitate towards technocratic approaches – a tendency that could further exclude migrants' voices.[92] On the other hand, with solid local leadership, the present juncture could open new opportunities for co-creation at the local level as communities resume their social functions and search for answers to the manifold social and economic woes brought by the pandemic. Existing roadmaps on how to initiate and facilitate community-wide planning processes may help local authorities chart a path to post-crisis recovery that is participatory and reflective of a city's diversity – for example, the Local Inclusion Action Tool developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Migration Policy Group, Welcoming International, and the Council of Europe,[93] and the tools and standards developed by the social venture Welcoming America and adapted by some communities to emergency response, such as the U.S. city of Charlotte, North Carolina.[94] Meanwhile, initiatives such as the European Migrant Advisory Board, launched by the Urban Agenda Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees to increase the participation of immigrants in EU policymaking processes, can provide a blueprint on how to leverage the voices of diverse communities to inform crisis management and recovery.[95]

4   Final Reflections: Ongoing challenges and lessons for the COVID-19 crisis

Social innovation holds important promise for local authorities grappling with how to adapt to new levels of diversity. By unlocking underused community resources – from volunteers willing to give their time, to empty nesters offering their spare rooms to newly arrived refugees, to successful immigrants keen to give something back by sharing their skills and experience with newcomers – social innovation nurtures a more human-centred approach to inclusion, and one that may come at a lower cost to the public purse.

These ambitions have become more important in the context of the public health crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic as the outbreak and its spillover effects threaten to both widen existing

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91   For example, to resolve the tension between the desire of many refugees to find work quickly and CURANT's goal of guiding them into education opportunities, the project started favouring shorter, more tailored educational opportunities to fill skill gaps in a more time effective fashion. See Stiene Ravn et al., *Cohousing and Case Management for Unaccompanied Young Adult Refugees in Antwerp (CURANT)* (Antwerp: University of Antwerp, Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies, 2018).

92   Hello Europe, *Major Challenges and Pathways for Solutions during and after COVID-19: A Conversation with Ashoka's Hellopreneurs* (Brussels: Ashoka, 2020).

93   Migration Policy Group, "The Local Inclusion Action Tool (LIAT)" (presentation, Migration Policy Group, Brussels, 2019).

94   Welcoming America, "Member Spotlight: How Charlotte, NC Makes Emergency Response More Inclusive for All", updated 28 April 2020.

95   The members of the European Migrant Advisory Board come from Amsterdam, Athens, Bamberg, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Helsinki, Lisbon, Stockholm, and Italy. See European Commission, "European Migrant Advisory Board (EMAB)", updated 10 September 2018.

inequalities and create new challenges for migrant and refugee inclusion.[96] Yet these same ambitions may prove more elusive, as communities are likely to emerge from lockdown deeply transformed. In particular, the economic fallout from the pandemic could bring rising intergroup tensions over scarce jobs, benefits, and services, and some political actors may see a chance to leverage anti-immigrant scapegoating for political gain. On the other hand, observers have pointed to an increase in volunteerism and community engagement as a reaction to the pandemic, at a time when many traditional public services were forced to suspend operations.[97] And civil society has proven agile in adapting, for example shifting from long-term projects to emergency relief or experimenting with new ways to recruit and engage volunteers.[98] In Turin, Italy, the local Service Centre for Volunteering (*Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato*) – part of a national network of organizations that support volunteers through capacity building and match them with civil society organizations – received the same number of applications during a few months of lockdown that it usually receives in a year, and it has been able to engage applicants via digital tools.[99] Similarly, in Belgium, the online platform "Give a Day" has helped municipalities make the best of surging interest in volunteering by matching volunteers with meaningful local opportunities to contribute.[100] With the right leadership, local governments could leverage, organize, and sustain this civic engagement so that it helps them respond to rapidly changing social needs.

As this report has shown, the social innovation infrastructure that began to develop in cities across Europe in 2015–16 offers local authorities valuable tools for responding to COVID-19-related challenges – yet it is still fragile and with evident limitations. Innovative solutions, which have often flourished in the cracks left by crisis, crippled public budgets, and overwhelmed

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services, have mainly aimed to plug urgent gaps rather than achieve lasting change. To the critical observer, the period after 2015–16 is a phase of *innovations* rather than *innovation*. It has seen a wealth of scattered and small-scale success stories – often without proper impact measurement – rather than systematic attempts to isolate the factors behind success that could make replication and scaling-up possible. To some degree, this period has also been characterized by a laissez-faire approach on the part of governments, rather than consistent investments in the innovation ecosystem to imbue it with better funding, evaluation, and skill-building capacity. And as interest has grown, a plethora of understandings of social innovation for inclusion have emerged – some explicitly formulated, others implicitly assumed – with limited attempts to bring rigor to the field and define common criteria. While more recent years have seen some degree of consolidation and maturing, this trend may be interrupted as a sense of crisis, this time driven by the pandemic and its knock-on effects on economies and societies, grips Europe once again.

