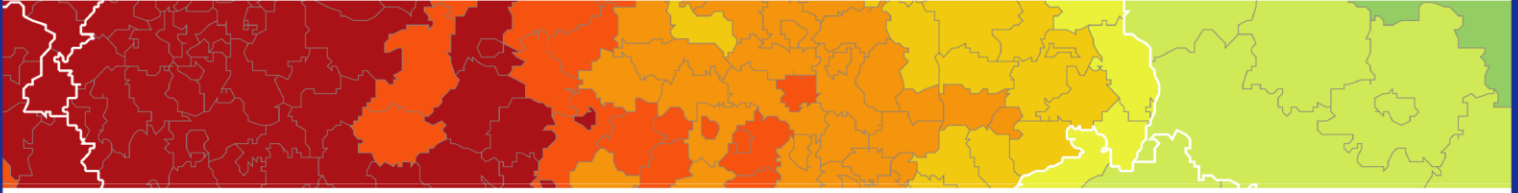


Inspire policy making by territorial evidence



# MIGRARE – Impacts of refugee flows to territorial development in Europe

Applied Research

**Executive Summary**

Version 29/04/2019

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## Abbreviations

AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
EC	European Commission
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESPON	European Territorial Observatory Network
EU	European Union
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
UIA	Urban Innovative Actions
UN	United Nations

## Executive summary

The cyclical nature of peaks and troughs of asylum seekers and irregular migrant flows through time has been triggered by the persisting socio-economic and political instability in several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. Due to the relative unpredictability of the peaks in such inflows, policy response at the regional and country level has in the past often been considered as a response to emergency crises. Nevertheless, the persisting and even increasing global political, economic and socioeconomic challenges are expected to inflate conflicts and extreme poverty situation in the near and mid-term future. This will most likely result in persisting inflows of asylum seekers in the bordering regions of EU Member States and in the European territories, although with different scenarios possible in the future. There is, therefore, a call for more efficient and effective coordination of efforts at the various institutional levels and across the various sectors involved.

European countries are often struggling to reconcile EU values to ensure prosperity and security for EU citizens, while fostering free movement of individuals and acting in full respect of human rights and the principles of solidarity and respect for human dignity. On the one hand, in fact, countries must act in accordance with UN obligations when it comes to the rights of international migrants and protecting refugees, while on the other hand, they should be able to foster the economic and social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers (in the shorter and longer terms) in order to avoid exacerbating local tensions and prevent the fuelling of illegal activities carried out by criminal networks (within and outside Europe). In this respect, meeting asylum seekers' economic as well as humanitarian needs is beneficial for local communities as much as it is for asylum seekers. Regions and cities are currently at the forefront of the policy challenge: they are the places where effective actions are fostered that respect the legitimate needs of refugees and asylum seekers, while maximising the positive (and minimising the negative) impacts for local communities, businesses and public finances.

The ambition of the study is twofold. First, it offers new factual evidence and a better understanding of the current effects and the future impacts of asylum seekers and refugees across Europe. Second, it fosters the EU added value in supporting policy capacity and capability at the local level, including by developing practical recommendations and a handbook for policymakers and other relevant actors involved at the local and regional level – with the aim of maximising the returns of increasingly relevant EU taxpayer investment in this area<sup>1</sup>.

This study encompasses all countries in the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme (EU28, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), with an additional assessment – to the extent possible – of EU Candidate Countries (i.e. Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia,

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2018). EU budget: Commission proposes major funding increase for stronger borders and migration. Available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-18-4106\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-4106_en.htm).

Serbia, and Turkey) and potential candidates countries (i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244)<sup>2</sup>. The findings of the study build on systematic review of secondary sources available at international level and across European countries, as well as findings from 12 case studies in selected countries.<sup>3</sup> The main emerging results with respect to the ESPON questions are now presented.

