



## **D6.1 Policy briefs**

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## **1. TITTLE<sup>1</sup>:**

Policy briefs.

Policy briefs on local governance of human mobility for the Town Halls of Granada and Palermo.

## **2. OBJECTIVE:**

The work developed to achieve this Deliverable is to elaborate policy reports on local governance of human mobility based on the research carried out in the case studies on local governance and good practices of social work with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the Municipalities of Palermo and Granada.

## **3. LINK TO WP/PERFORMED SECONDMENTS**

All the secondments made in Work Packages 4 and 5 have been crucial for the development of this document. These research stays allowed a deep dive into the key issues of local governance and good practices of social work with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, specifically through case studies in the Municipalities of Palermo and Granada. First-hand data collection, sharing of expertise, and validation of findings in these specific settings have substantially enriched the content and recommendations presented, ensuring that this report is based on a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the observed dynamics.

## **4. ACHIEVEMENTS/RESULTS**

A total of seventeen policy briefs have been developed thanks to the analysis of the following topics:

- Complex and non-linear processes of inclusion
- Migrants as rights-holders, contributors and active agents
- The Centrality of Local Governance and Community Participation
- Intersectional Vulnerabilities and Specific Needs.
- The Human Rights and Social Justice Imperative

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Below is a complete list of the various policy briefs included in the report:

<b>N°</b>	<b>Policy briefs title</b>
01	Toward Inclusive Governance: Strengthening Migrant Participation in EU Social Policies
02	Spirituality and Social Bonds in the Inclusion Pathways of Unaccompanied Migrant Minors
03	Beyond Margins: Disability and Migration in the Face of Institutional Silence
04	Protecting Asylum-Seeking Women: The Central Role of Social Work
05	The right to leisure as a social right and strategic tool for inclusion of Unaccompanied Migrant Minors
06	Local Governance and Collaboration with Migrant Associations
07	Mental health of migrant and refugee children and adolescents: a matter of social inequality
08	Breaking Barriers: Inclusive communication to ensure rights and access to welfare services for migrants and applicants for international protection.
09	Towards Inclusive Governance: A Gender and Intersectional Perspective in Social Inclusion Policies Involving Migrant Populations
10	Strengthen the coordination role of the City Council to improve local governance of migration.
11	Strengthening Coordination, Resources and Rights Access: Proposals for Public Policies on Migrant Inclusion
12	Intercultural Mediation as a structural component of Social Services in Europe.
13	The right to housing for migrants and applicants for international protection: a challenge for migration policies.
14	Guarantee accessibility to local social services for the migrant population and applicants for international protection. The central role of social work.
15	The importance of interculturality in ensuring the rights of migrants and persons seeking international protection within local social services.
16	Data in Action: Towards Evidence-Informed Management of Social Services for the Care of the Migrant Population
17	Service-Learning (S-L) with Migrants: An Educational, Political, and Social Alliance for Inclusion
18	Participatory Communication on Migration: A Proposal from Social Work and Constructive Journalism



# Policy briefs



## **Policy briefs on local governance of human mobility for the Town Halls of Granada and Palermo.**

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## **D6.1: Public Policy Briefs: Policy Briefs on Local Governance of Human Mobility for the City Councils of Granada and Palermo**

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### **Executive Summary**

The policy briefs that make up this report are based on a consensus on the need for more inclusive local governance in the field of migration. Governance based on a rights-based and participatory approach. It is also noted that social inclusion is a complex and non-linear process and that it is particularly relevant at the local level, in cities and communities. European and national policy establishes a framework for action, but cities are at the frontline of migration management, places where daily life is built and where social cohesion takes on its full meaning, so policy needs to be contextualised and adapted to the municipal level in order to be effective.

This Policy Brief is oriented around two dimensions of analysis. First, it identifies the systemic deficiencies that impede the full social inclusion of migrants and applicants for international protection. Secondly, improvement strategies are designed, in the form of recommendations to public authorities, as viable solutions to the "structural invisibility" of certain populations, the "systemic failures" in the provision of services and the "non-perception" of rights by the migrant population. A methodology based on the review of documentary sources and research carried out by members of the Global-ANSWER Network has been used for this purpose. Mainly, in the case studies that have been developed in the cities of Palermo and Granada, with a participatory approach, which has allowed the integration of the voices of migrants and applicants for international protection, as well as those of professionals in social work and other social professions, academics and experts, for the generation of knowledge and the development of practical tools.

The adoption of these methodologies makes it possible to recommend on the need to transform existing relationships between migrant communities and institutions - from a passive model, of only beneficiaries of services, to an active model, as rights-holding subjects, collaborating in the design and implementation of policies - which not only improves the effectiveness of management but also reinforces the democratic legitimacy of institutions and processes, in increasingly diverse European societies.

## Introduction:

Local and regional governments play a key role in the implementation of migration policies and play a pivotal role in providing leadership and political will to develop social inclusion strategies that go beyond the mere provision of basic public services to migrants and international protection seekers. Migration is a dynamic phenomenon that requires coordinated local responses aimed at effective social inclusion.

Cities are the main gateways and geographic destinations for migrant populations, where inclusion materialises and where it is experienced on a day-to-day basis. Local governments therefore assume considerable, often disproportionate, responsibility for migration management, including the provision of essential services and the promotion of social cohesion. Effective governance and well-designed inclusion policies are not only humanitarian imperatives, but are also crucial for regional economic development, overall social cohesion and the upholding of fundamental democratic values.

When referring to "complexity" in the governance of migration and integration processes, it is recognised that simplistic or national approaches cannot be used. That complexity stems from the intersection of various factors, such as the rights of migrants, the multi-level nature of governance structures, and especially the dynamic nature of social inclusion itself. And it is not so much a problem of volume of people but of being able to manage very diverse individual circumstances, legal statuses, cultures and the intersectional nature of vulnerabilities. This implies that successful governance requires adaptive, flexible and highly nuanced approaches that go beyond traditional administrative silos and reactive measures. The 'non-linear' aspect of inclusion further underlines that it is a continuous and evolutionary process, not a conjunctural event, which demands sustained and flexible political commitment rather than rigid, time-bound programmes conditional on available funding.

This report examines the seventeen policy briefs presented, analysing common themes in migration inclusion policies, key actors, methodological approaches, recurrent recommendations, and gaps or underexplored areas requiring further attention.

## I. General Themes in Migrant Inclusion Policies

This report analyses the recurrent themes that have emerged as shaping the current understanding of the social inclusion of migrants and applicants for international protection in the cities of Palermo and Granada, as well as the actors involved, the areas less addressed and the associated policy recommendations.

### 1. Complex and non-linear processes of inclusion

Social inclusion is explicitly defined as a complex and non-linear process, deeply intertwined with the active participation of local communities. This conceptualisation contrasts with simplistic and linear models that are often assumed in policy-making.

Considering inclusion as a "non-linear" process challenges traditional, often rigid models of integration that assume a straightforward progression through pre-defined stages over time. Instead, policies must be seen as inherently flexible and adapted to individual trajectories, to unforeseen and possible setbacks, and to the long term. It is not the solution to expect migrants to simply "adapt" to what is in place, which is a fixed system. This reality directly contradicts a 'one-size-fits-all' or 'checklist' approach to integration (Sanahuja, 2020; Namata et al., 2025; Nielsen & Noblet, 2022).

Instead, it calls for "individualised integration plans", "personalised and person-centred interventions", and the "recognition of refugees as individual subjects with specific needs that cannot be standardised". The non-linearity of inclusion underlines the inadequacy of rigid, standardised programmes that assume a uniform trajectory. It highlights the critical need for dynamic, person-centred approaches that can adapt to individual circumstances, trauma and changing needs. Furthermore, it implies that policy success cannot be measured by simple short-term metrics, but requires a qualitative assessment of individual well-being, genuine participation and long-term outcomes, recognising that integration is a continuous journey rather than a fixed destination.

## **2. Migrants as rights-holders, contributors and active agents**

Migrants and refugees, together with their civil society representatives, are recognised as rights holders who must be empowered with knowledge and skills to exercise their rights and become active social, economic and cultural actors. They should be seen as active contributors to social cohesion and democratic governance, moving away from the perception of only service recipients. It is considered essential that newcomers have a genuine voice in the implementation, advocacy and evaluation of programmes, as this not only enhances them with evidence-based recommendations, but also gives them a voice in the design of local policies (Laubenthal, 2023).

This issue represents a fundamental paradigm shift from a 'problem'-centred view of migration (where migrants are seen primarily as burdens or passive recipients of charity) to a 'resource'-centred view (where they are recognised as valuable assets and indispensable partners in social development). This redefinition of the role of migrants is crucial to foster dignity, reduce dependency and build more inclusive, resilient and democratically legitimate societies (Kaneti, 2011). The designation of 'rights holders', 'active contributors' and 'active agents' indicates that the involvement of migrants in the inclusion process is crucial. In this context, some policy briefs focus on migrant associations as a 'strategic lever for inclusion'. Others highlight the use of methodologies, such as Service-Learning, that empower migrant communities. In reality, it is more than a call for superficial participation; it is an attempt to fundamentally redefine the status and role of the migrant population within society. Transitioning from "recipient" to "contributor" and "agent" directly challenges paternalistic or purely welfarist approaches. It also recognises the inherent capacities, resilience and "situated knowledge" that migrants bring. This perspective fosters mutual respect, co-responsibility in the integration process and ultimately leads to more effective and sustainable outcomes. It also implies that policies should strategically invest in building the capacities and leadership of the

migrant population, rather than merely addressing perceived deficits (Rubio-Marín, 2025).

### **3. The Centrality of Local Governance and Community Participation**

Local governments are crucial to creating and maintaining positive conditions for civil coexistence and social cohesion among newly arrived populations, taking into account their diverse legal statuses. Good practices in inclusion consistently demonstrate the intrinsic value of community participation and the effectiveness of cross-sectoral services.

Effective inclusion should be seen as a bottom-up process (Canto, 2008), requiring tailored, context-specific solutions and direct community participation. Policy briefs analyse the effectiveness and limitations of the national or EU policy framework in practice. Because integration takes place at the local level, local governments are increasingly involved in migration management and play a key role in providing leadership and political will to develop social inclusion strategies.

But inclusion is fundamentally a social and relational process, not just a legal or administrative one (Klarenbeek, 2024). It takes place in neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces and community spaces. This implies that national policies must actively enable and empower local actors, providing them with adequate resources, flexibility and clear mandates, rather than imposing rigid and standardised solutions that may not fit local contexts. The pervasive problem of fragmentation and resource scarcity at the local level (as detailed in later sections) then becomes a critical bottleneck, underlining the need for a more coherent multi-level governance approach.

### **4. Intersectional Vulnerabilities and Specific Needs.**

Policy briefs have identified some phenomena that correspond to the special needs of the migrant population, which are not always recognised and addressed. This is the case of migrants with disabilities, who face a "triple barrier of inequality" (intersection of health, social exclusion and cultural marginalisation) and are characterised by a "double diversity" (being both migrants and persons with disabilities). This is also the case of unaccompanied migrant minors. It describes how they rely significantly on religion and spirituality as vital cultural and relational resources for identity formation, individual resilience and the development of social bonds, also a dimension often ignored by institutional approaches. Moreover, the right to leisure is identified as a fundamental social right and a strategic tool for their inclusion and well-being. Their mental health is deeply and negatively influenced by structural social inequalities. This is also the case for refugee women, who face gender-specific risks of violence, marginalisation and exclusion at every stage of their migratory journey, from their countries of origin to transit routes and host contexts. These risks are often exacerbated by host country reception systems that operate within gender-neutral or gender-blind frameworks, leading to double trauma and systemic neglect (Reilly et al., 2022). A critical gap is identified in policies that systematically omit gender and intersectional perspectives, which directly generates inequalities in access to rights and welfare services and negatively affects policy outcomes.

The consistent identification of specific vulnerable groups and the explicit introduction of "intersectional vulnerabilities" reveal that a generic and

undifferentiated category of "migrant population" is completely insufficient and even detrimental to effective policy design. Ignoring these intersecting axes of inequality leads directly to systemic failures, "structural invisibility" and the active reproduction of discrimination rather than its mitigation.

We use the concept of "intersectionality" as a critical lens, which leads to considering the consequences of not addressing these specific needs and intersecting vulnerabilities. This highlights the limitations of a generic approach to migrant inclusion. The policy briefs describe a "triple barrier of inequality" and the "institutional silence and inadequacy" for certain groups of migrants, leading to the "structural production of invisibility". This omission is not a minor error or academic subtlety; it is a causal factor in the perpetuation of inequality and the inherent ineffectiveness of policies. When policies are designed from a "normative rationality" centred on a presumed profile of "young, cisgender, self-employed male with no caring responsibilities", they actively produce exclusion and disadvantage for those who do not fit this narrow profile. This implies that truly inclusive and equitable policies must begin with a disaggregated and nuanced understanding of migrant populations and proactively address multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination. This requires moving from a universalist approach to one that is tailored and responsive to specific compound vulnerabilities.

## **5. The Human Rights and Social Justice Imperative**

Coherence in the formulation of inclusion challenges and policy recommendations within a strong human rights discourse elevates the discussion beyond mere service provision or economic integration. It positions the effective inclusion of migrants as a fundamental moral and legal imperative, essential to the integrity of democratic states and the fulfilment of their international obligations, rather than a discretionary act of charity.

In this report, the right to leisure is framed not as a luxury, but as a fundamental social right and a crucial component of well-being for children, especially unaccompanied minors. Access to decent housing is explicitly recognised as a fundamental human right, enshrined in international and EU law. It is emphasised that social work, as a profession, must ensure practices based on a human rights approach, particularly in interventions with migrants. Interculturality is understood as an ethical-political project deeply linked to the European normative framework and international human rights law. The frequent and prominent appearance in policy briefs of terms such as "human rights", "fundamental social right" and "fundamental right" leads to a consideration of the deeper meaning of framing these issues as rights rather than simply needs or services. This influences the role and responsibility of the state.

This has significant implications for accountability: when these rights are violated or inaccessible, states and institutions are legally and morally culpable. It shifts the burden from the migrant (to "integrate" or "adapt") to the state (to "enable rights" and remove barriers). This perspective also underlines that "inclusion" is not just about helping the migrant population; it is about upholding the fundamental principles of a just, equitable and democratic society for all its members, regardless of their origin or status. This implies the need for strong legal frameworks, enforcement mechanisms and a culture of accountability.

## **II. Key Actors in Governance and Implementation**

In multi-level governance of migration, the effectiveness of inclusion policies depends on the concurrence and collaboration and the active role of various actors in the territory.

### **Local governments and municipalities**

Local governments are increasingly involved in migration management and are crucial for regional economic development. They have a responsibility to create and maintain positive conditions for civil coexistence and social cohesion for newcomers, considering their diverse legal status. Cities are the main areas of settlement for migrant populations and are at the frontline of managing the influx of asylum seekers and providing essential services. Municipalities have a key role in providing leadership and political will to develop social inclusion strategies. However, they often operate in a 'crisis management' mode due to limited resources and a perceived lack of competence, or prioritisation of the local political agenda.

### **Third Sector Organisations and Migrant Associations**

Migrant communities, through their organisations, act as active agents in the provision of informal welfare and day-to-day cultural mediation. These associations are relational nodes between different social worlds, endowed with social capital and situated knowledge. They compensate for the absence of the state or municipality in guaranteeing access to essential services such as legal support, housing, education or health counselling. Despite systemic obstacles, they represent a growing form of collective agency. Cooperation with these organisations, recognising them as strategic partners in shaping service delivery frameworks and policy tools, is a strategic lever for social, economic and civic inclusion (Yeates & Holden, 2022).

### **Social Services Professionals and Educators**

Social workers are at the front line of action in services for the reception and care of migrant populations. Their involvement and commitment is unquestionable, even under regulations that are not conducive to or inhibit the care and inclusion of people accessing services. In contexts of lack of protection, they develop protective practices that compensate for the violation of the rights of the migrant population. However, they operate under considerable pressure and often lack specialised training (e.g. in intersectional feminist praxis and trauma-informed approaches). Nor in religious pluralism and intercultural competence, which is crucial for managing religious diversity and supporting freedom of belief). Social work must ensure practices based on a human rights approach, and specialised, ongoing and up-to-date human rights training is vital for social workers to acquire the necessary competencies. Finally, there is a gap between the large amount of data generated by social workers and their limited capacity to transform it into useful evidence for decision-making.

### **Religious communities**

Religion and spirituality are crucial cultural and relational resources for migrant populations, including unaccompanied migrant children, contributing to identity formation, individual resilience and the development of social bonds. They offer

"balm for the soul" and provide meaning and strength throughout the migration experience. Networks of meaning and support within religious contexts foster resilience and subjective well-being among migrant populations. Religious communities can serve as "transitional spaces" that guide children and adolescents towards active citizenship and a sense of cultural safety.

### **EU institutions and Member States**

European and national regulations provide the framework within which local governance of migration takes place. In addition, EU institutions play an important role in funding programmes and projects, as well as in promoting standards and the exchange of good practices. This report provides some examples of how European and national regulations are then difficult to fit together due to heterogeneous implementation, such as in the case of housing, where emergency or temporary solutions that do not meet standards of dignity and security are often used. Other examples focus on the need to harmonise national asylum legislation with disability rights frameworks.

## **III. Methodological Approaches Informing Policy Briefs**

The policy briefs describe a preference for methodological approaches to policy development that is respectful of people, involves them in the process and is based on data and evidence. This priority applies to migration policy formulation as well as to management and practitioners.

### **1. Human Rights Based Approach**

This approach is fundamental and transversal to all recommendations. It positions migrants as inherent rights holders, not as mere recipients of assistance. In this sense, the "non-perception" of the right to social protection is seen as a failure of the rule of law. The guarantee of rights translates into effective access to basic services, regardless of administrative status, under the application of the principles of non-discrimination and protection of rights.

### **2. Gender and intersectionality approach**

Policies must be sensitive to gender and intersectionality in order to guarantee rights, prevent inequalities and improve the quality of welfare services. Intersectionality is crucial to understanding how different dimensions of identity and vulnerability (gender, age, disability, legal status, ethnicity, religion) intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination and exclusion. The systematic omission of these perspectives generates inequalities and reinforces dynamics of subordination. It is recommended that these approaches be integrated into all phases of the public policy cycle and into the training of professionals.

### **3. Participatory and Co-Design Approach**

This approach advocates for the active inclusion of migrants in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes that affect them. It seeks to give migrant populations a genuine voice in decision-making, which not only improves programmes with evidence-based recommendations, but also gives

them a voice in the design of local policies. Transformative participation requires real power, recognition and accessible structures.

#### **4. Holistic and multi-sectoral approach**

It recognises the need to go beyond the foster care system to create a community where public sector and private actors, especially the third sector, cooperate for real inclusion in the employment, housing and socio-cultural spheres. The integration of spirituality into holistic care frameworks for unaccompanied minors is an example of this approach. Addressing the mental health of migrant children and adolescents requires consideration of the political, economic, social and cultural determinants of their health and mental health.

#### **5. Evidence- and data-driven approach**

This approach is necessary to understand migration flows. For this, disaggregated data (by sex, age, type of impairment, etc.) is indispensable. This is the only way to plan, prioritise, budget and allocate social and health resources effectively. The lack of standardisation in data capture and the limited capacity of staff to transform data into evidence for implementation is a major difficulty. Comparative research and impact evaluations are needed to generate evidence on the effectiveness of interventions.

### **IV. Recurrent Policy Recommendations and Strategic Approaches**

The policy recommendations emerging from the papers are multifaceted and reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges of inclusion of migrants and applicants for international protection.

#### **1. Simplification and Harmonisation of Administrative Procedures**

A central recommendation is the harmonisation and streamlining of administrative procedures in Member States to ensure timely and equitable access to essential services such as housing, health and legal assistance. It is crucial to ensure that migrants are adequately informed and able to claim their rights under EU law, including those related to long-term residence, family reunification and social protection. The complexity and slowness of procedures for regularising migration status, registering with local authorities or accessing basic rights intensify the vulnerability and exclusion of the migrant population. Lack of clear information and reliance on informal networks aggravate this situation.

#### **2. Promoting Personalised and Person-Centred Interventions**

The development of individualised inclusion plans, co-designed with migrant communities, which take into account their linguistic, educational, employment and psychosocial needs, is proposed. Participatory service delivery models should be encouraged where their voices help shape priorities and implementation. Diversity management requires training health professionals in structural and intercultural skills, so that they can maintain a horizontal dialogue between "expert" knowledge

and socio-cultural representations of the mental distress of migrant or refugee children and adolescents.

### **3. Enhancing Intercultural Competence and Mediation**

It is essential to integrate intercultural communication and anti-discrimination training into the professional development of civil servants, educators and health workers. Intercultural mediation is a proven tool to facilitate communication and interaction between migrants and host institutions, reduce cultural conflicts, promote social inclusion and ensure effective access to public rights and services. It is recommended that intercultural mediation be institutionally recognised through European legislation and that its stable funding through structural funds be ensured. The recruitment of intercultural mediators and bilingual staff in all public services serving the migrant population is crucial to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers.