What is certain is that the effects of the COVID-19 crisis are already being felt and will be for a long time to come. On one hand, this raises the stakes for a more rigorous and systematic approach to social

96   Council of Europe (accessed 26 May 2020), op. cit.
97   See, for example, Andy Haldane, "Reweaving the Social Fabric after the Crisis", *Financial Times*, 24 April 2020.
98   Brechenmacher, Carothers, and Youngs (2020), op. cit. See also European Economic and Social Committee, "Civil Society against COVID-19", accessed 20 August 2020.
99   Alessia Ciccotti, "Torino, boom di aspiranti volontari: 'in 4 mesi quanti ne arrivano in un anno'", CSVnet, 28 July 2020.
100   Eurocities, "Belgian Municipalities – Platform for Volunteering", updated 25 March 2020.

innovation. Yet it may also divert attention and resources away from the "niche" area of refugee and migrant inclusion as the topic loses public, media, and political attention to other issues. Cities and their local partners will have to strike a delicate balance between emphasizing the continued – and even increased – urgency of investing in immigrant integration, while being mindful of the political sensitivities in singling out one group's needs at a time of society-wide upheaval.

In this rapidly changing landscape, recent initiatives suggest there is great potential in using social innovation as a tool for recovery. For example, in March 2020, the City of Turin, Italy, tapped into its online social innovation initiative Torino City Lab – a city-wide project centred around an online platform that links up public administration, businesses, social ventures, and residents to develop solutions that improve quality of life – to stimulate creative solutions to needs arising from COVID-19. This resulted in an impressive output of more than 80 project ideas in less than one month, including solutions for remote learning and access to local services.[101]

Guiding this innovation to foster more inclusive communities will require shifting gears, especially in the following areas:

► **Addressing the hard questions of social innovation.** The crisis sparked by COVID-19 threatens to wipe out some nascent social innovations – from those that depend on close physical interactions to those that are high-intensity and costly. To some extent, this may be unavoidable. But to minimize the damage and guarantee the survival of the most promising initiatives, local governments will have to be much more strategic about their investments and play a more proactive coordinating role in bringing together scattered approaches to ensure they complement one another and cover the necessary bases. Meanwhile, initiatives will have to demonstrate how they deliver value for money and help cities make the right choices as their financial and political room to manoeuvre narrows. In times of plenty, questions about effectiveness, sustainability, efficiency, and scalability could be put off in favour of nurturing a bubbling ecosystem of diverse, small-scale, and highly localized solution. Now, cities will increasingly have to pick winners and help them perform evaluations, rethink their business models, diversify their funding, and design pathways to scale – possibly leveraging the expertise of for-profit businesses to address some of these meta-questions. At the same time, cities should seek to incorporate innovation into their institutional DNA rather than viewing it as a prerogative of their non-governmental partners. This could be done, for example, by making interdepartmental collaboration the norm, rather than an exceptional occurrence, or by investing in more thorough monitoring and evaluation (particularly of pilot projects).

► **Nurturing the new social infrastructure.** As economic recession looks set to tighten the public purse, cities' capacity to support vulnerable groups and counter long-term exclusion will be more limited. The future of social safety nets will therefore increasingly depend on communities. Volunteerism has been described as a "countercyclical societal stabilizer" that is of vital importance in tough economic times.[102] While most of the initiatives that have sprung up under lockdown – as well as those that are likely to emerge as life starts to go back to normal – do not explicitly focus on

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101 Comments by Marco Pironti, Deputy Mayor for Innovation, City of Turin (Italy) in the webinar Early Hotspot Cities: Coronavirus Learning from Local Officials in Bilbao, Torino, and Seattle, hosted by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, 28 April 2020. See also Gabriele Farina, "Torino City Love, un Portale Raccoglie Tutte le Iniziative di Solidarietà in Città per Semplificare la Vita in Quarantena", *Quotidiano Piemontese*, 9 April 2020; Torino City Lab, "Torino City Love", accessed 26 May 2020.
102 Haldane (2020), op. cit.