### **DISTRIBUTION OF INFLOWS**

*Patterns in the distribution of asylum seekers and refugees at regional and urban level and changes over time as a result of European and national policy decisions in recent decades.*

Patterns in the distribution of asylum seekers inflows in Europe and refugees across Europe through time have strongly depended on external geopolitical factors (wars, climate events, famine, etc.) as well as on internal policy decisions across European countries – hence making challenges for local communities highly dependent on political decisions on which they exercise limited (if any) influence.

Historically, the number of asylum applications in EU Member States has been subject to large fluctuations. Strongly dependent on global instability and threats, the inflow of third-country nationals seeking refugee status in the EU has peaked in recent years (2015/2016): according to Eurostat, 1.3 million asylum applications were filed in the EU-28 and the EFTA countries in 2016, mostly from Syria (341,985 applications), Afghanistan (190,250 applications) and Iraq (131,705). This number declined sharply in 2017 (728,900) with Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan remaining the top-three countries of origin. The decrease was largely due to the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 that contained migration flows through the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes. In 2018, around 660,000 applications were made overall which is below the level of 2014 when 663,000 applications for international protection were filed.

The **Eastern Mediterranean** route via Turkey to Greece was the largest migratory route in 2015, mainly used by asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria; The **Western Balkan** route also reached its highest level of undocumented migration in 2015 from Syria and Afghanistan. The **Central Mediterranean** route from Libya to Malta and Italy has remained an important entry point to the EU, mainly for Eritrea, Niger, Somalia, Gambia and Sudan nationals. This route is the most common entry to the EU since the decline of inflows in the **Eastern Mediterranean** route in 2016, becoming the route of choice for inflows from Africa.

However, the changing environment for rescue at sea operations, changing policies of Italy and the increasing number of departure attempts thwarted by the Libyan coastguards have led to a marked decrease in arrivals over the Central Mediterranean route in 2018 dropping to less than a quarter of arrivals compared to 2017 (118,962 arrivals in 2017 compared to

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<sup>2</sup> Note that a more limited review will be provided for these countries, with a greater focus on national dynamics and some selected territorial examples, depending on secondary data availability.

<sup>3</sup> The list of case studies can be found in annex.

23,485 arrivals in 2018). As a corollary, the Western Mediterranean Route from Morocco to Spain – which has been close to insignificant during much of the past – has increased in importance (more than doubling between 2017 and 2018, to 57,034 detections). This makes this route the most frequently used route into Europe in 2018, with Spain being the main entry point. While the increasing policing of deterrence at the Central Mediterranean Route did also arguably reduce the overall magnitude of irregular arrivals, its main effect has been to displace migrants to other routes.

At national level when looking at the cumulative number of asylum applications in the period 2008-2017 in Europe, Germany stands out with more than 2 million applications, followed by France with over 600,000, Italy with over 500,000 and Sweden at around 500,000. The other EU countries remain below 300,000 (Central Europe) or below 20,000 (Baltics and Balkans). Outside the EU borders, large numbers of asylum seekers are in Turkey, on both the Western Balkan and the Eastern Mediterranean route. In addition, Turkey provides temporary protection as an individual procedure without prior application to around 3.6 million Syrians.

The distribution of asylum seekers across European regions and territories reflects the status of the different regions as arrival, transit or destination areas<sup>4</sup> and that, in general, asylum seekers tend to move towards more economically dynamic and economically developed regions, often the capital and other metropolitan regions. The highest numbers are in destination countries, especially in Germany with Düsseldorf, Cologne, Arnsberg, Oberbayern, Darmstadt, Berlin and Stuttgart each accounting for more than 35,000 asylum applicants. France follows, with the regions accounting for the highest number of asylum seekers being the capital region of Île de France (26,400 applicants) and Rhône-Alpes (8,300 applicants). In Sweden, the asylum applicants are more widely distributed, with higher numbers in the regions of West Sweden (region of Gothenburg), East Middle Sweden (region of Uppsala) and Stockholm accounting respectively for around 5,200, 4,700 and 3,800 applicants. A significant concentration of asylum seekers in specific regions of arrival countries is also observed, although with a strong difference between regions. For example, in Greece there is also a strong difference between regions with a higher density of asylum seekers (Athens, and the border regions of Central Macedonia and Northern Aigaio accounting for 83% of asylum applicants) and the rest of the country. In some other countries, the distribution is more balanced.