### **4. Institutionalising Migrant Participation and Civil Society Leadership**

It is proposed to establish migrant consultative bodies at local and regional levels, linked to municipal councils and urban governance processes. These structures should be representative, permanent and connected to real decision-making power. It is essential to involve migrant communities in the monitoring and evaluation of public policies through participatory audits, focus groups and feedback mechanisms. Funding should be provided for training programmes in civic participation, leadership and policy advocacy for individuals and migrant community groups. Fostering cross-sectoral partnerships between public authorities, NGOs and migrant associations is key to promoting collective problem-solving and shared responsibility. Migrant organisations act as active agents in informal welfare provision and day-to-day cultural mediation, compensating for the absence of the state or municipality in guaranteeing access to essential services.

### **5. Strengthening Local Governance and Multi-level Coordination**

Municipalities must be provided with adequate human and financial resources to establish effective coordination mechanisms to ensure good governance in the reception and inclusion of migrants. Continuous training on migration issues should be promoted, covering legal, cultural, psychosocial and diversity management aspects. It is recommended that local government staff be appointed who can specifically assume responsibility and, at the same time, lead coordination efforts on human mobility issues. The approval of comprehensive operational plans for the inclusion of migrants, in collaboration with local governance actors, is fundamental, defining roles, responsibilities and coordination mechanisms. Finally, there is a need to identify and strengthen networks of European cities that excel in the administrative coordination of local migration management, promoting mutual learning.

### **6. Investment in Affordable and Social Housing**

It is recommended to actively monitor and enforce the standards of the Reception Directive, including the right to decent housing, in order to make access to housing - as a fundamental human right - effective. The use of European funds for the

creation of social and affordable housing, adapted to the needs of these populations, is also recommended. In this regard, it is crucial to strengthen the capacities of local authorities to manage housing and housing by developing specific funding programmes and technical assistance. Finally, the use of awareness-raising campaigns and legal advice is recognised as effective in combating discrimination and promoting inclusion.

## **7. Improving Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-being**

Spirituality should be considered a vital component of individual well-being, alongside the material, educational and psychological dimensions. Staff should be trained in religious pluralism and intercultural competence to manage religious diversity and support freedom of belief. The mental health of migrant and refugee children and adolescents is a public problem deeply influenced by social inequalities, and traumatic experiences have a scientifically proven impact on their mental health. It is recommended to recognise the rights and agency of migrant children and adolescents, and to increase the provision of services and budgetary and personnel resources for mental health care with a cross-cultural approach.

## **8. Ensuring the Right to Leisure and Socialisation**

Leisure is not a luxury, but a fundamental aspect of well-being, identity formation and resilience for children, especially those in situations of displacement. For unaccompanied minors, leisure time acquires a strategic value in their processes of social integration and self-construction. It is recommended that inclusive recreational programmes be funded, removing financial barriers and ensuring linguistic and geographical accessibility. It is crucial to train youth workers and educators in intercultural competence and to foster partnerships between sectors (schools, social services, community organisations) to offer structured and inclusive leisure activities.

## **9. Gender mainstreaming and intersectionality**

Social inclusion policies for migrant populations must systematically incorporate gender and intersectional perspectives in all phases of the social policy cycle: diagnosis, design, implementation and evaluation. It is essential to develop diagnoses that make visible the structural inequalities that affect migrant populations based on gender, sexual orientation, social class, age, disability, administrative status, origin, race, ethnicity or religion. The training of professionals in public services and social entities must be strengthened with mandatory continuing education programmes on gender, migration and intersectionality. It is crucial to recognise and address multiple forms of violence and structural inequalities, developing specific and accessible resources for migrant women and LGBTIQ+ people.

## **10. Strengthening Data Management and Evidence-Based Research**

There is a gap between the large amount of data generated by social workers and their limited capacity to transform it into useful evidence for decision-making. It is recommended to standardise data capture at the micro level by designing and incorporating a "common minimum module" of variables that can be integrated into existing forms. There is a need to progressively develop data skills in social work staff through training programmes. The creation of an Analytical Support Unit at meso

level to clean, integrate and visualise information is essential. Migrants should be involved in the design and evaluation of indicators through participatory workshops and co-designed surveys.

### **11. Promoting Educational and Social Partnerships (Service-Learning)**

The Service-Learning (SL) methodology combines academic learning with community service, offering an innovative approach to connect academic content with the acquisition of professional and critical skills. The benefits of ApS are multidirectional: it enhances student learning and the development of pro-social competences, strengthens the skills of migrants and their support networks, and promotes the openness of universities to their social environment. It is recommended to integrate ApS as an intervention tool in inclusion plans for migrant populations (local, regional and national) and to train faculty and technical staff in its principles and practices.

## **V. Gaps and Unexplored Areas**

Despite the proposed recommendations and approaches, there remain several gaps and areas that require further attention and which are identified below.

### **Structural Invisibility and Lack of Disaggregated Data**

Some specific conditions and needs of migrants face a "structural production of invisibility", where denial of access is embedded in institutional logic. In general, the information underpinning social intervention with migrants is weak at source, fragmented in its management and insufficiently supported by specific professional competencies. The scarcity of age-disaggregated data makes it difficult to understand and quantify the migratory flows of children and adolescents, which impedes adequate planning and resource allocation.

### **Institutional Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination**

The lack of coordination between municipalities and the various local actors (public and private) is a significant obstacle that prevents efforts and resources from fully translating into effective community inclusion. This fragmented and uncoordinated management undermines the effectiveness of interventions, leading to overlaps, gaps in services and difficulties for social work practitioners. There is a frequent disconnect between regional housing policies and the needs of local authorities. This situation is reported in the literature and in the case experiences. The situations in which it occurs and the reasons behind it need to be further explored and evidenced.

### **Insufficient Resources and Capacities**

Municipal social services often have limited capacity to serve the migrant population due to chronic shortages of human and material resources. This leads them to operate in a "crisis management" mode, intervening only in extreme emergency situations. Underfunding of services to address some special needs is counterproductive because it leads to higher long-term costs and failures of inclusion. Intercultural mediation, despite its value, remains a one-off resource in

many European countries, dependent on temporary projects and with little institutionalisation and professional recognition.

### **Persistence of Welfarist and "Gender Blind" Approaches**

Reception systems often operate within gender-neutral or gender-blind frameworks, which do not incorporate intersectional analyses of power and oppression, which can lead to systemic neglect for refugee women and double trauma. The supposed neutrality of institutional policies is a myth; they often operate from an exclusionary normative rationality, centred on a young, cisgender, autonomous male profile without care responsibilities, producing exclusionary effects. Social work, despite its human rights orientation, is often embedded in systems with charitable or needs-based approaches that focus on determining who is "worthy" of help.

### **Disconnect between Levels of Governance and Local Realities**

Although migration policies are formulated at the European and national levels, it is cities and municipalities that are in direct contact with the migrant population and implement social inclusion processes. However, the capacity of municipalities to deal with the migrant population is limited and, as a consequence, attention is often referred to the third sector, revealing a lack of strategic planning and political prioritisation. This disconnect hinders policy development and access to human rights at the local level.

### **Barriers to Inclusive Communication**

The absence of understandable, multilingual and culturally appropriate information is a significant problem that restricts migrants' access to essential rights and services. This manifests itself in insufficient interpretation or intercultural mediation services, low competence in the language of the host country and complex administrative systems with limited and inaccessible information. The digitisation of public services poses significant challenges if an inclusive approach is not adopted, reproducing the same barriers as face-to-face formats.

## **VI. Synthesis of Findings**

The analysis of the policy briefs reveals a complex and dynamic reality in the governance of migration and social inclusion. There is a clear consensus on the need for a paradigm shift towards more inclusive, rights-based and participatory approaches. Inclusion is understood as a non-linear and deeply rooted process at the local level, where the active participation of migrants and communities is indispensable. Specific attention to intersectional vulnerabilities is necessary to avoid the reproduction of inequalities and structural invisibility.

Key actors in the local governance of migration (municipalities, third sector organisations of and for migrants, social service professionals and other communities) play vital and interconnected roles. However, the effectiveness of their work is often compromised by institutional fragmentation, insufficient resources of all kinds and the persistence of welfarist or gender-blind approaches.

The gaps identified in the production and management of disaggregated data, poor coordination and communication barriers are not merely operational problems arising from the normal functioning of services but represent systemic failures, which impede the full realisation of human rights and hinder social cohesion. Addressing these gaps requires sustained political commitment and a cultural transformation of institutions. The recommendations of the policy briefs, implemented in a coordinated manner and with a human rights approach, can transform migration governance from reactive crisis management to a proactive model that fosters social cohesion, dignity and the full inclusion of all people in European societies.

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# GLOBAL ANSWER

Social work  
and human mobility

## Policy Brief

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## Toward Inclusive Governance: Strengthening Migrant Participation in EU Social Policies

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### \*Executive Summary

The integration of asylum seekers and refugees is a complex, non-linear process, deeply linked to the active participation of local communities. Across reception system and social services (education, housing, culture, etc.), local policies are called upon to guarantee coexistence and cohesion of all the components of the community of people living in a territory, favouring tools and paths to counter exclusion and isolation of citizenship, caused by economic, cultural and ethnic, linguistic, social, age or social context fragilities (OECD, 2018).

The good practices observed highlighted the value of community participation, the role of intersectoral services, and systemic criticalities (language, bureaucratic, employment barriers).

Supporting newcomers, those directly affected by reception pathways, to have a genuine voice in implementation, advocacy, and evaluation not only benefits programs by creating more evidence-based recommendations, but also gives newcomers a voice in program design, to promote their active and meaningful participation in local policymaking and program interventions and the establishment of robust and accessible accountability mechanisms.

For refugees, as individuals or as communities, to be able to assume leadership roles and voice their experiences, it is necessary to offer tailor-made technical assistance that provides adequate knowledge and tools and supports the development of critical skills and competencies.

Involving refugee and community organizations and refugees and asylum seekers in the design and delivery of services is good practice and the outcome will be more appropriate service provision; moreover, it will entail a reshape of the future of integration policies towards better conditions for successful integration.

## 1. Introduction

“When it comes to migrant integration, the local level matters. Where migrants go and how they integrate into their new communities depends on the specific characteristics of cities and regions. Local authorities play a vital role in this integration” (OECD, 2018:5).

Cities are at the forefront not only in managing the recent influx of asylum seekers, but also in providing essential services to all migrants throughout their lives. Local authorities have the duty, subsidiary or complementary to national authorities, to respect, protect and effectively fulfil the inclusion rights of refugees, which fall under their responsibility. At the same time, this implies that migrants and refugees – and their civil society representatives – are rights holders who should be empowered – through appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities – to exercise and claim their acquired rights and become active social, economic and cultural actors.

Refugee partners also have important insights into how to better establish trusting relationships with their wider community. A growing number of studies have examined the characteristics of refugees’ social networks and social capital, and how those characteristics affect their likelihood successfully integrating (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013).

The community is the starting point for migrants to connect with the host society. Community participation is the process through which individuals engage in formal and informal community activities, such as decision-making, volunteer activities and interactions with neighbors in the geographical communities in which they live (Putnam, 2000; Vaughan et al. 2013; Macaluso & Tumminelli, 2023). In fact, the lack of a sense of belonging to a context can easily trigger dynamics of passivity and lack of responsibility.

## 2. Participation at the local and territorial level

Integration as a multidimensional process that requires access to housing, employment, health, education and civic participation. Language barriers, slow bureaucracy, discrimination in the housing market, fragilities of the local economy complicate inclusion paths. Migrants should be seen not merely as recipients of services, but as **active contributors to social cohesion and democratic governance**. Facilitating their participation aligns with the EU’s broader goals of fostering social resilience, strengthening fundamental rights, and ensuring equal treatment across Member States.

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Good practices studies show that key elements for inclusion are: personalised plans, tutoring and mentoring, at the micro level; coordinated intersectoral services at the meso level. At the macro level, participation paths in local communities.

The first one is the development of the **individualized plan** for each beneficiary, which includes the identification of specific needs and requirements related to the individual's history and experience of the journey, the intake of the beneficiary and the interventions to be implemented.

Second, the **integration between sectors** is of central importance in the activation of the intervention, in order to achieve good practice not only for the beneficiaries, but also for the community, contributing to the creation of a context that includes and does not exclude.

At the macro level, **structural inclusiveness** issues need to be addressed by government and services, more inclusive evaluations should be designed, involving refugees. Migrant direct experience should be systematically added to city's learning processes through participatory evaluation and consultative mechanisms. Inclusion passes through the recognition of the migrant as a bearer of skills and rights. Participation in local initiatives fosters social ties and a sense of belonging.

The local and territorial level becomes the test bench for innovation, i.e. where it is possible to experiment with alliances between different organizations, effective and efficient forms of governance, and user take-over arrangements.

Innovative configurations that can emerge from social practices (Polizzi, Tajani, Vitale, 2013; Allegri, 2016; Twelvetreets, 2003) and most of the time they start from micro experiments capable of generating the unprecedented.

Migrants and refugees – and their civil society representatives – are rights-holders that should be empowered – through appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities – to exercise and claim their established rights and become active social, economic and cultural actors.

## \*Key issues

**- The relationship with the territory, with the city, with the community, with the neighborhood is a central theme.**

**-To be recognized, a person must be seen and heard as unique by the community and understood in a way that accords with their constructive self-perception within an environment in which all people are equally valued and their contributions appreciated and accepted (Fraser, 2000).**

## 3. Recognition in relationship with professionals and local communities

At the heart of the **relationship among refugees, professionals and the community** is the issue of their recognition as unique and singular persons with peculiar needs that cannot be standardized. Professionals and operators are called upon to exercise individual and collective responsibility by making visible the identities of their guests, implementing projects of inclusion in which there is a global and reciprocal involvement and empowerment.

When dealing with refugees in the reception system, it therefore seems appropriate to move towards a recognition of the host refugees' civic skills (Moro, 2013), i.e. all those organizational, communication and management skills learned by individuals during their participation in the activities of groups and associations.

Participation in initiatives, recreational events, cultural initiatives, workshops, and sports activities organized by local entities is desired and sought after by the managing bodies of the reception system, as an opportunity for facilitation, meeting and confrontation with natives, and the initiation of social networks and pathways to inclusion and socio-economic integration. What is therefore required of operators is to offer refugees an individualized project that entails the provision of contexts and spaces in which the subject can carry out certain key steps in the complex process of progressive acquisition of the forms of active and aware citizenship, such as access to basic services, the exercise of rights (including health and lifelong education), job and housing integration, and social participation.

Refugee participation in decision-making helps to build confidence in exercising basic rights and fostering a sense of belonging and trust in host communities. It is necessary to resort to intervention "outside" the reception system, to create a community in which the public, private and third sectors cooperate to achieve real inclusion in the labour, housing and socio-cultural spheres; a community that supports their close and familiar links with school staff, with tutors, with relationships with support or host families, with friends and their families, or with employers or other adults who take on the role of reference points (Peri, 2017).

### \*Key issues

**- Professionals and operators are called upon to exercise individual and collective responsibility by making visible the identities of their guests, implementing projects of inclusion in which there is a global and reciprocal involvement and empowerment.**

**- Refugee participation in decision-making helps to build confidence in exercising basic rights and fostering a sense of belonging and trust in host communities.**

## 4. Public policy recommendations

In the evolving landscape of EU social policy, the role of the third sector and the meaningful involvement of beneficiaries—especially migrants and refugees—has become increasingly relevant. The European Union’s commitment to inclusion, as reflected in the *European Pillar of Social Rights*, the *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021–2027)*, and the *Urban Agenda for the EU*, underscores the need for participatory approaches in policy design and service delivery.

By embedding these principles and actions into national and local policies, the EU and its Member States can move beyond a model of integration as assimilation and toward a model of **cohesion through participation**. Migrant inclusion in public decision-making is not only a question of rights—it is essential to building a resilient, democratic, and socially just European Union.

The following recommendations point to an integrated, participative and rights-based approach to strengthen social cohesion and the autonomy of beneficiaries.

### 1. Simplify the Regulatory Framework for Inclusion

- **Harmonise and streamline administrative procedures** across Member States to ensure timely access to essential services (e.g., housing, health, legal aid).
- Support **capacity-building within the third sector** to reduce fragmentation and enhance collaboration with local authorities.
- Ensure that migrants are informed of and able to claim their **rights under EU law**, including those related to long-term residency, family reunification, and social protection.

### 2. Promote Tailor-Made and Person-Centred Interventions

- Develop **individualised integration plans** co-designed with migrants, taking into account linguistic, educational, employment, and psychosocial needs.
- Encourage **participatory service delivery** models where migrant voices help shape priorities and implementation.
- Allocate EU structural funds (e.g. ESF+, AMIF) to pilot projects that test scalable models of **co-production and co-management** in integration services.

### 3. Enhance Intercultural Competence in Public Services

- Mainstream **intercultural communication** and anti-discrimination training in professional development for public servants, educators, and healthcare workers.
- Support **peer-to-peer exchange** and mutual learning between Member States on inclusive service design.
- Invest in **inclusive public spaces and community infrastructures** that facilitate everyday interaction and social cohesion across diverse groups.

### 4. Institutionalise Migrant Participation in Decision-Making

- Establish **local and regional migrant consultative bodies**, linked to municipal councils and urban governance processes, as promoted by the *Urban Agenda Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees*.
- Ensure that such structures are **representative, permanent, and connected** to actual decision-making power.
- Involve migrants in **monitoring and evaluation** of public policies through participatory audits, focus groups, and feedback mechanisms.

### 5. Support Migrant Leadership and Civil Society Engagement

- Fund training programmes on civic engagement, leadership, and policy advocacy for migrant individuals and community groups.
- Encourage **migrant-led organisations** to participate in EU-funded projects and consultative platforms, such as the *European Migration Forum*.
- Foster cross-sectoral partnerships between public authorities, NGOs, and migrant associations to promote **collective problem-solving** and shared responsibility.

### 6. Promote a Narrative of Shared Belonging and Co-Creation

- Develop EU-wide campaigns that highlight migrants' contributions to democratic life, economic development, and cultural vitality.
- Support Member States in integrating inclusive messaging in public education, local media, and cultural institutions.
- Recognise the value of inclusive governance as a democratic standard, not only as an integration tool.

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**WP 4:** RESEARCH DATA GATHERING: MULTI-SITE CASE STUDIES.

**WP 5:** DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH.

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# GLOBAL ANSWER

Social work  
and human mobility

## Policy Brief

July 2025

# Spirituality and Social Bonds in the Inclusion Pathways of Unaccompanied Migrant Minors

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### \*Executive Summary

In the migratory journeys of unaccompanied migrant minors (UMMs), religion and spirituality represent cultural and relational resources that significantly contribute to identity formation, individual resilience, and the development of social bonds (Zanfrini, 2020). However, the institutional invisibility of the religious dimension reveals a structural limitation: the tendency to reduce inclusion to the binary of care and settlement, overlooking the symbolic and subjective aspects that give meaning to the migratory experience (Ambrosini, Naso & Paravati, 2018).

Research further demonstrates that religious practices among UMMs are shaped through agentic processes of negotiation—often formed in response to displacement, trauma, and cultural dissonance (Herz & Lalander, 2020). Yet this complexity is frequently obscured by discourses that frame young migrants either through victimhood or cultural threat.

Religious social capital—networks of meaning and support within faith-based contexts—has been shown to foster resilience and subjective well-being among migrant populations (Chen & Williams, 2016). Among unaccompanied minors, spirituality may act as a deeply internalized resource for coping and identity formation, even when not connected to formal religious practice (Batuwanthudawa & Udayanga, 2025).



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In contemporary migration discourse, the holistic inclusion of unaccompanied migrant minors (UMMs) requires not only legal, educational, and material support, but also recognition of symbolic and spiritual dimensions of experience. Recent integration toolkits implemented across Europe emphasize spiritual well-being and social connectedness as critical domains of integration (Family for Every Child, 2024).

## 1. Religion and Spirituality as Relational and Symbolic Resources

As literature shows, the spiritual dimension represents a "balm for the soul" that can oxygenate even the most difficult stages of the journey (Connor, 2012, p. 25). In the reception phase, religion performs a function of "material and spiritual resistance," but also of mobilization and civic participation (Ambrosini et al., 2020).

In the reception system, minors often do not find space or recognition for religious expression. Some pray alone in their rooms, others do not know where to find places of worship or lack access due to logistical barriers (Borderline Sicilia, 2020). In many cases, religion is practiced online. While this illustrates digital resilience, it also signals a privatization of religion that may lead to further isolation (Di Rosa, 2025). Moreover, cohabitation among minors of different religious backgrounds can lead to tension if not supported by professional mediation. Lack of training on religious pluralism can lead to resistance or conflict, aggravating the social fragility of adolescents already impacted by migration (Di Rosa et al., 2019).