migrants and refugees,[103] they are generally highly localized and can build inclusion around place-based identities that transcend nationality and ethnicity. Discussions among city representatives in May 2020 within the framework of the Eurocities VALUES project (Volunteering Activities to Leverage Urban and European Social integration of migrants)[104] highlighted examples of migrants and refugees volunteering to support their vulnerable neighbours during the pandemic.[105] But engaging with smaller and looser community initiatives is still not among most cities' strengths. As more formalized civil society takes a major blow,[106] cities will have to get creative in how they engage with residents, including through neighbourhood-based approaches and digital channels. Meanwhile, making timely investments in capacity-building and training – for example, in collaboration with international organizations and foundations – will increase the chances that newly formed initiatives survive and have a meaningful impact.

► **Moving from "social innovation for migrant inclusion" to "inclusive social innovation".** In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, services and investments targeting specific groups, especially immigrants, may trigger backlash from local communities facing ongoing health risks, cuts in services, and high unemployment. Yet local governments can still turn to the processes of social innovation to advance migrant and refugee inclusion. In particular, the crisis presents a unique opportunity to involve immigrants in co-creation: as the unprecedented nature of the challenge calls into question traditional expertise, cities may seize the moment to democratize local decision-making processes, actively seeking the involvement of residents who are often left out of local politics, including migrants and refugees. This would help free projects involving immigrants from the integration niche in which they often get stuck, ensure that local stimulus and recovery measures take their needs into account without targeting them specifically, and earn immigrant groups greater standing within urban communities by highlighting their agency and contributions. Internship programmes that partner migrant and refugee youth with local councillors – such as the one piloted in Ireland in 2018 to improve diversity in local politics[107] – may in the long term increase migrant communities' trust in public institutions and strengthen their sense of belonging, while also opening up the closed circles of local decision-making. City governments could work to more fully harness the potential of migrant associations as partners – helping them strengthen their networks with public authorities and other civil society organizations, while also ensuring their involvement in key local consultation and decision-making forums to design a roadmap out of crisis. They may also wish to build on existing models of community-wide, inclusive planning to ensure that recovery planning is not rushed or limited in the views and experiences it reflects, but takes into account the diverse needs of local residents.[108]

In the aftermath of the 2015–16 spike in mixed migration, European cities worked hard to develop new models to support diverse populations and brokered new support networks to help share the load. This ecosystem has all the right ingredients to help localities weather the COVID-19 crisis and its economic and social knock-on effects, even as it is fragile and requires careful support. The pandemic could be

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103 At the same time, including migrants and refugees in emergency response has been a key dimension of many cities' approaches – from Stuttgart to Turku, from Nuremberg to Lublin – as highlighted by Eurocities' repository of city initiatives in response to COVID-19. See Eurocities, "Live Updates COVID-19: European Cities Respond to the Coronavirus Crisis", accessed 29 June 2020.

104 Integrating Cities, "VALUES (2019-2021)", accessed 29 June 2020.

105 Eurocities, "EUROCITIES City Dialogue on Volunteering", updated 8 June 2020.

106 Brechenmacher, Carothers, and Youngs (2020), op. cit.

107 Sorcha Pollak, "Numbers of Migrants Participating in Irish Politics 'Woefully Low'", *Irish Times*, 8 April 2019.

108 Hello Europe (2020), op. cit.

the making of a community-led, holistic approach to inclusion, one built around a sense of shared challenges and responsibilities that cuts across community divides. But for this to become a reality, cities will need to think and act strategically in the short term, resisting the temptation to sacrifice the progress achieved in recent years to the altar of new (and hasty) solutions.

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About the Author

LIAM PATUZZI 🐦 @LiamPatuzzi

Liam Patuzzi is a Policy Analyst at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe, where he focuses on the labour market integration of immigrants, innovative approaches to refugee inclusion, labour migration management, and EU free movement.

He previously was a Research Officer and Analyst at ebb (Entwicklungsgesellschaft für berufliche Bildung), a consultancy in the area of integration, employment, and education policy. Mr Patuzzi holds a joint master's degree in social sciences, with a focus on globalization and migration, from the University of Freiburg, Germany and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He completed his bachelor's degree in philosophy at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, Italy.

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Residence Palace,155 Rue de la Loi, 3rd Floor, 1040 Brussels
+32 (0) 2235 2113

Casale Strozzi Superiore, Via L.G. Faravelli snc 00195, Rome
+39 06 44 23 14 28