### **SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS**

*Skills and qualifications of refugees and impact of refugees' influx on recipient countries' regional and local labour markets and demographic imbalances (especially concerning regions which are facing the challenges of losing population and ageing).*

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<sup>4</sup> Within this study, examples of arrival countries include Italy, Greece or Spain, transit countries consist of, for example, Spain, France, Serbia or Hungary, with Germany, Sweden or Austria being considered as examples of the main destination countries.



Although notable exception may apply, in general the origins of asylum seekers and refugees are a strong predictor for their level of education, skills, gender and age balance and family status. In this respect, as an example, social groups range from balanced distribution among age and gender and relatively high education for Syrians to predominantly young male and lower-educated communities of Nigerians or Pakistanis. This fact, coupled with different predominance of certain communities/origins of asylum seekers and refugees across European countries and regions<sup>5</sup>, makes the distribution of skills, age/gender balance and family statuses very unevenly spread across Europe.

In this respect, data collected and analysed for this study suggests that the regions within destination countries are scoring higher in terms of percentages of highly educated asylum seekers and refugees, more well-balanced age/gender distribution and higher presences of families, while arrival countries are scoring as the lowest reception of high-skilled and families, with stronger percentage of single men often unable to speak any local languages, and transit countries are characterised by different “mixes” depending on the routes they belong to (and as a result the origins of asylum seekers and refugees acceding through such routes).

Those regions facing depopulation challenges may in principle benefit from such inflows of relatively young individuals, although in general asylum seekers and refugees tend to leave those regions towards more productive and potentially more inclusive areas where they perceive to have more and better chances of employment and policy support. In the absence of local active policies, therefore, such regions tend to lose any potentials for re-population and only face the challenges posed by the need to offer temporary support to inflowing individuals – and for which such regions tend to be unprepared.

*Extent to which skills and qualifications meet the needs of local labour markets and/or compete with local population and regular migrants.*

The composition of skills and qualification of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the extent to which those meet the needs of local labour markets, depend on a number of factors. These include, for example, a different composition in skills and qualification across various communities of incomers through time, also depending on countries of origins and social conditions, as well as the different skillsets required by local labour markets across European regions and the availability of such skills and competencies amongst local communities throughout Europe. As a result of such complex interplay of factors, some general differences

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<sup>5</sup> Depending on a number of factors, including the belonging of certain regions to specific routes (Western balkans, Central and Western Mediterranean), historical presence of certain linguistic communities, perception of ease of integration and policy support, length and complexity of reception procedures, etc.

in the relation between supply and demand of skills emerge between arrival, transit and destinations territories (i.e. administrative regions<sup>6</sup> and local municipalities within those).

Destination and many (central-western) transit regions in Europe, for example, are often characterised by relatively strong economies and a steady demand for higher and lower labour skills which are often not entirely fulfilled by local workers. As a result, these regions tend to be more attractive for asylum seekers and refugees, including particularly those better equipped in terms of skills and competencies. Transit and particularly destination regions are also in general more capable in their active labour policies, hence resulting in a more effective matchmaking between labour needs and incomers, and as a result increasing fiscal returns through time from refugees' integration.

On the contrary, arrival and some (south-eastern) transit regions often coincide with less performing labour markets, hence offering less occupation opportunities to incomers and as a result appear particularly unappealing for the more highly qualified asylum seekers and refugees – which tend to move to other European areas, as soon as possible. These are also areas confronted with the reception of many irregular asylum seekers, and which as a result struggle with complex reception procedure making it harder to exploit the short-term employment potentials of incomers. As a result, those regions also tend to have limited benefits in terms of employability of incomers and relatively lower fiscal returns from employed refugees.