Among UMMs, diverse religious trajectories can be observed: some seek continuity with their backgrounds in highly religious societies, while others "discover" a faith they never had the chance to experience in their countries of origin (Zanfrini, 2020, p. 327). In both cases, religion offers a narrative framework to interpret one's experiences and to give meaning to suffering.

However, when religious practices take place in isolation or are mediated exclusively through digital means, they risk becoming "disembodied" and lacking the communal dimension that characterizes collective worship (Di Rosa, 2025; Brubaker & Haigh, 2017).

### \*Key issues

**- From a holistic perspective on integration, religion and spirituality are dimensions that should be recognized and enhanced within reception systems.**

**- Religion accompanies every stage of migration, providing meaning and strength to individual agency**

## 2. The Sociopolitical Relevance of Spirituality in Integration Pathways

Religious belonging constitutes a form of **relational capital**, often functioning as a primary site for the reproduction of cultural meanings, the construction of interpersonal networks, and the negotiation of identity in conditions of structural dislocation. Particularly for young migrants who have experienced rupture, trauma, or disorientation, spirituality offers a language through which to re-signify their biographical trajectories and re-anchor themselves within new sociocultural contexts. Religion, in this sense, operates both as an “emotional shelter” and as a “discursive platform” for agency and resilience.

Moreover, faith-based communities often act as **socio-symbolic mediators**—spaces in which migrants can experience recognition, reciprocity, and a sense of belonging. These communities not only offer practical support and ritual continuity but also constitute informal arenas of **social participation**, counterbalancing the bureaucratic and depersonalized logic that frequently characterizes institutional care systems.

In the absence of opportunities for shared spiritual expression, however, many UMMs are compelled to internalize their religious life—practicing individually or through digital platforms. While such digital forms of religiosity can provide continuity and connection to transnational networks, they risk producing a **privatized and de-socialized spirituality** that undermines the potential for community integration and collective recognition. In sociological terms, this shift reflects the broader mediatization of religious practice, which, without supportive infrastructure, may contribute to isolation rather than inclusion.

Furthermore, a lack of institutional recognition for spiritual needs can exacerbate **symbolic marginalization**. When reception staff and guardians are unprepared to engage with the religious and cultural backgrounds of minors, opportunities for meaningful intercultural dialogue are foreclosed. This dynamic not only limits the minors' expressive freedom but also weakens the potential for shared cultural learning and mutual understanding—key tenets of a pluralist society.

From a policy perspective, acknowledging the **structural and symbolic significance of religion** entails integrating spiritual dimensions into social and educational programming, investing in the **religious literacy** of professionals, and establishing **formal alliances with local faith communities**. In doing so, institutions move beyond a narrow conception of care and toward a model of inclusion that respects and mobilizes the full spectrum of human experience—material, emotional, and spiritual.

### \*Key issues

- **Foregrounding spirituality in policy development enhances sensitivity to the cultural, emotional, and identity-based dimensions of integration.**

## 5. Public policy recommendations

Spirituality is not a marginal factor, but a vital resource for building pathways of inclusion and recognition. Ignoring it means disregarding a fundamental part of the migrant experience. A reception system that integrates the religious dimension into its practices and planning fosters social bonds, enhances well-being, and promotes participation in community life. Investing in this field not only strengthens the inclusion of minors but also contributes to a more cohesive, just, and plural society.

### 1. Recognize religion within reception planning

Spirituality should be considered a component of individual well-being, alongside material, educational, and psychological dimensions (Connor, 2012; Gozdzia, 2002).

### 2. Activate networks with local religious communities

Places of worship, associations, and spiritual leaders can serve as bridges between minors and the host territory, offering belonging and symbolic support (Foner & Alba, 2008).

### 3. Train staff in religious pluralism and intercultural competence

Reception professionals must be equipped to manage religious diversity and support freedom of belief (Eade, 2012).

### 4. Support the digital religious practices of minors

The use of religious platforms and social media should be accompanied by pedagogical reflection to avoid individualistic detachment and encourage constructive engagement with transnational networks (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017; Di Rosa, 2024).

### 5. Support inclusion through spiritual grounding

Religious communities can serve as "transitional spaces" that guide minors toward active citizenship and a sense of cultural security (Di Rosa, 2024; Bichi & Bonini, 2021).

### 6. Integrate spirituality in holistic care frameworks

Incorporate spiritual needs into individualized integration plans, case management, and youth empowerment approaches (Connor, 2012).

## 7. Engage faith-based communities as partners

Establish formal collaborations with mosques, churches, diaspora temples, and interfaith organizations to support mentoring, identity affirmation, and belonging (Chen & Williams, 2016).

## 8. Train professionals in religious and cultural literacy

Reception staff and legal guardians should be equipped with tools to navigate spiritual diversity and facilitate dialogue.

## 9. Create inclusive spaces for shared spiritual expression

The use of religious platforms and social media should be accompanied by pedagogical reflection to avoid individualistic detachment and encourage constructive engagement with transnational networks (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017; Di Rosa, 2024).

## 10. Critically support digital religiosity

While online faith practices offer continuity, educators should ensure minors are not isolated in disembodied religious consumption (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017).

## 11. Use spirituality to support transitions to adulthood

WhFaith communities may assist in building civic engagement, autonomy, and social responsibility as UMMs transition out of the reception system (Di Rosa, 2024).

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# GLOBAL ANSWER

Social work  
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## Policy Brief

July 2025

# Beyond Margins: Disability and Migration in the Face of Institutional Silence

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### \*Executive Summary

This policy brief addresses the compounded vulnerability of migrants with disabilities in Italy's reception and integration system, drawing on sociological insights and findings from field research in Palermo under the EU-funded Global-ANSWER project. The phenomenon, marked by what scholars term the "triple barrier of inequality," arises from the intersection of health, social exclusion, and cultural marginalization. It remains under-researched and poorly addressed by public institutions, calling for urgent structural and political responses.

Literature and empirical studies show that the reception system tends to underestimate the presence of individuals with special needs, delaying their identification and hindering their access to adequate health, social, and legal services. Structural and cultural barriers, combined with insufficient training of service providers and rigid bureaucratic procedures, contribute to the marginalization of these individuals, exposing them to a higher risk of social exclusion and the chronicization of their disabilities.



## 1. Introduction

The condition of vulnerability experienced by migrants with disabilities—often exacerbated by the migratory journey itself—poorly recognized within reception and assistance systems and research in the field remains recent and fragmented, both nationally and internationally. Institutional practices often lack an intersectional and transcultural approach, resulting in significant gaps in access to fundamental rights. Statistical monitoring is inadequate, with a lack of disaggregated data by gender, age, type, and origin of disability.

The “double diversity”—being both migrants and persons with disabilities—remains a largely unexplored area, both in theoretical frameworks and in practical application.

Migration and disability are often analyzed in isolation within social policy discourse. However, their intersection produces unique configurations of marginalization. The Italian reception system (SAI) suffers from both a lack of data and the structural unpreparedness to handle disability among migrants. This includes delays in disability recognition, insufficient dedicated reception spaces, and lack of coordination between healthcare, social services, and legal systems.

The invisibility of migrants with disabilities is not incidental but structurally produced (Di Rosa and Tumminelli 2025). Normative frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and EU Directive 2013/33 are rarely operationalized in ways that fully protect the rights of migrants with special needs.

Following PICUM (2022) and Pasini & Merotta (2023), the “triple barrier” consists of:

- \* Unequal determinants of mental health, due to traumatic migration experiences, lack of family networks, and cultural stigma around disability.
- \* Inequitable access to mental health support, hindered by bureaucratic and linguistic obstacles.
- \* Divergent experiences and outcomes of care, resulting from insufficient cultural competence among service providers and institutional fragmentation.

Sociologically, this reflects a form of “structural violence” (Galtung, 1969), where the denial of access is not a result of overt exclusion but embedded in the institutional logic of the reception system itself.

Within the Italian second-level reception system, there is a structural inadequacy in the availability of places specifically allocated for beneficiaries with disabilities. This leads to emergency responses, such as the placement of these individuals in ordinary facilities or in those intended for unaccompanied migrant minors (UMMs), thereby compromising both the effectiveness of care and the equity of the system.



## 2. Implications for Public Policy

The intersection of disability and migration presents a profound challenge to contemporary welfare states, particularly in the context of Southern Europe. Public policy must not only recognize the existence of migrants with disabilities, but also explicitly reorient itself to address their complex and intersectional needs. This requires a paradigmatic shift from emergency-based, minimal support to structurally integrated, person-centered, and rights-based approaches.

At a governance level, the lack of inter-institutional coordination exposes deep fragmentation within welfare and asylum systems. This fragmentation results in policy incoherence, where the right to health, education, housing, and participation are formally enshrined in law but effectively denied in practice. Integrating disability-sensitive criteria into all phases of asylum and migration policy—from reception to long-term integration—is essential to uphold fundamental rights and reduce systemic exclusions.

From a fiscal perspective, the underinvestment in disability services for migrants is counterproductive. Neglecting early interventions leads to higher long-term costs, including chronic health conditions, increased dependency on emergency services, and failure of integration pathways. A preventive, inclusive welfare strategy is not only ethically necessary but economically rational.

Furthermore, this issue challenges the very foundation of citizenship and belonging. By failing to accommodate the needs of disabled migrants, public institutions risk reinforcing hierarchies of deservingness based on ability, origin, and legal status. A truly democratic and inclusive society must redefine citizenship beyond nationality or productivity, encompassing all individuals' dignity and agency.

The implications are clear: without targeted, well-resourced, and intersectionally informed public policies, migrants with disabilities will remain in a liminal space of non-recognition—present in numbers, absent in rights. Addressing their needs is a litmus test for the credibility of Europe's human rights commitments and the coherence of its social policy frameworks.

### \* Key issues

**- The growing demand for support from migrant families with disabled children—an expanding phenomenon that is still empirically under-documented - calls for a revision of organizational structures and relational practices with local services.**



## 3. Disability within migrant families

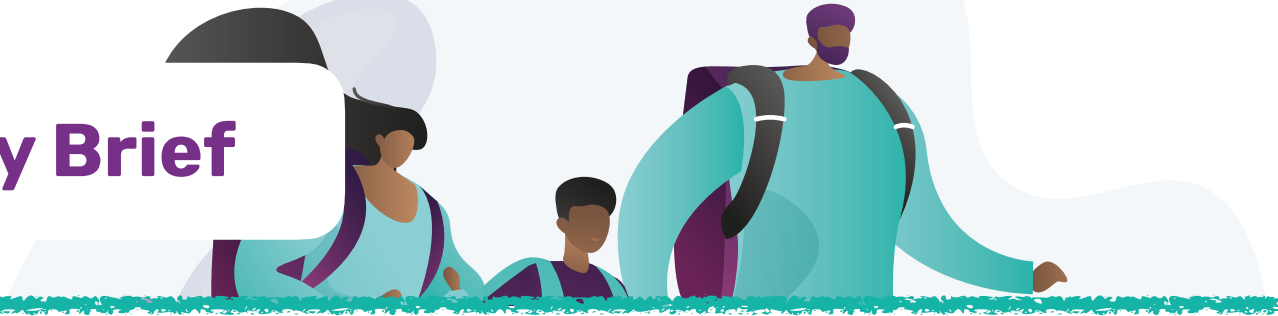
Disability within migrant families constitutes a complex and multidimensional configuration of vulnerability, shaped by factors related to the migratory experience (trauma, forced displacement), biographical discontinuity, and the challenges of integration into unfamiliar institutional, legal, and cultural contexts. The disability of minors—often severe—tends to be rendered invisible, while the limited cultural and informational capital of migrant parents hinders the full assertion of their rights, such as access to specific support measures. The absence of formal and informal support networks, combined with social isolation and precarious housing conditions, generates a sense of disorientation and abandonment. This can be interpreted through the lens of the “exile syndrome” (Moro, 2005), an existential condition in which the migrant subject, like an acrobat, moves without the safety of an effective protective net. These dynamics contribute to patterns of exclusion and inequality in accessing welfare services.

Within the SAI system, the reception of family units with disabled members poses significant challenges regarding the adaptation of practices and organizational frameworks. These include difficulties in ensuring service flexibility, in developing personalized and innovative solutions, and in maintaining high standards of professionalism as a safeguard for rights protection.

The emergence of these new needs highlights the necessity of a systemic and timely approach that considers the interplay among health, social, cultural, political, and relational dimensions. It becomes essential to implement continuous monitoring mechanisms and co-design interventions capable of responding in an integrated and intersectional manner to the complex lived experiences of migrant families with disabilities.

### \* Key issues

**-It is necessary a systemic and timely approach that considers the interplay among health, social, cultural, political, and relational dimensions. It becomes essential to implement continuous monitoring mechanisms and co-design interventions.**



## 4. Public policy recommendations

The current approach to migrants with disabilities remains fragmented and reactive. Sociologically, this reflects the persistence of an ableist migration system rooted in "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) and a medicalized model of disability. A shift toward a rights-based, intercultural, and bio-psycho-social paradigm is essential to ensure inclusion and dignity.

Failure to act not only undermines human rights but perpetuates institutional neglect and social reproduction of inequality. A truly inclusive welfare state must account for intersectional vulnerabilities and ensure that reception systems are places of care, not exclusion. It is essential to overcome the compartmentalization between migration inclusion policies and disability policies in order to foster a welfare system that is truly accessible and responsive to multiple forms of inequality.

It is urgent to activate more appropriate and differentiated reception modalities for migrant individuals presenting physical disabilities, psychological distress, and/or requiring medical, social, and home-based care, including specialized and long-term support. This underscores the need for a personalized and integrated approach, capable of responding to the complexity of needs of individuals whose vulnerability is both multiple and intersectional.

### 1. Early Identification and Assessment

- Introduce structured screening tools for disability at all reception stages.
- Train border and reception staff in identifying less visible disabilities (e.g., psychosocial, cognitive).

### 2. Service and System Reform

- Expand the number of SAI spots for persons with disabilities.
- Establish multidisciplinary teams (social workers, psychiatrists, interpreters, case managers).
- Create shared databases to track disability status, needs, and service provision.

### 3. Capacity Building and Training

- Mandate cultural competence and disability-rights training for all SAI personnel.
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration between legal, medical, and social professionals.

## 4. Data Collection and Monitoring

- Develop national-level data on migrants with disabilities, disaggregated by gender, age, and type of impairment.
- Monitor rights implementation in line with the CRPD and EU standards.

## 5. Legislative and Normative Reforms

- Align national asylum law with disability rights frameworks.
- Guarantee expedited access to disability benefits for asylum seekers with urgent needs.
- Address intersectional discrimination (e.g., being a disabled migrant woman).

## 6. Inclusive Labor and Education Policies

- Fund programs that enable caregivers to access language and employment training.
- Enforce anti-discrimination norms in labor markets.
- Support inclusive education for disabled migrant children.

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# GLOBAL ANSWER

Social work  
and human mobility

## Policy Brief

July 2025



# Protecting Asylum-Seeking Women: The Central Role of Social Work

Roberta T. Di Rosa (Università di Palermo, Italia)

## \*Executive Summary

The recognised relevance of the issue of refugee women and their protection, in the wide international production of official documents, reports and guidelines, testifies to a broad consensus on what was stated as early as 1990 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which identifies refugee women (either as single women or with their dependents) as approximately 80% of the UNHCR target population. It is still the UNHCR that asserts that the effectiveness of refugee programmes depends on the proper understanding and consultation of migrant women (UNHCR, 1990). Upon arrival, social workers are among the first professionals to respond and care for migrant and asylum seeker women's needs, together with NGO workers and medical staff helping them settle and evaluate their needs. There is a widespread international awareness that the scale and complexity of the phenomenon requires a far-reaching change from within social work and a specific investment in research and training. The up-to-date knowledge and expertise that they need to receive - in subject fields like intercultural social work, community work, legal issues, and psycho-social interventions with the women asylum seekers - may contribute significantly to their interventions both at micro and macro level.

## 1. Introduction

Refugee and asylum-seeking women face gender-specific risks of violence, marginalization, and exclusion at every stage of their migration journey. Women asylum seekers are situated at the intersection of multiple structural vulnerabilities, experiencing heightened exposure to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) across diverse geopolitical spaces – from countries of origin, through migratory transit routes, to the institutionalized reception contexts in host societies. These sites of containment often operate within gender-neutral or gender-blind frameworks that fail to incorporate intersectional analyses of power and oppression, thereby producing conditions of retraumatization and systemic neglect.

Social workers, often among the first responders, are crucial to ensuring protection and integration. However, services and systems are frequently ill-equipped to respond to these women's specific needs. A gender-sensitive, rights-based approach, rooted in intercultural understanding and supported by specialized training, is urgently needed at both national and EU levels. Within this context, social workers operate under considerable strain. Lacking specialized training in intersectional feminist praxis and trauma-informed approaches, they frequently encounter role conflicts and emotional exhaustion. This professional burnout not only undermines their capacity to engage in ethical, empathetic practice but also reflects the broader tensions between neoliberal managerialism in social services and the pursuit of social justice.

The reception and social support systems reproduce broader social inequalities through bureaucratic standardization and institutional routines that prioritize efficiency over individualized care. Such institutional logics perpetuate symbolic violence by rendering invisible the differentiated needs and lived experiences of refugee women, particularly in their access to essential resources such as healthcare, housing, linguistic capital, and labor market integration. These limitations are compounded by legal constraints, cultural hegemony, and structural barriers that inhibit women's agency and social inclusion.

## 2. Gender specificity in asylum seekers' protection

Violence against women is a form of gender-based discrimination and a violation of human rights that is currently affecting many women all over the world. Refugee women are more affected by violence against women than any other female population in the world (Sansonetti, 2016). Refugee and migrant women and adolescent girls often suffer violence and specific oppression in the countries of origin, during the journey that is taken to the host country, and in the society which should receive them.

Women's exposure to the risk of violence is exacerbated by the increasing difficulty of entering a host country's territory to apply for protection as they might be left in precarious and dangerous conditions. To control irregular immigration, potential host countries impose strict border controls on individuals who do not have proper documentation. Although this situation affects both men and women, it is women and young girls, due to the weaker position of the female in society, who frequently lack the means to travel and/or knowledge about their rights and the particular risks they face during the journey (UNHCR, 2008).

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These critical points also reoccur in the subsequent phase to reception, especially in contexts where the public authorities do not predispose adequate plans for accommodation (Bracci and Cardamone, 2005); the frequent reticence of private persons to rent out their property to non-citizens often forces women to live in overcrowded conditions, often with many men who are not necessarily part of their family, thus exposing them to the risk of violence and exploitation.

The specific vulnerability experienced by women requesting international protection or female refugees (Di Rosa, 2018), emerges in evident manner in the reception camps, both in the country of departure and arrival (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001; Freedman & Jamal, 2008). Experience as refugees and settlement in camps or facilities can also affect the identity of women, who may be particularly devastated by the loss of home – the place of their traditional authority. Situations of overcrowding and the absence of protected spaces for women expose them to the risk of violence perpetrated by other asylum-seekers, or by local operators and the forces of law and order, exposing them to the risk of exploitation for sexual purposes and, lastly, not guaranteeing adequate protection for their health (including their reproductive status) (UNFPA, 2015).

Sexual violence is endemic in some refugee camps due to poor security and unaccompanied women who have lost or been separated from their fathers or husbands are more vulnerable and at risk of sexual or physical violence. Sexual violence may be a key factor behind the psychological and physical health problems of refugee women (Stark & Ager, 2011). In many cultures, rape brings shame to the victim and her family and is unlikely to be easily revealed, especially within families. Consequently, some families may ostracise rape survivors. For some women, rape may lead to pregnancy.

One of the reasons for the vulnerability of women refugees and asylum seekers is related to the difficulties they often encounter in proving their claims for asylum, since they can generally exhibit less evidence for their application in comparison to men, or they choose deliberately to do so because female victims of sexual torture or gender persecution may be reluctant to report their stories even if these stories might constitute the legal basis for asylum application.

## \* Key issues

**- Despite progress in EU gender mainstreaming, asylum procedures remain male-centered, undermining the credibility and protection of female applicants.**

## 3. Protecting Migrant Women: some critical issues for social work

Women asylum seekers should at least have access to high-quality legal aid. The psychological trauma, shame and stigmatisation that many women experience as a result of violence can make it difficult for legal representatives to gain the trust of these women (Bartholini & Di Rosa, 2020). The very characteristics of the facilities are often a risk factor for the onset or exacerbation of psychological suffering (Porter & Haslam, 2005).

