



**HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA
Governance Platform**

Integration of Refugees in Europe as a joint municipal development

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1. The current situation

The European Union desperately needs a realistic and human rights oriented border and migration policy. The present stage brings the EU in a dangerous dependency of the Turkish President Erdogan, presumes African countries as safe which are not clearly safe and supposes Northern African countries as possible migration-policy partners which are neither coherent states, nor safe nor observing minimal human rights standards.

The general political objectives to help overcoming the causes for migration, to support countries close to migration origins in hosting refugees and to realize the Europeanisation of the border regime are necessary but insufficient steps. The idea to “outsource” the migration control into countries outside the EU is not realistic in the long run. It also undermines the fundamental values of the EU. The present policy which implicitly and inevitably leads to a “Fortress” Europe scenario is already undermining our open societies and will create new internal borders.

2. A new proposal

The urgent need for a sustainable value-oriented migration policy – which in the long run needs to be combined with a European immigration policy – is aggravated by the incapacity to find a solidary solution for a refugee integration in the whole of Europe. For many reasons a top down distribution is condemned to fail. Therefore, we need a bottom-up alternative by municipalities and cities that have an interest to voluntarily integrate refugees for humanitarian purposes and for own prospects.

A number of them all over Europe have already declared their readiness to welcome refugees, including cities in Central Europe, be it for demographic or other reasons. What they need are financing options for the costs of integration etc. In order to stimulate as many hosts for refugees as possible the financing should include a palpable “overhead” for the cities’ own needs in order to encourage a broad social support within the cities to undertake the long-lasting process of integration.

In the meantime, the national governments, which presently do not find a solidary solution within the European Council, keep the legal decision power on immigration and mostly the political decision power on operating the European financing. Therefore, the cooperation between the state- and the municipality level needs to be deepened and improved. By showing the possibilities to integrate refugees, cities and municipalities can help their national governments to fulfill their duties. This will have a positive impact on their mutual cooperation and communication.

A European funding tool for integrating refugees which cities and municipalities could apply for, would realize three objectives at once:

1. Find a humanitarian solution for the settlement of refugees in Europe,
2. Revive a European commitment by bottom-up citizen participation, and
3. Start a decentralized sustainable growth initiative at local level to overcome unemployment.

3. The obstacles to overcome

For this approach to be successful, the following obstacles need to be overcome:

- To convince the national governments that this strategy is in their interest helping them to fulfill their legal and moral duties and to revive their economy;
- To find simple and uncomplicated ways for financing the integration costs for cities and municipalities. Their own contribution could be financed for example by a cheap EIB credit;
- To find ways to match the interests of the refugees and of the possibly welcoming municipalities so that the refugees would go there and stay.

The application of the municipalities should be as easy as possible, but of course include minimal standards:

- In order to reach a broad support within the cities the application should be prepared by a multi-stakeholder governance including politics, business and organized civil society;
- it should include an integration strategy for the whole municipality;
- it should include an anti-corruption strategy;
- it should include a macro-economic idea for creating jobs and sustainable growth

In a longer perspective, the European Council should give the permission to create a trust fund attached to the EIB with a specific governance to control and at the same time make it easier to cities to apply for the financing of refugees and of necessary infrastructure.

4. Outlook

In a shorter perspective, a pilot project could be launched by a group of European cities applying to integrate refugees according to this concept and therefore, asking for financing. This could be possibly managed within the frame of a “Union Action” as an extraordinary measure. The advantage would be to test the viability of this strategy and to start a visible European “revival” which would empower the citizens and strengthen their identification with the European Union by participation and common projects.

In order to realize that a systematic obstacle would have to be overcome: the principal separation between the financing of refugees or migrants on the one hand and the financing of urban development on the other. The pilot project should unite a variety of financing programs to enable the cities and municipalities to develop their communities by receiving refugees.

This could be a decentralized deepening of the EU, thus, avoiding centralization as well as renationalization.