In all regions, for the time being, limited competition has emerged between local workers and newcomers: Nevertheless, local tensions are often arising, coupled with increased public anxiety and anti-immigration stances, amongst lower-skilled local workers that perceive asylum seekers and refugees as potential competitors in the search for low-wage employment. Irregular employment of migrants and exploitation of willingness of asylum seekers and refugees to accept low-wages positions can also exacerbate such latent tensions with results that are evident in terms of a growing anti-migrant rhetoric in political agendas.

### **LOCAL RESPONSE CAPACITY**

*How different European regions and cities located in arrival, transit and destination countries respond to the refugee crisis – in terms of providing humanitarian aid, services (accommodation, material support, healthcare provision, education, language courses, labour market programmes), community building, internal distribution of refugees and medium and long-term integration.*

The response capacity of a territory, intended as the ability of a city, region, or country to integrate asylum seekers and/or refugees in their labour markets and local communities, varies largely across Europe. Typically, the different level of capacity and capability has

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<sup>6</sup> EU NUTS2.

reflected the position of territory throughout inflows paths, with destination regions being the most experienced and effective in supporting active integrated policies (hence throughout the cycle of support from initial reception through social support up to active inclusion and labour-market inclusion facilitation). Good practices in redistribution of asylum seekers and refugees are also in place in many destination countries and regions, with transition regions again varying between those more or less advanced.

On the contrary, arrival regions have been mostly struggling with high peaks of inflows through time (largely composed by irregular arrivals which are more complex to manage) and being in general less experienced in putting in place well-integrated active social inclusion policies. Through time, actions have emerged in arrival countries to support better coordinated and more effective reception, inclusion and distribution policies – often emerging through the coordination of local “bottom-up” activities. These, at times, have resulted in some frictions in the relation with central governments for some countries. As these patterns are expected to continue, although with lower intensity if compared to recent peaks (2015), an increasing capacity of local stakeholders in responding to and addressing the challenges posed by asylum seekers and refugees would be an opportunity to strengthen the overall policy ability in today’s less performing areas (i.e. arrival and some transit regions). If considered part of the broader policy capacity in supporting local inclusion, therefore, current and future efforts to improve the response to refugees’ needs can be beneficial for the local population at large.

### **CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES**

*Main challenges and good policy responses and the best practices for successful integration of refugees into the local communities, societies and labour markets at regional and local levels*

The study has identified several challenges faced by regional and territorial actors for successful integration of refugees.

There is a **legal challenge related to the regulation of the asylum procedures, and the definition of working, residence, citizenship and political rights**. Asylum seekers waiting to lodge their application often do not have access to the labour market or have difficulties in securing accommodation or access to healthcare. The case studies however explain how early intervention emerges as crucial to support and promote asylum seekers and refugees’ active engagement, to accelerate the integration process, and to reduce social tensions.

**At institutional level the main challenges faced by local stakeholders** include: the lack of experience and capacity in the reception and integration of large inflows of asylum seekers and refugees; the lack of funding ensuring the long-term sustainability of programmes and full coverage; the lack of vertical and horizontal coordination both among the different institutional levels and the other relevant actors (NGOs, civil society organisations, etc.); the increasing

negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees both politically and socially. Despite this the current challenges good examples of policy approaches and governance mechanisms are nevertheless also frequent throughout the “policy cycle” – although mostly in destination and transit regions. Firstly, the adoption of integrated multi-sector and multi-actor approaches tailored to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, coupled with a strong role of international institutions and local NGOs – not only in concretely implementing reception and integration measures, but also in supporting institutional capacity building where local institutions did not have experience in the management of large inflows of asylum seekers and refugees. Secondly, the specific attention given to the direct involvement of local communities in order to avoid the rise of social conflicts and discrimination (in all the considered cases) and to the promotion of innovative measures tailored to the needs of both asylum seekers/refugees and local communities. In order to achieve consistency and long-term effects, the adoption of a long-term comprehensive strategy with adequate resources is also crucial.