In order to guarantee foreign/immigrant women's right to justice and fair treatment, they need to understand and be understood, therefore, interpreters must be provided by governments through public services to those who do not speak the language or languages of the host country. Interpreters, like any other service provider, must be qualified to do their job and also need special training to assist GV victims and survivors. The lack of specific training can cause serious damage to victims and, furthermore, lead to waste of valuable public resources

In the host country, asylum seeking and refugee women have a limited possibility of integration, because of their reduced access to learning the host country's language; their isolation depends on the fact that these women have lost all the support they used to receive from other family members in the country of origin. Their sense of belonging is reduced as well as their independence, and they have to rely on other family members for translation and communication. This may also hinder their access to labour market opportunities, as they cannot attend training courses or exploit other active labour market opportunities. They are also exposed to double discrimination in the host country labour markets. As regards healthcare assistance, asylum seeking, and refugee women find it difficult to access the necessary information and have to face cultural barriers when accessing health care services. In general, refugee and asylum-seeking women might become far less visible than their male counterparts and find it harder to have access to services, job opportunities, training, and language courses.

Working with refugees is a specialised position (Kelly, 2017). The professional figure that first meets the woman/victim of violence, cannot afford to stimulate and encourage her to tell her story and then offer her a course of action, unless the course of action is clear, simple and easy to follow.

### \* Key issues

**- Victims of gender-based persecution often struggle to provide evidence and may be reluctant to disclose trauma due to shame, stigma, or fear. Many women are isolated, with limited language skills, and dependent on male relatives for communication and access to services. Women with children are particularly vulnerable and face significant barriers to housing, employment, and support services.**

**- Social workers are crucial to ensuring protection and integration. The professional working in this field must be constantly informed about the many current national and international events that will have a direct impact on his or her work.**

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In order to provide a quality service to refugees, social workers must deepen and broaden their understanding of the traumatic migration experiences of refugees beyond narrow formulations (George, 2012), to offer a process of help placed within a multicultural approach and propensity for action. On the other hand, it is also evident how the adaptation of services and procedures requires not only the training of professionals (social workers, legal advisors, psychologists, educators, etc.), but also the structural possibility of making use of adequately trained mediators, in order to resolve a situation of uncertainty and risk that, otherwise, will continue to affect the outcome of the assistance processes.

Moreover, it is essential that they master the use of legal resources in order to be able to make use of all available tools in arranging, from their first placement, adequate reception solutions to protect them and their children from the violence from which they flee. Intervention with refugees will always be linked and conditioned by the legal aspects of foreigners and, more specifically, in the field of refugee protection. Without claiming to assume the functions of a legal advisor, the fact that a social worker has knowledge of these issues will determine - to a large extent - the quality of his or her work with asylum seekers and refugees.

The type of information referred to would be: armed conflicts in different countries, characteristics of the population concerned, trends in national and international immigration policy, applicable legislation, existing human rights agreements, treaties and conventions, asylum and aliens in specific countries, etc.

The cultural skills of social workers are relevant to the effectiveness of the intervention process. Otherwise, the risk is to invalidate the moment of reception and the preliminary interview, producing significant prejudices when trying to understand the distress endured by women victims. The social workers' knowledge of their own prejudices and the subjective interpretations of others, resulting from different life experiences, helps prevent any transference or countertransference. The degree to which the social worker can have a multicultural perspective will influence the degree to which he or she can understand the views, barriers and strengths of refugee clients and incorporate effective interventions (Bartholini & Di Rosa, 2020).

## \* Key issues

**- There is an urgent need for trauma-informed, multidisciplinary teams, including female professionals, to support women refugees.**

## 4. Public policy recommendations

Protecting refugee and asylum-seeking women requires systemic change rooted in human rights, gender justice, and professional competence. Social workers, if equipped with adequate tools and training, can be catalysts for resilience, safety, and social inclusion. EU Member States must act now to ensure equal protection, meaningful participation, and dignity for all women on the move.

### **1. Mandatory, certified vocational training for social workers and frontline staff:**

- Gender-based violence, trauma, and memory
- Intercultural and anti-discriminatory practice
- Legal rights and psycho-social support frameworks

### **2. Gender-sensitive reception and asylum procedures:**

- Guaranteed access to female interviewers and interpreters
- Private and secure interview environments
- Access to long-term psychological and legal support

### **3. Empowerment-focused integration strategies:**

- Prioritized access to housing for women and their children
- Language and vocational training adapted to women's needs
- Support for female cultural mediators and childcare services

### **4. EU-wide harmonization of gender-responsive asylum standards:**

- Implementation of UNHCR Guidelines on Gender-Related Persecution
- Prioritized resettlement for survivors of SGBV and other vulnerable groups
- Coordinated data collection and evaluation mechanisms

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# Policy Brief



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## Policy Brief

July 2025

# The right to leisure as a social right and strategic tool for inclusion of Unaccompanied Migrant Minors

Giuseppina Tumminelli (Università di Palermo, Italia)

### \*Executive Summary

Across Europe and beyond, thousands of foreign minors arrive each year, often alone or in vulnerable family contexts. These young people face immense challenges: linguistic barriers, cultural disorientation, trauma, and social marginalization. While significant resources are rightly devoted to housing, education, and legal support, one area remains under-prioritized – their right to meaningful leisure time. Leisure is not a luxury. For minors – particularly those navigating displacement – it is a fundamental component of well-being, identity formation, and resilience.

Leisure should be understood as a fully social dimension, through which essential processes of socialization, integration, cultural production, and identity construction unfold. Its organization, distribution, and accessibility are deeply influenced by structural factors, such as social class, gender, ethnicity, and migration status, making it a significant indicator of social inequalities. From this perspective, leisure is not merely an individual opportunity, but a social good, whose regulation assumes a public function.



# Policy Brief

## 1. Introduction

Leisure time has assumed a significant social function in contemporary society, becoming a space for individual expression, socialization, and identity construction.

In the case of unaccompanied foreign minors, free time takes on a strategic value within the processes of social integration and self-construction (Iglesias et al, 2023). Thus, leisure time should not be viewed solely as a pause or escape, but as a potential space for resilience, social inclusion, and agency: an opportunity for peer interaction, for renegotiating one's identity in a new context, and for acquiring relational, linguistic, and cultural skills.

Historically considered a marginal space compared to the spheres of production and education, leisure time has gained increasing relevance in contemporary society, including in political and sociological debates. However, public policies often continue to underestimate the transformative and structuring potential of leisure, treating it as a peripheral area rather than a fundamental component of individual and collective well-being (Sue, 1980).

Too often, foreign minors are excluded – unintentionally – from local youth services. This exclusion not only limits their development but also delays their integration, increasing the risk of isolation, radicalization, and dropout from education. Barriers include:

- Lack of information in accessible languages.
- Economic limitations and transportation issues.
- Insufficient cultural sensitivity among organizers.
- Limited collaboration between migrant services and recreational

### \* Key issues

**- Leisure time is not merely a neutral space, but represents a meaningful context for the accumulation of social and cultural capital, especially for individuals in vulnerable conditions.**

## 2. Why Leisure Matters

In particular, for individuals in vulnerable conditions, such as minors, youth, migrants, and people living in poverty, leisure policies can function as tools of social compensation, creating opportunities for access to culture, social capital, and interpersonal relationships.

In the framework of empowerment and territorial equity, it is essential that these policies be conceived not merely as standardized offerings, but as instruments capable of enhancing subjectivities, responding to specific needs, and supporting emerging social practices in different local contexts.

The analysis of leisure practices (Lo Verde, 2009) provides a critical perspective for understanding how non-productive spaces can influence the construction of the Self, integration into a new social context, and the reworking of migratory experiences.

These practices are never neutral: they reflect the logics of the institutionalization of leisure, shaped by local cultures and public policies. In light of these considerations, leisure should be interpreted as a social and symbolic dimension that contributes to the production of meaning, the construction of social bonds, and the definition of biographical trajectories.



# Policy Brief

Leisure activities such as sports, arts, music, and youth group participation provide much more than entertainment (Minardi & Lusetti, 1997). Research consistently shows that structured free time offers:

**Psychosocial benefits:** Reduced stress, improved mental health, and development of coping skills.

**Social integration:** Opportunities to build relationships with peers from different backgrounds, fostering inclusion and a sense of belonging.

**Cultural exchange:** Platforms for sharing one's heritage and learning about the host society, which accelerates mutual understanding.

**Empowerment and agency:** Encouraging minors to explore their interests and make choices builds confidence and self-worth.

Conversely, unequal access to recreational opportunities can reproduce or worsen forms of exclusion and marginalization. Addressing the issue of leisure time for unaccompanied foreign minors therefore means questioning how social policies, educational institutions, and local networks can enhance this space as a tool for empowerment and active integration, contributing to the development of inclusive citizenship pathways (Tumminelli, 2024).

In the case of unaccompanied migrant minors (UMMs), leisure time takes on a multifaceted and layered function (Bichi & Bonini, 2021). On the one hand, it represents a space of agency, where individuals can exercise self-determination, personal exploration, and the development of social skills; on the other hand, it is a space of cultural mediation, useful in reducing the gap between the minor and the host society. From this perspective, leisure becomes a tool for social inclusion, capable of countering the risks of marginalization and ethnic ghettoization, acting on relational, symbolic, and emotional levels.

Inclusion begins where young people feel safe, seen, and free to participate. Curating the leisure time of foreign minors is not simply an add-on to public policy; it is a necessity for any society that values equity, cohesion, and human dignity (Giusti, 2008).

## \* Key issues

- Leisure thus becomes a border zone between vulnerability and possibility, between protection and autonomy, between exclusion and participation. Within this space, minors can shape their subjectivity, affirm their right to normality, and construct new maps of meaning to navigate a radically transformed world.

- Leisure time is not merely a pause between activities such as school or training, but plays a fundamental role in secondary socialization processes, as it facilitates the internalization of norms, values, and codes of the host society.

# Policy Brief



UMMs, as individuals exposed to multiple forms of vulnerability (legal, emotional, psychosocial), often carry biographical trajectories marked by ruptures and discontinuities. Leisure can serve as a symbolic container through which such fractures are reworked, offering opportunities to experience forms of normality, belonging, and recognition. In this sense, it is not merely a moment of 'escape,' but an existential laboratory where identity, emotional, and cultural dynamics intertwine (Lo Verde, 2014).

The issue of leisure time raises important implications for public policies, both in terms of its recognition as a space for the creation of social bonds, cultural citizenship, and well-being, and in terms of social equity and active inclusion.

Public policies are therefore called upon to develop cross-sectoral strategies that promote equitable and meaningful access to leisure (Tumminelli, 2024). This involves:

- designing accessible recreational spaces and activities that respond to the specific needs of different groups based on age, gender, origin, and legal status;
- valuing leisure as a means of integration, particularly in reception programs for migrant minors, leveraging the educational, therapeutic, and relational potential of cultural, artistic, and sports activities;
- supporting local networks (schools, associations, youth centers, social cooperatives) that act as mediators between institutions and young people, fostering active participation and co-creation of opportunities;
- investing in the training of social and educational workers so they can recognize leisure not only as a time for relaxation, but as a domain of personal and collective development, useful for strengthening autonomy and a sense of belonging.

Recognizing leisure as a tool for social empowerment means orienting public policies toward a more inclusive model of citizenship—one capable of reducing both symbolic and material inequalities and ensuring that everyone, regardless of social or migratory background, has the opportunity to fully experience their time.

## \* Key issues

**- Leisure should be recognized as a social right, not merely as an “extra” beyond primary needs.**

**- Policies concerning leisure, through the provision of spaces, services, and cultural, sports, or recreational infrastructures, reflect the value priorities of a society and the way it recognizes or denies rights to social citizenship.**

**- Leisure should be considered a strategic area of intervention, especially for promoting inclusion, cohesion, and participation.**

## 3. Public policy recommendations

### 1. To fund inclusive recreational programs that are genuinely accessible to all.

- This means removing financial barriers, ensuring that activities are held in locations easily reachable by public transport, and offering language support where needed. Accessibility must be understood in the broadest sense – economic, geographic, and linguistic (Rapporto SAI, 2024).

### 2. To train youth workers and educators in intercultural competence.

- Those who engage with foreign minors on a daily basis must be equipped not only with practical tools but also with the sensitivity and awareness required to create welcoming and respectful environments. Training should be ongoing and grounded in the lived experiences of migrant youth.

### 3. Fostering partnerships across sectors.

- Schools, social services, and community organizations must collaborate more systematically to design and deliver leisure activities that are both structured and inclusive. These partnerships can help bridge institutional silos and offer minors a more coherent and supportive social framework.

### 4. To recognize the agency of young people themselves.

- It is vital to include migrant minors in the planning and design of leisure initiatives (Bortoletto, 2013). Their voices and perspectives should inform the content, format, and delivery of activities to ensure that programs are not only inclusive in theory, but also relevant and engaging in practice.

### 5. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

- These should be developed to assess both the participation of foreign minors and the qualitative impact of leisure programs on their well-being and integration. Without robust data and feedback mechanisms, we risk missing opportunities to learn, adapt, and improve.

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## Policy Brief

July 2025

# Local Governance and Collaboration with Migrant Associations

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### \*Executive Summary

Subnational levels of government are increasingly involved in managing migration, which is one of the key factors in developing the economic potential of a region in the context of globalised competition. Local governments, however, bear the burden of creating and maintaining positive conditions for civil coexistence and social cohesion for new arrivals in the short and medium term, taking into account their different legal statuses, which can be classified on a continuum from regular to irregular. In the service-based economies of advanced countries, cities are also among the main areas of settlement for immigrants at different stages of their migration journey (irregularity, instability, stabilisation in progress or achieved).

Migrant communities, through their organisations, act as active agents in the production of informal welfare and in everyday cultural mediation. This is a form of agency that lies on the margins of the institutional political space but often compensates for the absence of the state or municipality in guaranteeing access to essential services, such as legal support, housing, education or health guidance.

## 1. Introduction

Studies on the local dimension of immigration policies form a separate section from those focusing on paths to inclusion in the citizenship rights of nation states because it is at this local level that the substantive aspects of integration processes can be observed.

	Closure vs. civil society activism	Passive opposition	Implicit tolerance	Institutional activism vs. anti-immigrant mobilisation	Cooperation
Dynamics	Local authorities try to prevent non-public actors from providing aid to refugees	Local authorities do not take action and pass the buck to civil society	Local authorities do not hinder the activism of non-public actors	Groups of residents protest against institutional initiatives in favour of refugees	Local authorities and non-public actors collaborate in welcoming refugees

Source (adapted by author): Ambrosini e Campomori, 2024, 190.

The challenges described above highlight a tension between formal inclusion and substantive inclusion. From a perspective inspired by the theory of multilevel governance (Piattoni, 2010) and the concept of the “battlefield” (Ambrosini & Campomori, 2020), Palermo appears as an archipelago of practices and institutions which, although motivated by inclusive intentions, risk reproducing structural inequalities and systemic disconnections. The distance between administrative structures and migrant subjectivities manifests itself in a differential production of access to rights, mediated by language barriers, implicit norms and divergent cultural representations.

This tension can be interpreted in terms of asymmetry in communicative and symbolic power, where the ineffectiveness of institutional communication is not only a technical problem, but reflects a lack of recognition of cultural plurality. Institutional mechanisms such as the Consulta delle Culture (Council for Culture), created with inclusive aims, have often become bogged down in symbolic forms of representation, unable to translate social conflict into effective political representation. In this context, the fragmentation of policies is not only administrative, but also the result of a weakness in the relational infrastructure between institutions and migrant civil society.

To enhance the inclusiveness and effectiveness of local governance in migration policy, several strategic developments are recommended. First, it is essential to strengthen intercultural communication by creating multilingual digital portals with simplified user guides, and by establishing dedicated language task forces involving members of migrant communities. These initiatives would directly address the persistent information and accessibility gaps that hinder migrant populations from fully exercising their rights.

Second, there is a pressing need to institutionalise migrant representation. This includes introducing additional municipal councillors with the right to make policy proposals, as well as replacing outdated consultative bodies—such as the *Consulta delle Culture*—with renewed, participatory structures that are more attuned to the evolving composition and needs of migrant communities.

Third, it is crucial to differentiate and professionalise the role of cultural mediators. This means ensuring a diverse pool of mediators, trained in intercultural competence and drawn from varied backgrounds, while also introducing shared ethical standards—particularly concerning confidentiality—to ensure trust and accountability in service delivery.

Last but not least, local authorities should move decisively toward formalising cooperation with third-sector organisations (ETS) and migrant associations, particularly in the provision of essential services to undocumented migrants—one of the most structurally excluded groups. While civil society has long acted as a de facto welfare provider in areas where public services are fragmented or absent, such informal delegation often results in inconsistent standards, unclear responsibilities, and lack of coordination. Formalising these relationships through memoranda of understanding (MoUs), operational agreements, and inclusion in institutional planning processes would help move from reactive, fragmented interventions to coherent, shared governance models.

This formalisation should not be limited to bureaucratic arrangements but must involve co-design processes, where ETS and migrant organisations are recognised as strategic partners in shaping service delivery frameworks and policy tools. Likewise, their involvement in participatory budgeting can ensure that local investments reflect the actual needs and priorities of diverse communities.

## \* Key issues

**- By transitioning from a model of tolerance or passive reliance on civil society to structured collaboration based on recognition, trust, and mutual accountability, local governance can both enhance its legitimacy and improve the inclusiveness and effectiveness of its migration-related interventions.**

## 2. The Potential of Migrant Associations for the Inclusion of Migrants

Despite systemic obstacles, migrant associations represent a growing form of collective agency. These organisations are not only executors of “proximity” functions, but also genuine relational nodes between different social worlds, endowed with social capital and situated knowledge.

However, their ability to influence public policy is often limited by a structural asymmetry in the field of governance: institutions do not always recognise migrant associations as legitimate political interlocutors, relegating them to executive or subordinate roles.

Supporting the agency of migrant associations implies redefining institutional relations in terms of co-decision-making and co-planning, overcoming the logic of delegation in favour of collaborative practices based on trust, transparency and mutual recognition.

Migrant associations are a strategic lever for social, economic and civic inclusion:

## *1. Production of social capital and intercultural cohesion*

Migrant associations act as relational bridges between the communities involved and the local population (Donati, 1991). They offer cultural and social activities that involve not only immigrants but the entire community, helping to transform the public perception of immigration from a problem to a resource. This effect promotes inclusion and enriches the urban fabric in terms of interculturalism and solidarity. In particular, in urban contexts such as Rome, migrant associations promote widespread social capital and reduce inter-community prejudice.

## *2. Informal support and local welfare*

While public policies often arrive late or remain fragmented, migrant associations mitigate inequalities through informal services: language courses, legal guidance, housing or health support. This “bottom-up” approach allows migrants to access their rights more directly, especially where institutions struggle to ensure the uniform provision of services, compensating for structural deficiencies by offering support in essential areas (housing, health, work) (Barberis & Angelucci, 2022).

## *3. Socio-economic inclusion and the labour market*

Italian CSOs and migrant associations play a key role in economic integration, offering professional courses, internships, career guidance and CV writing support. Associations cover a wide range of services aimed at social and labour integration, going well beyond mere emergency relief to promote training, guidance and migrant entrepreneurship, strengthening autonomy and empowerment (OECD, 2022).

## *4. Empowerment and agency in political protagonism*

Migrant associations act as collective entities with strategic capabilities. Through collaborative networks and co-design processes with public bodies, migrant organisations establish themselves as legitimate political interlocutors. The empowerment model developed at the diaspora level – as documented by the OECD – shows that migrant associations can contribute to sustainable development, skills transfer and institutional dialogue, both locally and transnationally. They are incubators of active citizenship and spaces for political construction, even in the absence of legal citizenship (Bicchieri, 2016)

### **\* Key issues**

**- Migrant participation should not be seen as a symbolic meaning, but as a transformative device capable of changing the very structure of local governance.**

## 5. Social innovation and entrepreneurship

Associations and migrant entrepreneurship represent a laboratory for social innovation: micro-enterprises, co-development projects and microcredit initiatives with local roots create mutual recognition and a sense of belonging. These experiences can act as drivers of economic inclusion and community cohesion, for example through the valorisation of remittances and the banking of migrants. They activate transnational and local projects, contributing to inclusive and sustainable development models (Yeates, 2022).

Dimension	Description of value
Social	Building bonds, breaking down prejudices
Welfare	Covering needs not met by the public sector
Economic	Facilitating entry into the labour market
Political	Organised and authoritative presence in local policy
Innovation	Production of entrepreneurial projects and co-development

Source: Frazzica G., Gerbino G., Gucciardo G., *La governance locale delle politiche migratorie a Palermo* (forthcoming)

## 3. Public policy recommendations

Truly inclusive governance must recognise and support the active contribution of migrant associations, not only as service providers, but also as key players in the definition and implementation of migration and social policies. Local governance systems must shift from symbolic inclusion and passive reliance on civil society to structured, trust-based partnerships with migrant associations. By institutionalising their dual role—as both service providers and policy actors—local authorities can create more inclusive, effective, and legitimate migration governance frameworks.

### 1. Recognise and promote the role of migrant associations in providing of programmes and services to migrants.

- Formalise Collaboration Frameworks
  - o Establish Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and operational agreements with migrant associations and third-sector organisations.
  - o Integrate them into institutional planning processes to ensure coherent, coordinated service delivery.