**Socio-economic challenges** relate to the accessibility and availability of local services and facilities supporting access to education and training, the labour market, healthcare, housing and other welfare benefits and services necessary for socio-economic integration in the community. Asylum seekers and refugees face multifaceted and interlinked problems that require the collaboration and coordination of various public and private actors at all levels on a wide number of policy domains often managed by separate departments at different institutional levels.

Accommodation is another major obstacle to integration and a challenge for local authorities. The shortage of social housing can trigger segregation and social conflict, hindering integration. All the innovative solutions promoted in the case studies are meant to avoid territorial segregation and to incentive the local community to provide private accommodation facilities. In some cases, a specific platform has been created to support municipalities in monitoring their absorption capacity and managing their accommodation services. Different national strategies have been developed to support access to education for asylum and refugee children. The case studies report interesting programmes supporting an effective integration in order to avoid early school leaving through specific training for teachers, after school support to families with children, and scholarships to encourage access to higher education for young refugees.

Difficulties in accessing social services and benefits and to healthcare are often due to the lack of information on rights, the complexity of the procedures, and the lack of training among healthcare and social workers. In most EU countries there is a move towards an ‘activation’ approach, as access to social services is increasingly made conditional on participation in introduction programmes, language courses, and tests mainly aimed at newly arrived immigrants. However, without effective individualised support asylum seekers and refugees remain dependent on welfare for long periods.

Limited access to the labour market is another major obstacle to the socio-economic integration of asylum seekers and refugees, often due to reception rules (legal constraints to the acquisition of work permits for asylum seekers), obstacles to the recognition and certification of qualifications, as well as lack of host-country language, mismatch between the skill offered and demanded at the local level, and overall social discrimination. Refugees are more likely than native-born to be employed in low-pay, unstable and irregular jobs, which do not ensure economic independence. To address these problems, local authorities and NGOs usually support labour market integration with targeted employment services and training measures, often combined with job grants or traineeships opportunities or support to business start-ups. The creation of private-public partnership where the local authority cooperates with the private sector to find business-led solutions to social problems appear very effective.

*How to improve the use of existing funding opportunities and need to improve legislation.*

Most of the reception and integration interventions are funded by European Funds (AMIF, ESF and ERDF, UIA), and by international/national organisations, foundations, charities and crowdfunding. Crucial challenges related to the funding system are the fragmentation of funds and programmes, and the long-run sustainability of funded measures, as EU and private funding are usually project-based clashing with the long duration of integration processes. In addition, although it is now widely acknowledged the need for a territorial perspective on integration, local actors cannot easily access EU funds, which are often managed by national or regional authorities. Another issue is the lack of rigorous evaluations and cost-benefit analysis of funded policies or programmes. In order to improve the use of existing funding opportunities, it is thus necessary to increase EU funding and support to the planning and implementation of long-term comprehensive reception and integration strategies, making access easier for local authorities and NGOs, reducing administrative complexity in their use and promoting vertical and horizontal coordination and public-private partnerships.

The funding allocation is also linked with a fairer distribution of asylum seekers across Member States. The revision of the reception and distribution mechanisms and of the multi-level governance of reception and integration systems across and within countries is an issue to be addressed, together with the rules and procedures on the legal status of asylum seekers and refugees and on access to citizenship.

In addition, there is a need to support to capacity building through the exchange of experiences and good practices within each territory and along different migration routes in the EU. These activities could revamp cross-border dialogue amongst EU Member States and a more structured cooperation among authorities and stakeholders, especially in border areas along migration paths; and contribute to the improvement of data collection and evaluation systems.