## **1. Recognise and promote the role of migrant associations in providing of programmes and services to migrants (Cont.).**

- Support Informal Welfare Contributions
  - Acknowledge and fund the essential services provided by migrant associations—especially in areas where public provision is lacking (e.g. legal assistance, health access, housing).
  - Provide technical and infrastructural support to ensure quality and sustainability.

## **2. Recognise and promote the role of migrant associations in defining and implementing migration and social policies.**

- Institutionalise Migrant Representation
  - Introduce migrant councillors at the municipal level with formal powers to propose and influence policy.
  - Reform outdated consultative bodies (e.g. Consulta delle Culture) into participatory, accountable, and inclusive structures.
- Embed Migrant Associations in Policy Co-Design
  - Include migrant organisations in co-design processes for service frameworks and policy tools.
  - Ensure their participation in participatory budgeting to align public investments with diverse community needs.
- Promote Political Empowerment and Active Citizenship
  - Recognise migrant associations as legitimate political interlocutors—not merely service implementers.
  - Support diaspora-led initiatives and transnational collaborations that strengthen democratic engagement and skills transfer.
- Strengthen Intercultural Communication
  - Create multilingual digital platforms with accessible user guides.
  - Involve migrant community members in communication task forces to address information gaps and improve institutional outreach.

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# GLOBAL ANSWER

Social work  
and human mobility

## Policy Brief

July 2025

# Mental health of migrant and refugee children and adolescents: a matter of social inequality

Ainhoa Rodríguez García de Cortázar (Universidad de Granada, España)

## \*Executive Summary

Children and adolescents migrate in diverse and, in some cases, traumatic conditions. Structural axes of social inequality based on age, social class, gender, or ethnic or national origin affect their opportunities, well-being, and mental health. In order to plan policies, services, and resources that adequately address the needs of migrant children and adolescents and/or those in need of international protection, it is essential to study both the specific characteristics of these migrations and the political, economic, social, and cultural determinants of the health and mental health of these groups. To this end, a review of secondary data on migrants, asylum seekers, and victims of trafficking under the age of 18 in the European Union, was conducted, along with a narrative literature review. This review outlined a conceptual framework of the main structural axes of social inequality and scientifically demonstrate the impact that wars, family separations, sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking, poverty, racism, and xenophobia have on the mental health of migrant or refugee children and adolescents. Focusing on the social determinants of suffering and psychological distress allows for the design of preventive strategies, while providing evidence-based analytical frameworks helps to critically review and guide the programs, resources, and practices currently being implemented with migrant children and adolescents and/or those in need of international protection throughout the European Union.

## 1. Introduction

Children and adolescents may migrate with family members or alone, independently, in trafficking or migrant smuggling networks. They may be seeking to reunite with their families, find better opportunities and rights, and/or flee crisis contexts or violent situations. Despite the recognition of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, national immigration laws and other regulations do not guarantee full respect for their rights as children in the European Union. This failure is also evident at the administrative level, due to deficiencies in managing migratory flows, allocating resources, and adapting services to their needs. At the social level, prevailing racism and xenophobia also fail to guarantee their rights.

From a structural point of view, there are at least four major axes of social inequality—based on age, gender, social class, and ethnic or national origin—that intersect with each other, limiting their opportunities and life experiences at different stages of their migration processes. Depending on their social position at any given time, a range of factors—political, economic, educational, cultural, and environmental—or the broader social determinants of health (WHO, 2022), may have varying impacts on their psychological distress or suffering.

The mental health of migrant and refugee children and adolescents is a public health issue, as stated in the European Commission's communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health (European Commission, 2023). This issue through the following approach: First, it presents available data on migrant children and adolescents with foreign nationality, family reunification, accompanied and unaccompanied asylum seekers, and victims of trafficking in the European Union. Second, it proposes a conceptual framework for understanding the intersectionality of social inequalities and their effects on the lives of these individuals. Third, it reviews the scientific literature on the impact of social determinants on the mental health of migrant or refugee children and adolescents at different stages of their migration processes. Finally, it offers a series of recommendations to improve their care and well-being, derived from the previous analyses.

## 2. Migrant and refugee children and adolescents, facts and statistics

Despite limitations and shortcomings in the collection of age-disaggregated data (UNICEF et al., 2018), it is estimated that there are 473 million children and adolescents living in conflict zones worldwide, 47 million forcibly displaced by conflict, violence, and disasters, 12 million due to extreme weather events, and 17.5 million seeking international protection, asylum, or refuge. Four out of ten refugees or displaced persons are under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2025, 2024; UNICEF, 2023, 2022).

In 2023, there were nearly 7.5 million foreign nationals under the age of 18 living in the European Union (Eurostat, 2025), of whom 997,062 were registered in Spain (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, & Gómez, 2024). In that year, 373,936 first residence permits were granted in the European Union to children and adolescents for family reasons, 49% of whom were under 5 years



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of age, 24.3% of such permits for family reasons were issued in Germany and 22.7% in Spain (Eurostat, 2025). In Spain, residence permits for family reunification accounted for 11% of the 457,137 residence permits for children under 16 in force on December 31, 2023 (Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración, 2025).

In that year, 271,685 boys (58.1%) and girls (41.8%) applied for asylum in the European Union. 40.3% of these applications were made in Germany and 11.4% in Spain, the third country (after France) in terms of the number of applications from minors under 18 (31,641). 78.7% of children seeking asylum in Spain were aged 0 to 13 (Eurostat, 2025), 90.8% were from Latin American countries, 5.0% from Asian countries, and 2.6% from African countries. In 2023, 15,855 international protection decisions were issued for children and adolescents in that country, with 35.7% unfavourable and 64.3% favourable. Of these decisions, 46.1% granted residence permits on humanitarian grounds, 14.7% resulted in refugee status or the right to asylum, and 3.5% in subsidiary protection (Oficina de Asilo y Refugio, 2023). To date, the highest number of asylum applications from minors was recorded in 2016 in the European Union and in 2023 in Spain (Eurostat, 2025).

On the other hand, there were 40,495 asylum applications from unaccompanied minors under the age of 18 in the European Union in 2023, less than half the number in 2015. Of these, 91.7% were boys and 8.3% were girls, with 68.3% aged 16 or 17 and 9.4% under 14. Syrian nationals accounted for 35.4% and Afghan nationals for 31.3%. Once again, Germany is the country with the highest number of asylum applications from unaccompanied minors under the age of 18 in the European Union (37.8%), followed by the Netherlands (14.4%) and Austria (12.2%). In Bulgaria, 67.3% of children and adolescents seeking asylum were unaccompanied, 56.6% in the Netherlands, while in Spain they accounted for 0.1% of such asylum applications in 2023 (Eurostat, 2025). Of the 31 unaccompanied minors under the age of 18 who applied for international protection in Spain, 24 were from African countries (Office of Asylum and Refuge, Ministry of the Interior, 2023). This contrast is significant, given that 4,865 unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents arrived in this country by sea in 2023, 95.1% of whom were boys and 4.9% girls. They came from Senegal (36.6%), Morocco (22.1%) and Gambia (13.5%). As of December 31, 12,878 children and adolescents were under the guardianship or care of protection services,

## \*Key issues

**- Around 7.5 million children and adolescents in the European Union are foreign nationals.**

**- In 2023, Germany and Spain accounted for a large proportion of residence permits granted on family grounds, half of which were for children under the age of five. The number of child asylum seekers is growing, but not at the same rate as in 2015 and 2016. Germany is the main receiving country, followed by France and Spain.**

**- Unaccompanied adolescent asylum seekers in the European Union come mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, with Germany once again the main host country, followed by the Netherlands and Austria.**



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generally in residential care (Fiscalía General del Estado, 2024). The year with the highest number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Spain by sea was 2018.

Data on trafficking victims remains limited and likely under-represents the true scope of the problem.. Girls account for 22% of identified victims worldwide and boys for 16%; these percentages have increased in recent years. Thirty-one percent of victims come from Africa, where trafficking of girls and boys is more common than trafficking of adults (UNODC, 2024). The European Union countries with the highest number of identified victims under the age of 18 were France (399), Germany (241), and Romania (221) in 2023; Spain only identified six child victims of trafficking. The number of minors trafficked for sexual exploitation is generally higher than for labour exploitation, except in Portugal and Greece. France (300, 96.7% girls), Germany (216, 75.0% girls) and Romania (163, 86.5% girls) were the countries with the highest number of minors identified as victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in 2023. In terms of trafficking for labour exploitation, Portugal (37 boys and 2 girls), France (23 girls and 15 boys) and Greece (22 boys and 8 girls) stood out (Eurostat, 2025).

## \* Key issues

**- France, Germany, and Romania lead in the identification of girls and adolescents who are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.**

## 3. Rights of migrant children and intersectionality of inequalities

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, n.d.) emphasizes that care for migrant or refugee children and adolescents must be based on a universal and indivisible rights approach, which is summarized in the four basic principles of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child: the right to non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to survival, development, and the right to be heard. It also requires awareness of existing adultcentrism, which in European societies translates into the social representation of children and adolescents as incapable, irresponsible, economically and socially dependent beings, subject to paternalism, victimization, invisibility, and discrimination. However, minors have agency, are capable of thinking and acting strategically and politically, and can defend and demand their rights (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2024). Adult-centrism leads to disrespect, contempt, discrimination, frustration, insecurity, pain, and anger for them (Liebel, 2022). In migration studies, this adult-

## \* Key issues

**- According to UNICEF, a rights-based approach is essential in caring for migrant children and adolescents.**



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Centrism has been reflected in their invisibility as migrants (they are not considered part of the working class in the European Union); they are not perceived as individuals who make migration decisions despite their subordinate status, they are very present in the family motivations for migrating, and they take on important roles for their families in the receiving societies (translators, mediators, etc.). In short, they are much more than victims in need of protection (Dobson, 2009).

In addition, there are other axes of structural social inequality that affect them, such as economic or class inequalities, gender inequalities, and racial, ethnic, or national discrimination. These axes intersect (Wihstutz, 2022), conditioning their well-being and their mental health (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2025).

Regarding economic inequalities, migrant minors or descendants of non-EU migrants are at greater risk of poverty or social and material deprivation (Eurostat, 2025). There is evidence that poverty affects children's health, even more so if it occurs in the early years of life, because cognitive, emotional, social, and physical capacities are in full development. Poverty leads to stressful situations and can sometimes be linked to the early development of mental or psychosocial health problems (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2020).

In terms of gender inequalities, girls tend to have a poorer self-perception of their emotional health, regardless of their origin. Their symptoms of anxiety or depression often go unnoticed when they are migrants (underdiagnosed). Depending on their origin and circumstances, as migrants or refugees they are at greater risk of sexual and gender-based violence, some are forced into marriage, and they may be victims of female genital mutilation, trafficking, or sexual exploitation, among other forms of abuse.. Gender-based violence and discrimination also have a negative impact on their emotional well-being and mental health (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2025).

Xenophobia and racism or discrimination based on administrative status negatively impact the living conditions and mental health of migrant, refugee, or internationally protected children and adolescents, causing stress, depression, and low self-esteem, among other symptoms (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2025).

These structural axes of social inequality condition the possibilities and opportunities of migrant, refugee, or internationally protected children and adolescents at each stage of their life course, as well as the problems and stressors they may experience that affect their mental health.

## \*Key issues

**- The intersection of structural inequalities related to age, gender, social class and origin places migrant and refugee children and adolescents at heightened risk of social exclusion and has significant implications for their well-being and mental health.**

## 4. Social determinants of mental health in the migration process

The model of social determinants of health—including risk and protective factors, vulnerabilities, and resilience—serves as a key framework for the World Health Organization, which defines them as “the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, including the health system. These circumstances are the result of the distribution of money, power, and resources at the global, national, and local levels, which in turn depends on the policies adopted” (WHO, 2018, cited in Piñones et al., 2021, p.3). This model allows us to understand the causes of many of the mental health problems experienced by migrant or refugee children and adolescents at each stage of their migration process.

In the country of origin, the impulse to migrate may be motivated by economic difficulties or lack of access to health, education, and social services, lack of opportunities or freedoms, various forms of violence, threats, persecution, wars, environmental disasters, among other factors. Children and adolescents fleeing countries at war or in armed conflict show symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression, somatization (Sirin et al., 2015), anxiety, negative self-concept, and hostility. Although symptoms may decrease over time with sustained mental health support, Akgül et al. (2019) conclude that refugee girls continue to show higher levels of anxiety, depression, somatization, and overall severity, which highlights the need for mental health care that incorporates a gender-sensitive approach. In this regard, there are cultural practices as violent as female genital mutilation—common in Somalia, Guinea, Mali, and Egypt (UNICEF, 2024)—which, in addition to causing serious physical harm, also, cause psychological problems, anxiety, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress in the girls who are abused (Gallego, 2023).

Political determinants reflected in immigration regulations also affect the well-being and mental health of children and adolescents. For example, for those who want to reunite with family members who have previously migrated, the economic and housing requirements, among others, for family reunification pose considerable barriers, prolonging the grief of separation and generating depression, fear, stress, helplessness, and, ultimately, a deprivation of care. When family reunification is denied, the impact on children is severe (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2024).

### \*Key issues

**- The mental health and well-being of migrant and refugee children and adolescents are affected by social, economic, political, cultural, territorial, and environmental factors at different stages of the migration process.**

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During the journey, migrant children and adolescents may experience adverse situations, frequent changes of residence, economic deprivation, unsanitary conditions, confinement or violence, and violations of their rights. They have sometimes witnessed the death of others during the journey and, if they are victims of trafficking, these circumstances are aggravated by torture, rape, and exploitation (Gimeno et al., 2024). Migration often involves family separation, which can sometimes negatively affect children's mental health (Rubio, 2020), and unaccompanied children often experience emotional deprivation, which can lead to attachment problems (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2025).

In some countries and situations, migrant children and adolescents may be imprisoned in detention centres for migrants (UNICEF, 2017), practices that violate children's rights and negatively affect their mental and emotional health (Chávez and Menjívar, 2010).

On the other hand, a large number of unaccompanied migrant girls and girls seeking international protection have been victims of sexual violence (as have some boys), not only during the migration journey. Gender-based and/or sexual violence in their country of origin is one of the triggers for unaccompanied adolescents to migrate (Kids in Need of Defense & Fray Matías de Córdova Human Rights Center, 2017). Sexual and gender-based violence has consequences for their mental health, such as depression, anxiety, or emotional disorders (Save the Children, 2023).

Girls and adolescents in trafficking networks for sexual exploitation suffer serious damage to their mental health. The violence associated with trafficking generates post-traumatic stress disorders (hypervigilance, nightmares, and flashbacks), anxiety (panic attacks, nervousness, and insomnia), depression (self-harm or suicide attempts), hostility, etc. (Kiss et al., 2015; PHIT Project, 2019).

In the host society, the usual barriers to accessing housing and employment, which are even greater for families in an irregular administrative situation, have an impact on their social relationships and on the mental health of their minor children (Fanjul et al., 2021). Although migrant children and adolescents in the European Union generally have the right to basic healthcare, barriers to access have been identified, including a lack of knowledge about the healthcare system, language barriers, logistical obstacles, fear of detention or

## \*Key issues

**- There is ample evidence of the impact of war, family separation, sexual and gender-based violence, racism, and xenophobia on the mental health of migrant and refugee children and adolescents.**

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deportation orders, lack of information about rights, discriminatory attitudes among healthcare staff, etc. If specialized mental health therapies or treatments are required, the lack of public or free services is a recurring limitation in different countries (Hjern & Stubbe, 2016; Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2025). Existing mental health resources for migrant or refugee children and adolescents are insufficient or ill-equipped to address the traumas of travel and other adverse experiences in an intercultural manner (Save the Children, 2023). And the deprivation of quality psychological care can exacerbate developmental disorders, socialization difficulties, isolation, and other psychological distress (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2025).

The likelihood of drug use may be higher among adolescents than among adult migrants, as may interpersonal difficulties (Rubio, 2020). In Spain and other countries, barriers have been reported to referring unaccompanied adolescents to specific addiction treatments, as well as to adequately monitoring the prescribed treatment (Gallego, 2023).

Racism, xenophobia, and social exclusion in educational settings and community life impact the mental health of migrant or refugee children and adolescents (Venegas et al., 2023). Numerous studies have found a significant relationship between racial discrimination and depression or anxiety (Priest et al., 2013), with a higher risk among migrant adolescents than among the children of migrants, as they are more likely to feel that they cannot share their concerns (Abdulhamed et al., 2022). Other studies link ethnic discrimination to psychosomatic problems in migrant adolescents, which are exacerbated when perpetrated by police officers (Kauff et al., 2017).

Family and community support networks, as well as identity and cultural affirmation, have been shown to cushion the impact of racial discrimination on children's mental health (Linton & Green, 2019). In addition to family education in a positive ethnic identity, preparation for dealing with discrimination has protective effects on the mental health of children and adolescents (Masten, 2018). Schools can also play a regulatory role in the impact of racism and xenophobia on the mental health of migrant or refugee children (Venegas et al., 2023).

## \*Key issues

**- Although migrant and refugee children and adolescents are entitled to healthcare, there are barriers to accessing specialized mental health resources.**

## 5. Public policy recommendations

**1. Recognize the rights and agency of migrant and refugee children and adolescents** and respond to their expressed needs and demands, such as those expressed in the Children's Manifesto for the Global Refugee Forum 2023 (Initiative for Child Rights in the Global Compacts, 2023), which include safety, care, dignified treatment, teacher training, opportunities to play and make friends, accessible psychological support, poverty reduction programs, and safe spaces to participate.

**2. Promote rigorous data collection and ethical research with children.** It is necessary to understand and quantify these migratory flows to plan, budget, and allocate social and health resources and to improve the support and services provided to migrant children and adolescents and/or those in need of international protection (UNICEF et al., 2018). This also makes it possible to refute false alarms or fake news that fuel their stigmatization. It is essential that these records comply with the ethical criteria for research involving children (protection and avoidance of harm, respect for dignity and rights, informed consent, anonymity, etc.) (Laczko et al., 2020).

**3. Study the combined effects of the various axes of social inequality** that shape the lived experiences of migrant and refugee children in different ways, and assess how social determinants impact their well-being and mental health.

**4. Apply a gender perspective in identifying problems or needs and in providing mental health care to migrant and refugee children and adolescents.** Female genital mutilation, gender-based and sexual violence, trafficking, child marriage, honour-related violence, etc., require a focus on gender and age differences in the mental health care of migrant or refugee children and adolescents. The impact of migratory adversities varies depending on the psycho-developmental stage, in terms of risks and consequences, symptoms, treatments, and support (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2025).

**5. Train professionals from different social, educational, legal, and law enforcement fields,** among others, on the rights of migrant and refugee children and adolescents, as well as on the main risk and protective factors for their mental health. Above all, provide them with tools that allow them to review their own and others' professional practices from anti-racist, feminist, non-classist, and non-adult-centric perspectives.

**6. Improve mental health care for children and adolescents,** with greater provision of services and budgetary and personnel resources, using a cross-cultural and, where feasible, transnational approach. Adapting mental health interventions to diversity requires training health professionals in structural as well as intercultural skills, so that they are able to maintain a horizontal dialogue between "expert" knowledge and the socio-cultural representations of the mental suffering of migrant or refugee children and adolescents (Martínez-Hernández, 2025).

**7. Enhance the resilience of migrant and refugee children** and adolescents, respecting and caring for their own **support networks**, accompanying them respectfully and without overstepping in the development of a positive ethnic identity, and helping them identify their own strategies (individual and collective) that enable them to cope with social and institutional discrimination (Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar, 2025).

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# GLOBAL ANSWER

Social work  
and human mobility

## Policy Brief

July 2025



## Breaking Barriers: Inclusive communication to ensure rights and access to welfare services for migrants and applicants for international protection.

María Teresa Gijón Sánchez (Universidad de Granada, España)

### \*Executive Summary

Migrants and applicants for international protection frequently face multiple barriers in accessing rights and welfare services. These include legal, linguistic, cultural, economic and institutional obstacles which intersect with each other and further restrict access.

The lack of comprehensible, multilingual and culturally appropriate information particularly affects individuals and groups of migrants in situations of vulnerability. Specifically, the lack of inclusive communication results in three main obstacles to accessing welfare services: insufficient interpretation or intercultural mediation services, low proficiency in the host country's language, and complex administrative systems with limited and poorly accessible information.

This policy brief draws on part of the fieldwork carried out in a case study in the city of Granada, within the framework of the European project Global-ANSWER (Grant Agreement No 872209), based on a literature review and a nominal group composed of migrants and applicants for international protection, along with social intervention professionals from the City Council. It

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proposes concrete measures addressed to public administrations and social organizations to guarantee inclusive communication. This type of communication is a key tool for the effective exercise of rights and the reduction of structural inequalities in access to services and resources, regardless of people's origin, language, or administrative status.

The aim is to offer guidance at the European level on the need to adopt practices of accessible information design, translation into multiple languages, use of easily understandable visual materials, and codesign-based validation of content with migrant populations and applicants for international protection. Ensuring communication justice implies adopting an intersectional and participatory approach that recognizes the cultural, linguistic, and technological diversity of contemporary societies.

## 1. Introduction

According to international organizations such as the United Nations, ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms in accordance with national laws and international agreement (objective 16.10) is a fundamental aspect of achieving peaceful and inclusive societies. Moreover, the Council of Europe has issued numerous recommendations emphasizing the importance of bringing information closer to all people, regardless of where they live or what languages they speak, by supporting research and innovation in language technologies and their implementation to overcome barriers.

Access to clear, comprehensible and culturally appropriate information is a fundamental enabling right for the exercise of other social rights. However, many migrants and applicants for international protection face persistent barriers when attempting to access essential services such as social services, healthcare, education, housing, employment, or social protection. These barriers reveal that migrant populations and applicants for international protection often struggle to navigate complex service systems due to the opacity of rules and the lack of accessible information on formal rights (Fleischman et al., 2015).

Frequent obstacles include language difficulties, lack of translation into relevant languages, the use of inaccessible technical-administrative language, poor cultural adaptation of content, and, in particular, the near-exclusive reliance on digital channels to disseminate information. This is especially excluding for people with trajectories of forced mobility, precarious administrative status, or challenges related to literacy or digital access. Specifically, irregular administrative status limits access to services due to fear of deportation and confusion about administrative requirements (Fleischman et al., 2015).

### \*Key issues

**- Inclusive communication is an enabling right for access to essential services.**

**- Current institutional communication policies do not take into account the linguistic and cultural diversity of migrants and international protection applicants.**

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The issue lies not only in the lack of resources, but also in the absence of communication strategies that take into account the linguistic, cultural, and social diversity of the target populations. Communicative exclusion has direct consequences for the well-being, autonomy, and social inclusion of migrants and applicants for international protection.

Public administrations and social sector organizations have a responsibility to adopt communication approaches that promote equity, ensure access to rights, and foster social participation. In this context, it is urgent to reconceptualize public communication as an integral part of inclusion policies, adopting approaches based on multilingualism, linguistic justice, information accessibility, and the active participation and codesign involvement of migrants in the development and validation of content.

This policy brief draws on fieldwork carried out in a case study in the city of Granada, within the framework of the European project Global-ANSWER (Grant Agreement No 872209), based on a literature review and a nominal group composed of migrants and applicants for international protection, together with social intervention professionals from the City Council. The reflections and proposals presented here aim to provide useful guidance at the European level to ensure communicative justice through an intersectional and participatory approach that recognizes the cultural, linguistic, and technological diversity of today's societies.

## \* Key issues

**- Communication policies must be based on communicative justice and an intersectional approach.**

## 2. Linguistic and communicative barriers to accessing institutional information

Migrants and applicants for international protection face multiple, interrelated barriers in accessing welfare services, stemming from linguistic, communicative, and institutional functioning issues (Galanis et al., 2022).

Firstly, persistent structural barriers exist, such as the absence or insufficient provision of professional interpretation and intercultural mediation services, due to poorly defined public policies and limited funding (Galanis et al., 2022). These communication barriers hinder interaction with service providers (Fleischman et al., 2015). Furthermore, the lack of resources and inadequate cultural training hinder the equitable provision of services (Chiarenza et al., 2017).

## \* Key issues

**- The lack of professional interpretation and intercultural mediation services undermines equity in access to welfare services.**

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Secondly, many migrants do not have sufficient command of the host country's official language and culture (Kiliç et al., 2025), making it difficult to express needs, understand their rights and responsibilities, and engage autonomously with public systems. This often leads to reliance on ad hoc or unqualified interpreters, such as family members or volunteers without proper training, which compromises confidentiality, clarity of information, and equity in service provision (Galanis et al., 2022; Khanal, 2025). This situation is exacerbated by the fact that most informational resources and administrative procedures are available only in the official language, and written in technical and inaccessible language.

Thirdly, access to public services is hindered by the complexity of institutional functioning: administrative procedures are difficult to understand, information on services and resources is often limited or poorly visible, and many migrants rely on informal networks for guidance (Kuan, 2020). As a result, instead of receiving clear guidance from public services themselves, they are forced to turn to associations, acquaintances, or community environments to obtain basic information. In some contexts, this lack of information is not merely due to operational shortcomings but forms part of institutional dynamics that—explicitly or implicitly—generate inequality and exclusion through systematic disinformation (Gonzalez, 2021).

Taken together, these communicative, linguistic, and operational barriers reflect a lack of institutional adaptation to the cultural and linguistic diversity of today's societies, and jeopardise the equitable access of migrant persons and applicants for international protection to essential services and the full exercise of their rights.

## 3. Digital information without an inclusive approach

The digitalisation of public services poses significant challenges for migrant persons and applicants for international protection, particularly when an inclusive approach that considers linguistic, cultural, technological diversity and administrative status is not adopted. Recent research has shown that certain migrant groups, such as older Russian-speaking individuals in Finland, face exclusion from digital health and welfare services, especially when they have low socio-economic status and limited language proficiency (Buchert et al., 2022). Similarly, migrant women in Finland have reported experiencing coercive forms of digitalisation,

### \* Key issues

- **The use of technical language and the lack of translation limit understanding and autonomy.**

- **Migrants rely on informal channels due to the absence of clear official information.**

### \* Key issues

- **Digitalisation without an inclusive approach excludes those lacking digital skills, language proficiency, or resources.**

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especially in relation to essential services that require the use of complex technologies and knowledge of foreign languages (Buchert et al., 2023).

Administrative and digital literacy is a crucial condition for accessing digitalised public services, but it is hindered by multiple barriers (Safarov, 2023). In Italy, migrant persons in irregular administrative situations or applicants for asylum face multidimensional digital inequalities, such as lack of infrastructure, poor digital literacy, and absence of digital capital (Lintner and Zadra, 2025).

These studies consistently highlight that digitalisation without an accessibility and equity focus can intensify existing inequalities, becoming a new form of social exclusion. In many contexts, digital channels have become the only way to access information and services, excluding those without devices, connectivity, digital skills, or language proficiency. Moreover, digital content often replicates the same barriers found in face-to-face formats: technical and administrative language that is difficult to understand, lack of translations, and an institutional perspective that fails to consider the diversity of the intended audience.

These barriers, both in digital and face-to-face formats, reflect a structural lack of institutional adaptation to the diverse societies of today. This situation undermines the equitable access of migrant persons and applicants for international protection to basic services and limits the effective exercise of their rights. In this context, the role of social work professionals is key to mitigating these gaps, promoting equitable access to digital resources, and providing the necessary support to prevent processes of marginalisation (Buchert et al., 2022; Safarov, 2023; Lintner and Zadra, 2025).

## 4. Participation of migrants and applicants for international protection in the development of informational content

The needs and preferences of migrant persons and applicants for international protection must be taken into account from the outset of developing informational materials (Veeravagu et al., 2025). However, migrant populations are rarely consulted in these processes, resulting in materials that are of limited usefulness, difficult to understand, or culturally inadequate. This lack of participation reinforces the disconnect between institutions and

### \* Key issues

- **Digital content reproduces the same technical and cultural barriers as face-to-face formats.**

- **The lack of digital equity deepens the gap in access to social and administrative rights.**

### \* Key issues

- **Codesign processes enable more inclusive and culturally appropriate solutions.**

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their intended audiences, and reduces the effectiveness of public policies aimed at social inclusion.

Recent studies highlight the importance of including migrant persons in the design and validation of communication strategies, as such active participation helps identify mistakes, improve the relevance of content, overcome linguistic and bureaucratic barriers, and enhance institutional trust (Concilio et al., 2022; Pollini and Caforio, 2021). In this regard, co-design approaches that involve migrants, service providers, NGOs, public authorities, and technology developers have proven to be effective tools for developing more inclusive solutions, in both traditional and digital formats (Mariani et al., 2024).

Participatory processes have been implemented in contexts such as public health, access to social services, and digital guidance, using iterative and community-based methods—such as design thinking or collaborative development of technological tools—which have enabled the creation of interventions better suited to migrant realities (Crawshaw, 2022; Pollini and Caforio, 2021). Examples such as the use of AI-powered chatbots or digital companions illustrate the potential of these methodologies to improve service accessibility and quality of life.

Nonetheless, some authors warn that traditional participatory techniques may be insufficient to address complex social challenges, and stress the need to move towards innovative models that transform participation into action (Varanasi, 2024). The sustained involvement of migrant persons in participatory infrastructures can contribute not only to the design of more appropriate services, but also to the strengthening of collective capacities and the development of more equitable governance structures (Varanasi, 2024).

## \* Key issues

**- The active participation of migrants and applicants for international protection in the codesign and validation of content improves the effectiveness of public policies.**

**- Social work plays a key role in ensuring fair access to information.**



## 5. Public policy recommendations

### 1. To guarantee accessible, clear, and multilingual information on rights

- To ensure that all information related to rights, procedures, and services is available in understandable formats and in multiple languages, prioritizing those most spoken by migrants and applicants for international protection.
- To avoid the exclusive use of technical-administrative language by adapting content to different levels of literacy and reading comprehension.
- To incorporate visual materials, infographics, and oral or audiovisual formats that facilitate access to and understanding of information.

### 2. To improve professional interpretation and intercultural mediation services

- To incorporate professional interpretation and intercultural mediation services into public and contracted welfare services.
- To establish protocols for interpretation and intercultural mediation, avoiding the use of unqualified individuals or those without specific training.
- To provide ongoing training for welfare service personnel in intercultural competences and inclusive communication with migrants and applicants for international protection.

### 3. To design inclusive and diverse communication channels

- To disseminate information not only through digital platforms, but also via in-person channels, community spaces, and social organisation networks.
- To ensure equitable access to information in both physical and digital formats, with special attention to individuals with limited connectivity, low digital literacy, or irregular administrative status.
- To invest in accessible tools such as multilingual chatbots, video guides, or digital support devices tailored to the needs of migrants and applicants for international protection.

### 4. To promote participatory processes with migrants and applicants for international protection

- To actively include migrants and applicants for international protection in the design, validation, and review of informational content intended for them.

## 4. To promote participatory processes with migrants and applicants for international protection (Cont.)

- To promote co-design approaches in collaboration with social organisations, public administration staff, and migrant communities, especially in welfare services that directly affect their daily lives.
- To foster stable participatory structures –such as roundtables, forums, or community spaces– that help identify informational barriers based on migrants' lived experience.

## 5. To review the institutional communication approaches

- To evaluate the impact of institutional communication strategies from a rights-based, equitable, and culturally diverse perspective.
- To recognise inclusive communication as a core and cross-cutting element of public policy, not as a secondary or purely technical matter.
- To integrate indicators of communication justice into the planning, evaluation, and continuous improvement processes of welfare services.

### \* Key issues

**- Access to information is a fundamental right that enables access to other rights. Public policies must treat communication as a tool for equity and inclusion, ensuring clarity, multilingualism, intercultural mediation, inclusive digitalisation, and the active role of migrant populations and applicants for international protection in knowledge production.**

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# GLOBAL ANSWER

Social work  
and human mobility

## Policy Brief

July 2025



# Towards Inclusive Governance: A Gender and Intersectional Perspective in Social Inclusion Policies Involving Migrant Populations

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María Teresa Gijón Sánchez (Universidad de Granada, España)

## \*Executive Summary

Social inclusion policies targeting migrant populations do not systematically incorporate gender or intersectional perspectives. This omission generates inequalities both in access to rights and welfare services and in the outcomes of these policies. By not considering how gender relations intersect with other axes of exclusion – such as sexual orientation, social class, age, disability or functional diversity, administrative status, origin, race, ethnicity, or religion – these policies reinforce dynamics of subordination that hinder the effective exercise of rights.

This policy brief draws on fieldwork conducted as part of a case study in the city of Granada, within the framework of the European project Global-ANSWER (Grant Agreement No 872209). The analysis is based on a literature review, participant observation and focus groups held with migrants and applicants for international protection, as well as with professionals from public services and social organisations involved in their inclusion processes. It proposes concrete measures for public administrations and social entities to move towards inclusive governance

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capable of recognising and addressing the structural inequalities that shape migratory trajectories in European local contexts. This requires the transversal integration of gender and intersectional perspectives throughout all phases of the social policy cycle: design, implementation and evaluation – particularly within welfare public services and the third sector.

Recognising migrants as embodied and social subjects – whose trajectories are shaped by multiple dimensions of vulnerability, but also by agency and resistance – is essential to developing inclusive responses that promote social justice. This policy brief argues that questioning institutional neutrality, adopting situated approaches, and recognising migrant knowledge are key drivers of transformation. The aim is to provide useful guidance at the European level to support the development of gender- and intersectionality-sensitive social policies that guarantee rights, prevent inequalities, and improve the quality of welfare services.

## 1. Introduction

According to international organisations such as the United Nations, reducing inequality within and among countries (Sustainable Development Goal No. 10) is essential to ensuring a decent life for all people. In a global context characterised by interdependence and inequality, phenomena such as poverty, migration, forced displacement, armed conflict, climate change, and economic crises – although diverse in nature – share a common effect: they deepen social divides and limit access to basic rights for millions of people.

In this framework, when we talk of social inclusion policies, we refer not only to those targeting migrant populations, but – above all – to those developed with them. These are strategies that do not conceive of migrant populations as mere beneficiaries, but as political subjects, active agents, and holders of valuable knowledge for social transformation. This perspective requires moving beyond models focused on adaptation to dominant norms – such as those defining legitimate bodies, trajectories, or identities – and advancing towards social policies that ensure the non-violation of human rights within the framework of social and democratic states governed by the rule of law.

Factors such as gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity have a decisive impact on the social inclusion, economic empowerment, and legal protection of migrant populations (Ekmekçi, 2024). In particular, migrant women and LGBTIQ+ individuals often face compounded forms of marginalisation, experiencing multiple discriminations and limited access to essential services (Ekmekçi, 2024). Moreover, elements such as gendered narratives and processes of self-ethnicisation influence the unequal distribution of

### \*Key issues

**- Social inclusion policies must be developed *with* migrant populations, not just *for* them.**

support within transnational families, affecting opportunities for social mobility in host countries (Amelina, 2011).

An intersectional perspective enables a better understanding of how these inequalities are produced and reproduced within institutional structures, challenging essentialist views of community, ethnicity, and culture in migration studies (Bürkner, 2012). This perspective also helps to identify and question institutional narratives that portray policies as neutral, while in reality they reproduce structural inequalities. Taken together, these findings underscore the need to structurally integrate an intersectional and gender-sensitive perspective in welfare services, incorporating inclusive policies that acknowledge the realities of LGBTIQ+ individuals and other systematically excluded groups (Ekmekçi, 2024; Siim, 2013).

The recognition of violence and discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity as grounds for persecution – and therefore as legitimate grounds for the right to asylum – has been a relatively recent achievement. It was not included in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and has been the result of years of struggle and the evolution of international conventions and declarations of rights (Yela, 2022). Nonetheless, legal frameworks still present significant limitations and inequalities in their application.

These inequalities are related to a patriarchal and neo-capitalist conception of migration, centred on a normative subject – the autonomous male, without emotional ties or care responsibilities – which renders invisible other realities, such as those of migrant women, people with non-normative gender identities, or individuals facing multiple axes of subordination. This model permeates both the social iconography of migration and public policy, hindering their adaptation to diverse and complex contexts.

In recent years, motivations for migration have increased and diversified. For instance, women and girls represent the majority of victims of human trafficking (Correa & Sumariva, 2023), an extreme expression of gender objectification reproduced through cultural norms, stereotypes, and social practices. Within this transnational context, the stigma associated with gender-based or sexual violence can deter victims from reporting, approaching social organisations, or initiating asylum procedures – thus losing access to protection and redress.

Research conducted in Spain by Mercedes Yela (2022) documents multiple forms of gender-based violence across countries of origin, transit, and destination – from physical to institutional violence. For

## \* Key issues

**- A gender and intersectional perspective is key to understanding and addressing structural inequalities.**

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example, the National High Court's ruling 18/2017 of 12 January rejected the application for subsidiary protection of a Peruvian woman, a victim of gender-based violence, on the grounds of insufficient evidence of persecution. In contrast, the Supreme Court ruling 1834/2018 of 18 July upheld the right to asylum of a man from Cameroon who faced persecution due to his sexual orientation, overturning an administrative decision that had denied him protection, despite support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Both cases illustrate how asylum procedures continue to shift the burden of proof onto victims, perpetuating situations of defencelessness and vulnerability. This reinforces the legal uncertainty faced by professionals in their daily interventions. These examples underscore the urgency of implementing social policies with a gender and intersectional perspective that identify and respond to specific vulnerabilities, and promote effective mechanisms of protection and prevention.

As Correa & Sumariva (2023) argue, an intersectional analysis that considers how different identities and social positions intersect is essential to understand complex phenomena such as trafficking or forced migration. Mainstreaming gender and intersectional perspectives in social policies not only enhances their effectiveness but also challenges the alleged neutrality of many public interventions that continue to reproduce patriarchal or racist frameworks. As Joan Scott (1990) reminded us, gender will only be useful as an analytical category if it is understood as a tool to reveal historically constructed hierarchical power relations.

From this perspective, the Guide for Incorporating the Gender Perspective in Social Policy Planning by the Andalusian Regional Government (2017) – as a practical example from the case study – states that equal opportunities must be understood as intrinsic to social policy. However, this requires specific operational mechanisms, such as gender mainstreaming, intersectionality, and differentiated impact assessments.

This policy brief is based in part on fieldwork carried out in a case study conducted in the city of Granada, as part of the European project Global-ANSWER (Grant Agreement No 872209). The analysis draws on a literature review, participant observation, and focus groups conducted with migrant populations and applicants for international protection, as well as professionals from public services and social organisations involved in their inclusion processes. The reflections and proposals presented here aim to offer useful guidance at the European level to strengthen inclusive governance that acknowledges and addresses the multiple inequalities embedded in migratory trajectories.

## \* Key issues

**- Social policies must recognise the voices, knowledge and rights of those experiencing multiple forms of exclusion.**

## 2. Absence of a gender and intersectional perspective in social inclusion policies for migrant populations

The absence of a gender and intersectional perspective in social inclusion policies for migrant populations shapes an intervention model that presents itself as neutral, yet operates from an exclusionary normative rationality: a young, cisgender, autonomous male without care responsibilities. This neutrality is not harmless; rather, it produces concrete exclusionary effects by designing responses tailored exclusively to that specific profile (Kabeer, 1998).

Just as in social intervention, the lack of actions aimed at promoting autonomy generates dependence and subordination, in the field of public policy, if strategies aimed at emancipation are not developed, structures of oppression end up being reinforced. The non-recognition of gender identities and the associated forms of violence stems from an apparently neutral migratory logic that in fact reproduces the same patriarchal system it should seek to challenge (Ruíz, 2021). In contrast, social policies must be capable of responding to the multiple and specific realities experienced by migrant women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, not only in host countries but also by considering the violence and inequalities suffered in contexts of origin and transit. Likewise, other migratory realities affected by multiple axes of vulnerability must be taken into account – such as unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking, or forcibly displaced individuals – whose trajectories do not fit the normative model and whose experiences remain invisible unless these perspectives are applied.

Recognising the corporeality of migrant individuals implies acknowledging that their identity is not fragmentable. It is not possible to separate who they were in their contexts of origin, nor can we ignore how these prior experiences shape their agency and participation in the present. Modern thought – which tends to dissect, dismember or compartmentalise bodies, turning them into objects or instruments – must be transcended in favour of an understanding of the body as a lived totality. The body embodies both pain and desire, both spirituality and the cultural markings it carries – from privilege to violence.

From this perspective, social policies must approach migrant bodies by addressing their full trajectories: origin, transit and reception. Only then is it possible to understand the impact of the encounter between their corporealities and dominant cultural codes, and how

### \* Key issues

**- Current policies are based on a normative migrant model that excludes multiple realities.**

**- Ignoring gender and intersectionality perpetuates hidden forms of violence and inequality.**

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such an encounter may even shape the way they narrate their migratory experience. This conditioned narration may result in the loss of rights or increased exposure to rights violations.

Moreover, without an intersectional perspective, the gender approach runs the risk of being incomplete. Only intersectionality enables the analysis to incorporate other structures of oppression – such as sexual orientation, social class, age, disability or functional diversity, origin, administrative status, race, ethnicity or religion – which intersect with migrant trajectories. These structures do not operate in isolation; they interact and generate unique forms of exclusion that must be addressed in a specific and situated manner. These dimensions profoundly affect experiences, life opportunities and exposure to social injustice (Correa & Sumariva, 2023), and therefore must be integrated into the design, implementation and evaluation of any public policy aimed at inclusion.