## **IMPACTS AND AREAS OF CONCERNS**

*Practices in redistribution of refugees internally and main concerns for host countries and communities.*

Redistribution policies and practices vary across countries, with different impacts for the various regions within each European nation and an overall very diverse framework across Europe. Some countries have no redistribution schemes in place, while when these policies are available, they may differ from a prominent role of centralised procedures in assigning asylum seekers to a limited number of reception centres, or instead distributing refugees more evenly across various regions and cities. In general, such decisions seem to have limited impact if no involvement of regional and local authorities, hence resulting in growing social pressures and tensions for local communities. Although asylum seekers and refugees are in general obliged to remain in a given area, although they may be willing to move to other regions and to do so may enter in an irregular status.

*Kind of impacts for the implementation of the proposal of European relocation scheme generate to European countries regions and cities.*

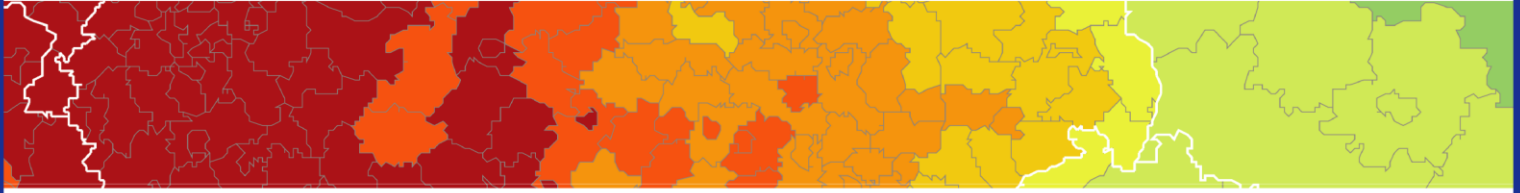
This question was no longer relevant and for the study focuses on dispersal policies at national level. Dispersal policies imply the settlement of refugees/humanitarian immigrants in specific locations throughout the receiving territory. The aim is typically to place asylum seekers away from larger cities that already host large foreign-born populations. In order for dispersal policies to have a positive impact, there should be a good match between an asylum seeker's skills and the demand for those skills in the area where they are relocated. Oftentimes, however, dispersal decisions are based on other determinant factors, such as housing availability. This can sometimes represent an issue, since available and affordable housing can be found where demand for accommodation is low, which is generally in areas that are economically disadvantaged, experiencing depopulation and offering poor employment opportunities. Optimal dispersion policies, thus, would have a significant impact on employment, as it would contribute to the optimal allocation of resources, specifically labour supply of refugees to the labour demand of the different regions and cities within regions. We estimate that an improvement in dispersal policies – for instance, re-allocating based on labour demand and supply of skills – would contribute up to 40% increase in the employment rate of refugees, in each cluster.

One of the elements to be considered when discussing relocation policies in Europe is the extent to which the **policy could allow to adjust financial imbalances for European regions supporting the active inclusion for asylum seekers and refugees.**

Financial impacts and public funds spent on asylum seekers and refugees are in fact at the centre of the public debate on migration. Financial returns associated with the refugee inflows

have been so far unevenly distributed across European regions. **Only transit and destination regions with strong economies, a steady demand for labour and immigration and relatively good quality of inclusion policy experience large and increasing returns through time from refugees' integration.** The overall volume of fiscal returns generated through time remains relatively limited across all regions – if compared to the total spending for reception and social support. One of the relevant finding in light of current policy debates is that if **the costs and revenues are decreasing through time, nevertheless, it is clear that besides high initial reception costs – largely covered through EU contributions for EU Member States – the regional support to refugees is a relatively self-sustainable affair through time.**

It is important to stress that, regional-level effects can vary from country to country depending on the extent to which national support is provided to cover certain initial costs and maximise the potential effects of policy support through efficient distribution policies. Additional policy support should be put in place in order to maximise local inclusion policy capacity across Europe, including through the activation of European communities of practices involving local stakeholders and policymakers across different arrival, transit and destination regions. Only by allowing for greater pan-European cooperation amongst local policymakers and other relevant actors, in fact, it would be possible to ensure a coherent and coordinated response.



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