## 3. Deficit in training and in the incorporation of gender and intersectional perspectives in welfare services

Recent studies highlight the urgent need to strengthen both staff training and public policies to ensure that welfare services can adequately respond to the complex realities of migrant populations, particularly those affected by multiple forms of discrimination. The intersection of migration, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, disability or functional diversity, origin, race, ethnicity, or administrative status directly influences trajectories of inclusion, access to rights, and the quality of care received.

This challenge is not exclusive to policy design, but manifests itself daily in professional practice. To ensure effective inclusion, those involved in public services or social entities must have a gender and intersectional perspective and adequate training that allows them to transform their outlook, practice and ethical positioning. Embracing this perspective is not only about mastering theoretical or regulatory tools, but about engaging in an ongoing—both individual and collective—exercise of critical awareness of structural inequalities and the privileges from which one acts. This requires critically reviewing the epistemological frameworks from which migrant reality is interpreted, integrating situated knowledge as a source of legitimacy.

### \* Key issues

**- It is urgent to design policies that respond to diverse and complex migratory trajectories.**

### \* Key issues

**- Welfare services are not equipped to address migrant realities through an inclusive approach.**

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There is no such thing as professional neutrality in social intervention: the supposed neutral standpoint conceals power relations and reproduces oppression (Blázquez, 2010). As various feminist authors, including Carole Pateman (1995), have pointed out, the modern concept of citizenship was founded on a gender bias that excluded women from equal distribution of rights and opportunities. This bias persists today when the specific forms of violence affecting migrant women or LGBTIQ+ individuals are ignored, or when intervention is based on stereotypes that reinforce subordination.

In daily practice, these training and epistemological gaps translate into institutional biases: lack of identification of gender-differentiated impacts, invisibilisation of violence, ignorance of non-normative identities, reproduction of gendered roles, or stigmatising generalisations about migrant populations. All of this seriously compromises the quality of care, the guarantee of rights, and the building of institutional trust.

Moreover, the social intervention model itself conditions the possibility of integrating these perspectives. Adopting an intersectional lens means not only recognising inequalities, but also starting from the potential and agency of service users. This requires abandoning deficit-based approaches and embracing support models rooted in empowerment, acknowledging the capacities, knowledge, and strategies that migrant populations already mobilise to navigate their trajectories (Fernández & Ponce de León, 2012; Raya & Caparrós, 2014).

Recent studies highlight the importance of improving training for professionals working with migrant and refugee populations in Europe, particularly in the fields of healthcare (Chiarenza et al., 2018) and social work (Mataitytė-Diržienė & Ališauskaitė, 2020). Chiarenza et al. (2018) note that many training programmes in the healthcare sector face limitations such as insufficient involvement of participants, a lack of defined pedagogical approaches, and the absence of a systematic results-oriented framework. Mataitytė-Diržienė & Ališauskaitė (2020) identified a lack of specific and systemic training for social workers who work with migrant minors. Terrón-Caro et al. (2022) developed an e-learning programme to improve training on the social inclusion of migrant women through an interdisciplinary approach. Santini et al. (2023) explored the impact of training in elder care on the quality of life and social inclusion of migrants, and found that while it did not affect quality of life, it was associated with improved social inclusion. Therefore, structurally incorporating gender and intersectional perspectives into welfare services requires not only technical training but also an

## \* Key issues

**- Professional training must include gender, intersectionality, and critical awareness.**

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ethical and political stance. Only in this way can truly inclusive, just, and transformative social policies and interventions be developed.

In this regard, an example from the autonomous community of Andalusia (Spain) can be highlighted: the 2025 training offer from the Andalusian Institute of Public Administration – published in the Official Bulletin of the Andalusian Regional Government (No. 1, 2 January 2025) – includes training courses for staff working with migrant populations, such as *“Sociolabour inclusion of migrant populations in situations of vulnerability”* and *“Migration and human trafficking. The specific situation of women”*. These courses are part of the Training Plan of the Ministry of Social Inclusion, Youth, Families and Equality, which seeks to promote gender equality and the integration of this perspective into the administrative workplace, fostering the recognition and eradication of inequalities.

## \* Key issues

**- Without this change, stereotypes, exclusion and institutional inequality are reproduced.**

## 4. Placing migrant populations at the centre of social inclusion policies: a gender and intersectional perspective

Placing migrant populations at the centre of social policies does not imply reinforcing centres of power historically shaped by patriarchal and Eurocentric logics. Rather, it means shifting the focus from instrumental rationality towards care, the validation of lived experience, and the recognition of otherness as a legitimate source of knowledge and political action. This transformative centrality does not simply mean “taking migrant populations into account”; it entails guaranteeing their genuine involvement as active agents in the production of knowledge, policy design, and institutional transformation.

Social inclusion policies with a gender and intersectional perspective must incorporate mechanisms that enable the active and sustained participation of migrant populations throughout all phases of the public policy cycle: diagnosis, design, implementation, and evaluation. Such participation not only reduces gender, cultural, and structural biases, but also represents an effective pathway for collective empowerment and the redistribution of power.

However, mere presence in participatory spaces does not guarantee transformative participation. What matters is how participation is structured, the ideological frameworks underpinning it, and the actual power granted to influence decision

## \* Key issues

**- Migrant populations are not passive beneficiaries, but agents of change with their own knowledge.**

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-making. In many contexts, participation indicators are reduced to quantitative metrics – such as the number of attendees at forums or roundtables – without considering the level of influence or the conditions that enable or hinder meaningful involvement.

A common mistake in participatory policies is to assume that migrant populations lack prior experiences of mobilisation, organisation, or advocacy. This bias reproduces paternalistic views that render invisible their histories of struggle, community-based resistance, and networks of solidarity. On the contrary, numerous studies show that migrant populations – particularly women – have led organisational and political participation processes in various local contexts.

For example, Morén (2002) analysed the creation of consultative councils in cities such as Barcelona and Lisbon, highlighting the role of these spaces in facilitating dialogue between local governments and migrant communities. Oca & Lombardero (2018) examined gender relations within migrant associations in Galicia, emphasising female leadership and the factors that influence political participation. Caviedes-García (2022) documented the experiences of migrant women living in England who face discrimination based on nationality, religion, language, or qualification level, yet also create spaces for self-organisation and resistance. In the Spanish context, Garrido & Cubero (2019) demonstrate how methodologies such as Photovoice have helped create inclusive spaces where migrant women can develop critical awareness and mutual support networks. Falú et al. (2022) analyse the impact of migrant women's political leadership in local governments, while Aguilar (2010) shows how sociocultural animation based on political advocacy can strengthen the self-organisation and public visibility of African migrant women. These studies demonstrate that, despite multiple obstacles, migrant participation is not only possible but also transformative when appropriate spaces are made available.

In Granada, the city where the case study was conducted, several initiatives have been developed that place migrant populations at the centre from a gender and intersectional perspective. Among them, the project *La Bolina* (<https://labolina.org/>) stands out, supporting migrant populations in all areas of life: care, decision-making, training, and entrepreneurship. Additionally, the University of Granada published the *Atlas-Guide "Solidarity Economy and Social Work in Andalusia"*, which compiles experiences related to the social economy involving migrant populations. A chapter by Quesada & Espadas (2022) describes an entrepreneurship model from a gender and intersectional perspective based on the voices of migrant populations themselves.

## \* Key issues

**- Transformative participation requires real power, recognition, and accessible structures.**

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The *Fundación Escuela de Solidaridad* has promoted programmes where art is used as a tool for emotional support, community integration and entrepreneurship. One of these initiatives led to the creation of the *Stankos Ramadan* company (<https://stankosramadan.com/>), made up of young Moroccan former unaccompanied minors, who have taken part in events such as the “*FAN Festival in Sierra Nevada*” (<https://festivalfan.org/>). Another project focused on suicide prevention through clown performance, carried out by the *Compañía Internacional de Formación Artística* (CIFA). Finally, among others, the project “*Zaidín intercultural: comunica y media*” (<https://asad.es/zaidincomunicaymedia>), developed by ASAD and the Moroccan Association for the Integration of Immigrants, promotes community organising in a neighbourhood of Granada. In this project, migrant populations play an active role in voicing their experiences and realities.

Taken together, these studies and initiatives underline that situated knowledge –derived from migratory experiences, marked bodies and collective memory– must be recognised as legitimate and valuable for improving social policies. This requires the creation of valid channels of dialogue, mechanisms for positive action and flexible institutional structures that legitimise migrant voices.

Fostering a culture of participation involves both strengthening the organisational capacity of migrant communities and critically reviewing the institutional models that frame these spaces. Relevant experiences include local participation councils, community assemblies or participatory budgeting initiatives. However, replicating formats is not enough: they must be grounded in clear ideological principles, coherent methodologies and redistributed power structures.

Initiatives inspired by frameworks such as *Good Governance Strategies*, *the Economy for the Common Good* or *the Social and Solidarity Economy* have proven effective in promoting participatory processes with migrant populations, placing their contributions at the centre of public policy design (Quesada et al., 2024). These proposals share the conviction that only through a genuine redistribution of institutional power will it be possible to move towards truly inclusive governance.

## \* Key issues

**- Successful experiences exist when they are based on the migrant voice and social justice as a principle.**

## 5. Public policy recommendations

### 1. To mainstream gender and intersectional perspectives in social inclusion policies

- To incorporate gender and intersectional perspectives into all phases of the public policy cycle: diagnosis, design, implementation, and evaluation.
- To develop diagnoses that make visible the structural inequalities affecting migrant populations based on gender, sexual orientation, social class, age, disability or functional diversity, administrative status, origin, race, ethnicity, or religion.
- To ensure the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by key variables such as sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, origin, administrative status, or disability or functional diversity.
- To define indicators that measure gender relations and multiple forms of discrimination, particularly against migrant women and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

### 2. To strengthen the training of professionals in public services and social entities

- To establish mandatory continuous training programmes on gender, migration, and intersectionality, adapted to the different areas of intervention (social services, health, education, employment, housing, etc.).
- To include indicators of equity and intersectional inclusion in the evaluation of services provided.
- To design and implement care protocols sensitive to cultural, sexual, religious, and gender diversity, in order to prevent stigmatising or discriminatory practices.
- To incorporate intercultural mediation services with training in gender and intersectional perspectives as support for professional teams.
- To establish inter-institutional coordination mechanisms that include all entities working with migrant populations in the territory.
- To integrate interpretation and intercultural mediation services with an intersectional gender perspective into social intervention work teams.

### 3. To recognise and address multiple forms of violence and structural inequalities

- To develop specific, accessible and sustainable resources for migrant women and LGBTIQ+ individuals who face structural, institutional or family violence.
- To adapt services to the differentiated needs of migrant populations with caregiving responsibilities, disability or functional diversity, homelessness, or mental health issues.

### 3. To recognise and address multiple forms of violence and structural inequalities (Cont.)

- To guarantee effective access to basic services regardless of administrative status, applying the principles of non-discrimination and rights protection.
- To recognise the impact of trauma experienced in countries of origin and transit as part of the migratory process.
- To identify gender-specific violence affecting women, as well as minors exposed to gender-based violence as direct victims.
- To make visible boys and girls as victims of an extreme form of structural violence affecting childhood in contexts marked by social exclusion and global conflicts.

### 4. To encourage the active and transformative participation of migrant populations

- To create stable spaces for participation (councils, dialogue tables, co-creation processes) that meaningfully include migrant women, LGTBIQ+ individuals, and other groups with experiences of multiple exclusion.
- To fund co-design and participatory evaluation projects for services, incorporating gender and intersectional perspectives.
- To implement positive action measures that acknowledge and reduce the specific barriers faced by migrant women and LGTBIQ+ people in exercising their right to participation (language, caregiving responsibilities, legal status, structural violence, etc.).
- To recognise the situated knowledge of migrant populations as a legitimate source for improving policies and services.
- To promote social intervention platforms in which migrant populations are protagonists and lead processes, rather than being passive recipients.
- To support migrant leadership platforms where migrants are protagonists instead of passive beneficiaries, and where self-organisation, political advocacy, and institutional representation are actively encouraged.
- To develop good practice guides aimed at migrant populations that highlight social and community initiatives with a gender and intersectional perspective, beyond traditional assistance-based models, expanding opportunities and autonomy.

#### \* Key issues

**-Placing migrant populations at the centre of social inclusion policies requires structural change: true inclusion demands a gender- and intersectionality-based approach, power redistribution, and the active participation of migrant populations in shaping public policies.**



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## Policy Brief

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### **Strengthen the coordination role of the City Council to improve local governance of migration.**

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#### **\*Executive Summary**

The European Union is making significant investment efforts in cohesion and social inclusion policies. Local governance of migration is a complex challenge, which requires coordinated local responses to be effective. City councils play a leading role in the leadership and political will to develop social inclusion strategies, beyond simply offering public services to migrants and people seeking international protection. However, the lack of coordination between the municipalities and the actors involved in the local space prevents them from fully achieving their objectives. This lack of alignment between the different levels of government and the various local public and private actors involved hinders efforts and resources from being fully translated into the objectives of effective community inclusion of the migrant population.

In this Policy Brief we are interested in the action of the city council in the reception of recently arrived migrants and applicants for international protection. It is based on the fieldwork of the Case Study carried out in the city of Granada, within the framework of the Global-ANSWER project, based on semi-structured interviews with key informants of the City Council (municipal political and technical staff, appointed for reasons of political confidence or technical competence). We observe the role of the City Council and how it coordinates with the other actors of local governance, with services and benefits that meet basic needs, responding to and attending to the problem of reception.

## 1. Introduction

For the European Committee of the Regions (2024), local and regional authorities play a key role in the implementation of migration policies, since the effects of European and national regulations directly affect local authorities. For this reason, the role of municipal social services in the management of migration is essential as they are on the front line of social care for the resident population. However, their responsiveness is often compromised. A combination of perceptions of lack of competence – as long as the population is not officially registered as residents of the municipality – and a notorious lack of resources – a shortage of personnel, time and funding – prevents services from offering comprehensive and sustained care. This situation pushes them to operate in a "crisis management" mode, intervening only in extreme emergency situations.

*"All residents of the district are served, without distinction between nationals and immigrants. Registration is a requirement to access resources and benefits, with exceptions for families with children at risk. There is a high demand for irregular immigrants, which conditions the intervention"*

(Technical staff of the City Council).

Social services interpret an emergency situation as one in which minors at risk are involved. On the contrary, the vulnerability suffered by adult migrants, who face multidimensional challenges and require a coordinated response from social services, as they arrive without resources, without psychosocial support networks, or a home, and limited access to employment is not an emergency situation nor does it require urgency to act (Latz & Lusk, 2024; Dogan & Buz, 2025).

As a direct consequence of these limitations, attention to migrants is often referred to the third sector (NGOs, associations and other civil society organizations). Although this practice could be considered as a pragmatic solution, that of understanding that there is no legal mandate and that the referral proceeds, also reveals the lack of strategy in the framework of migrations of the City Council, considering that they are not a political priority.

*"In practice, there are no clear principles or a solid framework. A lack of real prioritization of the needs of migrants is detected, which shows that they are not a political priority."*

(Technical staff of the City Council)

*"There is no structured local migration policy, but specific actions according to the urgency. Governance is based more on immediate action than on a strategic plan. There is a desire for inclusion, but there is a lack of the City Council's own tools".*

(Technical staff of the City Council)

## 2. The Role of Local Governments in the Social Inclusion of Migrant Populations

The search for security, better life prospects or family reunification characterises the complexity and dynamism of the current migration situation in the European Union. Cities become the main protagonists of this scenario, as they are the geographical gateway or destination; the places where inclusion occurs and where the day to day is lived.

Local governments, therefore, have a great responsibility in the management of migration, often disproportionate. They are the ones who must face the direct challenge of providing the population with essential services. They also ensure that there is good coexistence in the neighbourhoods, articulating initiatives for cultural exchange and the inclusion of newcomers. They work, in short, to achieve a cohesive community coexistence.

They are not responsible for the formulation of migration policies but they are responsible for their implementation. To this end, city councils must exercise political leadership, with the strategic objective of translating the regulations approved by other levels of government into the development of social inclusion policies, beyond simply offering basic public services to migrants and applicants for international protection. This requires a vision and also integrating these objectives into all municipal policies in a transversal way.

Reception and care as a fundamental pillar of inclusion, is based on access to basic services: from emergency accommodation and food, to legal guidance, education or health. This places cities, with limited resources and sometimes diffuse competences, at the epicentre from which true social cohesion and the effective inclusion of migrants in European community life take place.

The municipal response is limited for several reasons. Firstly, because a lack of competence is alleged when there are no specialised municipal social services, aimed at the migrant population.

*"The City Council acts as a resource of last resort, without competence in migration matters, focusing its attention on emergency situations. The need is prioritized more than the origin of the person."*

(Technical staff of the City Council)

### \*Key issues

**- City councils play a leading role in the leadership and political will to develop social inclusion strategies for the migrant population and those seeking international protection.**

**- Reception and care as a fundamental pillar of inclusion, is based on access to basic services.**

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*"At a technical level, actions aimed at migrants are considered but it is not an instruction that comes from the government team" (...) "There are specific initiatives, but implementation seems to depend more on the technical sector than on clear policy guidelines. This makes attention to migrants not an explicit priority."*

(Technical staff of the city council)

Secondly, because access to basic services is conditional on municipal regularisation, through registration in the city register. Only once the administrative requirement has been fulfilled is it possible, in general, for citizens to access community services, programs and public resources.

For these reasons, third sector entities assume the bulk of the provision of reception and care services and are often the real engine of care and inclusion of migrants, although the scarcity of resources and the pressure of demand are factors that characterize their role.

### 3. The problems caused by a lack of coordination in local migration management.

Various public and private actors converge in the territory that work with the migrant population itself, seeking their reception, care and social inclusion. Administrative coordination seeks the harmonization and adaptation of the decisions and activities of the different actors to achieve a specific objective that cannot be achieved by a single actor (Giljevic & Novak, 2020)

Despite this concurrence, there is fragmented and uncoordinated management, which is a persistent and significant obstacle that undermines the effectiveness of these interventions.

*"Collaboration with social entities is essential to make up for the lack of municipal resources, and governance is based more on immediate practice than on strategic planning"*

(Technical staff of the City Council)

The majority of municipal care is limited to subsistence needs, so that survival-oriented services predominate, as opposed to holistic approaches. However, the absence of a strategy between public and private actors in social services reduces the effectiveness of efforts (Dogan & Buz, 2025).

#### \* Key issues

**- The capacity to care for the migrant population is limited. A combination of perceptions of lack of competence and a notorious lack of resources prevents municipal social services from offering comprehensive and sustained care.**

#### \* Key issues

**- Coordination is one of the pillars on which local governance of migration is based, as public and private actors concur in the territory and on the population itself.**

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The effectiveness of governance is limited by several factors. There is a dispersion of competences between the different public administrations involved. The absence of clear protocols for the referral of cases or the exchange of information between these bodies can leave people in a bureaucratic limbo, delaying or preventing their access to fundamental rights.

"Weak, fragmented and under-resourced governance. They act more out of inertia or professional commitment than out of a firm and sustained policy. They often work under the motto of "passing the hot potato".

(Technical staff of the City Council)

There is also a disconnect between the city council and the network of external actors (civil society organizations, migrant associations, the private sector, and sometimes international organizations). Although they play a crucial role in responding to the needs of migrants, the absence of a formal and permanent coordination framework prevents both resources and accumulated knowledge from being fully integrated into a coherent local strategy.

*"Yes, it exists. It's not one in a very regulated way, but we do put ourselves on." (...) "We work in communication, we do not have a protocol, but we are very close to each other" (...) "Well, to exchange ideas and see how it is the best way to face this type of social problem."*

(Political responsible of the City Council)

In short, instead of a robust and articulated support network, what prevails is a sum of individual, dispersed, reactive, informal efforts, which weakens the collective capacity to address the challenges of migration in a comprehensive and sustainable manner.

*"Policies are implemented in a fragmented and welfare-oriented way. There are concrete and specific programs, but there is a lack of a structured plan or a clear and sustained intervention strategy within the excessive bureaucratization of each process to meet the needs of the people; registration, roots..."*

(Technical staff of the City Council)

## \*Key issues

**- Local governance of migration is characterized by individual, dispersed, reactive, informal action efforts that concur in the territory with the migrant population and those seeking international protection.**

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The effort of city councils to contribute to good local governance is undeniable (Zapata-Barrero, 2024). The dedication of the technical and professional staff of the services is overwhelming. But if management is fragmented, the effectiveness of reception and inclusion suffers, the exercise of migrants' rights is undermined and the potential for social capital for the local community is lost.

Why is it not possible to make progress in improving these problems?

It is easy to explain, from a practical point of view: constraints of time, staff, specific funding and roadmaps for coordination. And of course, there is a lack of political leadership to mitigate fragmentation, probably not supported by spaces of coordination with the other actors involved in the local management of migration. Administrative capacity, which is the mechanism of the political system and which translates political and collective will into actions through management and execution, suffers (Farazmand, 2009)

Ensuring that local governance of migration is based on active and systematic coordination in the territory requires a paradigm shift and also a cultural change. Their effectiveness is conditional on the strategies being comprehensive and coordinated between the different levels of government and actors involved (OECD, 2022)

City councils must prioritise coordination as the most effective way to ensure the success of migration policies in their territory, with fair and sustainable governance in European cities. For its part, Europe must allocate sufficient resources since coordination is not simply an additional burden but a return investment, which strengthens the social cohesion of cities in the face of the phenomenon of migration.

In essence, developing community inclusion policies for municipalities requires moving from a welfare approach (reactive and problem-solving) to a human rights approach (proactive, preventive and transformative). It's about building genuinely welcoming, equitable, and cohesive communities where everyone feels a sense of belonging and has the opportunity to thrive.

## \*Key issues

**- Ensuring that local governance of migration is coordinated, active and systematic in the territory requires a paradigm shift and also a cultural change. Strategies must be comprehensive and coordinated between the different levels of government and actors involved**

## 4. Public policy recommendations

### 1. Strengthen local capacities and resources in coordination.

- Provide municipalities with sufficient human and financial resources so that they can establish effective coordination mechanisms that guarantee good governance in the territory in the reception and inclusion of migrants.
- Promote continuous training in migration matters, both legal, cultural and psychosocial aspects and those of diversity management. Training must be specialized and up-to-date in order to respond effectively to increasing complexity.
- Develop and provide municipalities with the necessary practical materials (they can be Toolkits or Guides) specifically aimed at administrative coordination and with the aim of facilitating the implementation of efficient and standardised procedures.

### 2. Create structures and leadership to improve administrative coordination.

- Propose the specific designation of people from the local administration who will take responsibility and lead coordination efforts on immigration issues.
- Approve comprehensive action plans for the inclusion of migrations in a collaborative manner with local governance actors that contemplate the clear definition of roles, responsibilities and coordination mechanisms for all actions related to reception and inclusion.

### 3. To recognise and address multiple forms of violence and structural inequalities

- Strengthen municipal participation bodies and ensure the active and meaningful presence of migrant presences.
- To attend to the cultural diversity of cities, beyond the current criteria of representation for their inclusion in participatory bodies.
- Establish criteria that ensure that their voices are heard and taken into account in decisions that affect them.
- Identify networks of European cities that excel in terms of administrative coordination in local migration management, strengthening networks and promoting mutual learning between municipalities by exchanging best practices and the most innovative solutions.

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**WP 4:** RESEARCH DATA GATHERING: MULTI-SITE CASE STUDIES.

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# GLOBAL ANSWER

Social work  
and human mobility

## Policy Brief

July 2025

## Strengthening Coordination, Resources and Rights Access: Proposals for Public Policies on Migrant Inclusion

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### \*Executive Summary

The effectiveness of local inclusion policies targeting migrants is hindered by three persistent and fundamental challenges. First, institutional fragmentation and a lack of coordination across government levels create significant barriers—leading to overlaps, service gaps, and challenges for social work professionals, even impeding the continuity of inclusion processes. Second, insufficient resources and the overload of municipal social services make it difficult to sustain long-term responses, especially when addressing complex needs such as the reception of unaccompanied foreign minors and labour market integration. Finally, administrative and rights-access barriers restrict migrants' access to fundamental rights and basic services, hampering effective integration processes.

This policy briefing integrates the fieldwork carried out during secondments as part of the European Global-ANSWER project (Grant Agreement No 872209), at the *Comune di Palermo* in 2022 and at OXFAM Italia Intercultura in Tuscany in 2023 and 2024. The document emphasizes collaboration among local governments, the third sector, and civil society, providing strategic

recommendations based on field visits, academic literature, and reports. Although this analysis is informed by fieldwork in Italy, its conclusions and recommendations are fully applicable to other European countries. Challenges such as lack of coordination, dependence on external funding, and unequal implementation of integration policies are observed in many cities and regions across the European Union. The goal is to offer guidance at the European level on the necessity of increased coordination among municipal governments, the third sector, and civil society to strengthen coordination mechanisms, resources, and rights-access pathways. Policy proposals are offered to foster the inclusion of migrants and build more cohesive and resilient communities.

## 1. Introduction

Local governance and integration policies on migration in Italy have undergone notable transformations in recent decades, driven both by increased migratory flows and the need for more integrated and effective responses. According to Article 117 of the Italian Constitution, immigration legislation is exclusively a state competence (Constitution of the Italian Republic, 1947). Regions are responsible for planning, coordinating, and guiding social interventions—ensuring these are adapted to the needs of local communities, as well as verifying their respective application at the territorial level. Nonetheless, a frequent disconnect between policy design and implementation has been highlighted (Centri d'Italia, 2025; Menjivar et al., 2019; Zincone et al., 2011). Municipalities also face structural shortages of resources and competencies, leading to heavy reliance on externally funded projects and considerable variability in policies executed at the local level (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Ambrosini, 2013). Thus, the process of migrant integration in Italy is delicately balanced between diverse institutional interests and capacities.

While this analysis focuses on Italy, it is fully applicable to the broader European context. Indeed, the variability in articulation among different levels of government, as well as the lack of resources and disconnect between policy design and practical implementation, are common in cities and regions throughout Europe. An urgent need has been identified to overcome fragmentation, with an emphasis on the innovative capacity of municipalities and the third sector (Menjivar et al., 2019). Issues of local governance, dependence on external funds, and disparities in integration policy implementation are recognized challenges across many EU member states (OECD, 2018; European Parliament, 2024). For this reason, the lessons and recommendations drawn from the Italian case offer important guidance for developing more effective, coordinated, and sustainable models of migration management and local inclusion policies at the European level. Furthermore, insufficient inter-institutional coordination is compounded by the limited participation of migrant actors and the prevalence of emergency-focused, rather than long-term, integration responses. Migration is often treated as an emergency, with structural policies for migrant inclusion still lacking. Integration processes are currently implemented through projects funded by European or ministerial sources, such as FAMI (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) projects, mainly managed by third sector organizations, yet structural public policies remain absent. These findings highlight the need for flexible, participatory approaches that promote collaboration among municipalities, the third sector, and civil society to build more effective models for migrant reception and social inclusion (OECD, 2018).

## 2. Institutional Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination in Social Intervention with Migrant Populations in Italy

### Linguistic and communicative barriers to accessing institutional information

Institutional fragmentation remains a key challenge in managing migration in Italy. It not only affects coordination among the State, regions, and municipalities, but also directly impacts how social work professionals carry out their daily activities with migrant populations (Echeverría, 2024). The division of competencies and lack of a shared strategy hinder articulation among municipal, regional, and state social services, causing problems in case referral, resource coordination, and the ability to provide integrated responses. This particularly affects migrants in vulnerable situations, unaccompanied minors, and those seeking to regularize their status (Di Rosa & Gerbino, 2021; Campomori & Caponio, 2017; OECD, 2018).

In Tuscany, despite a robust network of social organizations and innovative experiences, the fragmentation of responsibilities between the regional administration and municipalities creates substantial challenges for social work professionals. These actors face differentiated protocols, inequalities in resource access, and dispersed interventions, particularly in key sectors such as reception, temporary housing, and educational support for migrant minors. Decentralization processes and disparities in municipal response capacity also produce fragmentation, disrupting the continuity of inclusion pathways and educational support, especially for migrant minors and families seeking regularization. This "confusion of rights and local practices" ultimately shifts responsibility to the municipal level and the third sector, which must develop ad hoc solutions in the absence of coordination and resources from higher levels of government (Barberis & Boccagni, 2014). The limited structured dialogue between regional entities and municipal services restricts ongoing case monitoring and complicates the drafting of individualized plans and the provision of effective social support.

In Palermo (Sicily, Italy), institutional fragmentation is evident in the daily functioning of municipal social services and the organizations collaborating on the reception of migrants and refugees. Although there are exemplary initiatives such as the *Casa dei Diritti* and youth volunteer projects, social work teams report a lack of solid referral protocols, communication gaps, and duplicated

### \* Key issues

**- Significant difficulties exist in coordinating actions among different government levels (national, regional, and municipal).**

**- The absence of clear protocols results in both duplicated efforts and gaps in attention to migrant populations.**

An illustration at the top of the page shows three people from behind, looking at their smartphones. One person is wearing a purple shirt, another a green shirt, and a third a dark shirt. They are standing in front of a light blue background with some abstract shapes.

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competencies across administrations. As a result, social workers often rely heavily on informal networks, NGOs, and neighbourhood associations to cover basic needs and provide consistent educational and social support to migrants. This places municipal services at the frontline, but without the normative capacity needed for coordinated and sustainable inclusion processes, especially in the case of unaccompanied minors and families needing regularization (Di Rosa & Gerbino, 2021; Panichella et al., 2021; OECD, 2018). The lack of clarity in assigning competencies and resources leads social work teams to operate in “grey zones,” resorting to informal practices or ad hoc cooperation with NGOs and associations to fill institutional voids. This situation makes municipal social services central actors in reception but also leaves them overwhelmed by increasing demand and limited by the absence of clear protocols and formal channels of inter-institutional support (Barberis & Boccagni, 2014; Echeverría, 2024).

## 3. Insufficient Resources and Overload in Municipal Services

Chronic resource shortages are another major obstacle for the care and integration of migrant populations in Italy, with particularly notable effects in municipal contexts such as Palermo and regions like Tuscany. Overloaded social and municipal services result in predominantly reactive, emergency-based responses, hampering the development of sustainable and personalized pathways for migrant inclusion, especially for unaccompanied minors and vulnerable families (De Leo, 2023; Barberis & Boccagni, 2014; Centri di Italia, 2025). The third sector also takes on an excessive burden and tends to manage cases from an emergency-oriented perspective rather than with a view toward progressive autonomy and integration (Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021; Di Rosa & Gerbino, 2021).

In Palermo, municipal social services and reception centres face constant pressure due to the scale and complexity of needs, compounded by high staff turnover, a lack of spaces, and insufficient material and human resources. Recent reports reveal that increased operating costs have not translated into improved service quality, but rather have led to reduced individualized support, greater overcrowding, and the proliferation of informal solutions to structural gaps—such as the reliance on community networks, NGOs, and volunteer labour (Centri di Italia, 2025). This perpetuates inequalities in access to fundamental rights like housing, health, and education,

### \* Key issues

**- There is a disconnect between public administrations and social actors, undermining the effectiveness of local inclusion policies—especially for vulnerable groups, frequently including migrants themselves, and limiting the coverage of programs.**

### \* Key issues

**- Local social services, especially in receiving municipalities like Palermo, lack sufficient material and human resources to adequately meet demand.**



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final responsibility onto precarious teams with limited capacity for long-term planning.

In Tuscany, although there is an active network of third sector organizations and innovative projects, available resources are uneven and largely dependent on unstable national and European funding as well as local political will. Social services are hampered by the lack of intercultural mediators, high staff turnover, and insufficient housing availability, all of which particularly affect support for migrant minors and families. Social work teams struggle to provide individualized plans and continuous monitoring, as the outsourcing of services to the third sector is not always supported by sufficient resources or the institutional continuity needed to ensure comprehensive interventions (Milani, 2025; Ponzo et al., 2022). In some cases, the necessary expertise to address the changing needs of migrant populations is lacking, and specialized training is needed to fully understand their specific situations. This, too, leads to emergency-driven management and reinforces territorial inequalities, often relying on improvisation and the resilience of community networks.

Thus, in both Palermo and Tuscany, insufficient resources and service overload have consolidated an attention model cantered on emergency and fragmentation, hindering more planned and inclusive integration. The combination of external funding dependency, transfer of responsibilities without adequate resourcing, and institutional discontinuity gravely compromises the guarantee of rights and the effective social inclusion of migrants (De Leo, 2023; Centri di Italia, 2025; Milani, 2025; Ponzo et al., 2022).

## 4. Administrative and Rights-Access Barriers

Administrative barriers continue to be one of the principal constraints on the effective integration of migrant populations in Italy. These difficulties manifest themselves in the complexity and slowness of procedures needed to regularize migration status, register with local authorities, or access basic rights such as housing, health, and education. The bureaucratic landscape is marked by long waiting times, documentation requirements, and unclear procedures, which, for many migrants, strip away fundamental rights for months or even years—intensifying their vulnerability and exclusion (De Leo, 2023; Barberis & Boccagni, 2014; OECD, 2018).

### \* Key issues

**- Intervention logic tends to be reactive (emergency-driven rather than preventative), with particular impact on vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied foreign minors.**

### \* Key issues

**- Access to social services, health, housing, and education is subject to complex bureaucratic procedures, lack of clear information, and obstacles to municipal registration.**

An illustration at the top of the page shows several people from behind, looking at their smartphones. One person in the foreground is wearing a purple shirt, and another is wearing a dark green shirt. The background is light blue with some abstract shapes.

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Palermo, the overload of municipal services and lack of specialized staff intensify the repercussions of these barriers. Administrative procedures are often stalled due to long waiting lists, insufficient information in different languages, and restrictive interpretations of existing regulations. This limits the continuity of social support and hinders migrants' labour and educational integration. As a result, many are forced to depend on informal networks or the support of third sector organizations to access basic goods and services, leading to unequal access based on individual capacity to navigate the system (Centri di Italia, 2025; Barberis & Boccagni, 2014).

In Tuscany, administrative criteria vary significantly between municipalities, and fragmented responsibilities result in unequal access, with rights varying greatly from one area to another. Basic processes such as child school enrolment, access to social services, or protection from gender-based violence often suffer delays, frequently relying on NGOs and volunteers for mediation—as documented by Oxfam Italia and other organizations in the region. The absence of institutionalized channels for migrant participation in policy design and evaluation hampers cultural adaptation and the effectiveness of services, perpetuating non-inclusive and fragmented responses (Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021; Milani, 2025).

Overcoming these barriers requires, in addition to streamlining procedures and strengthening the training of administrative staff, the creation of effective mechanisms for the direct participation of migrant communities and their associations in the definition, implementation, and evaluation of public policies. Article 42 of Italy's Consolidated Immigration Act No. 286/1998 establishes that territorial councils for foreigners should be convened in prefectures (Decreto Legislativo n° 286/1998, 1998). However, many prefectures have not convened these councils for years, and in most municipalities, the councils representing migrant communities have disappeared. Previous legislative proposals to allow foreign citizens with certain characteristics to vote in local elections (2009) have not been followed up.

These issues are not unique to Italy but are rather echoed across many European contexts, highlighting the need to strengthen inter-institutional coordination, ensure adequate resources, and foster the active participation of migrants. The following recommendations aim to advance toward integrated and sustainable governance models that recognize the innovative role of local administrations and the third sector to promote effective social inclusion.

## \* Key issues

**- These barriers severely affect the social inclusion of migrants, limiting their ability to integrate and participate fully in society.**

## 5. Public policy recommendations

### 1. Strengthen Institutional Coordination and Networking

- Promote the creation of permanent coordination mechanisms among different levels of government (national, regional, and municipal), establishing spaces for dialogue and joint decision-making on migration management.
- Foster the exchange of best practices and the development of joint action plans among public administrations and third sector entities, ensuring program coherence and territorial coverage across the country.

### 2. Reinforce Human and Material Resources in Municipal Services

- Increase the provision of human and material resources in local social services, prioritizing municipalities with high numbers of incoming migrants and vulnerable profiles such as unaccompanied foreign minors.
- Ensure the ongoing training of technical teams on migration, intercultural approaches, and diversity management, encouraging specialization in social intervention with migrant populations.
- Establish sustainable and territorially adapted financing systems to prevent staff precariousness and strengthen planned response capacity, transitioning from emergency-driven logics to preventative and long-term inclusion approaches.

### 3. Simplify Procedures and Eliminate Administrative Barriers to Rights Access

- Review and streamline administrative procedures related to regularization, municipal registration, and access to essential services, reducing bureaucratic obstacles affecting migrant populations.
- Set up comprehensive support and legal/social guidance points, especially for new arrivals and those in more vulnerable situations, guaranteeing non-discriminatory access to housing, health, education, and other basic services.
- Foster the active participation of migrants and their associations in identifying administrative obstacles, designing solutions, and evaluating public policies, to ensure culturally appropriate and effective approaches.

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# GLOBAL ANSWER

Social work  
and human mobility

## Policy Brief

July 2025



## Intercultural Mediation as a structural component of Social Services in Europe.

Antonio M. Lozano Martín (Universidad de Granada, España)

### \*Executive Summary

Europe's growing cultural diversity poses complex challenges for social cohesion, inclusion and the effectiveness of social services. Intercultural mediation can play an essential role, as it has proven to be an effective tool to facilitate communication and interaction between migrants and host institutions, reduce cultural conflicts, foster social inclusion and ensure effective access to public rights and services. Intercultural mediation processes approach relationships through self-strengthening (people enhance those resources that allow them to be an agent, a protagonist of their lives, while at the same time they "take charge", responsible for their actions) and the recognition of others (recognition is achieved when, given a certain degree of revaluation, we are able to recognize and show ourselves to be mutually sensitive to the situations and common human qualities of the other), in short, to overcoming the limits to relate to others (Giménez, 2001; Suárez, 1996).

However, in many European countries, intercultural mediation continues to be a one-off resource, dependent on temporary projects and with little institutionalization. This report, developed on the basis of the findings of the Global-ANSWER network, argues, on the one hand, based on evidence from recent studies and good practices, and on the other, given its positive

impact, that making intercultural mediation a structural and stable component of social services in Europe is key to achieving more cohesive societies, reduce inequalities and improve the effectiveness of migration policies.

As Di Rosa (2006) argues, mediation should not be limited to "managing diversity" as if it were a problem, but should be open to spaces of co-construction and coexistence, that is, to move from passive tolerance to the active participation of all cultures in social life. Therefore, intercultural mediation must be integrated into social services as part of a broader transformation of the care approach, making it more dialogical, inclusive and relational. It is not only a matter of caring for migrants, but of rethinking the relationship between institution and plural citizenship.

## 1. Introduction

Europe faces persistent and varied migratory dynamics such as labour, family and study migration, asylum seekers and refugees, or irregular migration or migration in a situation of administrative vulnerability. According to Eurostat, in 2023 more than 10% of the population resident in the EU was born outside their country of residence, leading to growing cultural diversity. This diversity generates new demands on health, education, social services and citizen participation. Often, social services are not sufficiently prepared to address this growing cultural, linguistic and regulatory diversity of migrant populations.

Numerous studies (OECD, 2019, 2024; FRA, 2022) identify that language barriers, institutional ignorance and mistrust of administrations hinder access to rights and benefits to essential services (health, education, housing), favouring the appearance of conflicts arising from cultural or language misunderstandings and an increase in the perception of discrimination.

Although many European countries have developed integration strategies, intercultural mediation is often seen as a marginal or ad hoc resource rather than a structural pillar of social policies.

Some of the shortcomings that have been detected are related to a. the poor integration of mediation into the ordinary action protocols of social services, health and education (Cabrera, 2021; Cuadros, 2014) b. the fragmentation of programs and dependence on short-term funding (Sales, 2008) c. the lack of professional recognition and job insecurity of intercultural mediators (Genova & Barberis, 2018) and d. the insufficient intercultural training of administration professionals (Aguado & Herraz, 2006).

There are also two legislative precedents on mediation in the European framework:

Council of Europe Recommendation R (98)1 on family mediation, adopted on 21 January 1998. This recommendation promoted the use of mediation as an alternative method of conflict resolution, especially in the family sphere, establishing principles and guidelines to promote the use of family mediation in Europe.

Member States should promote the use of family mediation as an alternative method of resolving family disputes, recognising that mediation can reduce tensions, facilitate agreements and protect the interests of the parties.

Directive 2008/52/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 on certain aspects of mediation in civil and commercial matters. In order to promote the use of mediation as an effective and efficient method to resolve conflicts in cross-border civil and commercial matters. Member States should encourage the use of mediation and ensure its quality, ensuring that agreements resulting from mediation can be declared enforceable and promoting the training of mediators and the development of voluntary codes of conduct.

## 2. Evidence of the positive impact of intercultural mediation as a structural component of Social Services on migration in Europe.

Evidence of a positive impact of intercultural mediation as a structural component of Social Services on migration in Europe can be seen in the following categories:

### 1. Better access to and use of services

Some studies show that intercultural mediation significantly reduces language and cultural barriers, increasing the use of health and social assistance services among migrant populations (Pumariiega & Pissarroia, 2017; Pumariiega, Rothe, & Pumariiega, 2005; Racioppi, 2016; Muñoz, 2013; Segura, Alaoui, & Salas, 2023; Rosa, 2025)

The Mediato project in Italy (2011) showed that the presence of cultural mediators reduced the abandonment of social and health care processes by migrants.

In Spain, the intercultural mediation programme of the General Directorate of Public Health of Valencia significantly increased the number of migrant women who accessed protection resources against gender-based violence (Alcaraz et al., 2014).

### 2. Conflict prevention and social cohesion

Intercultural Mediation in Public Services (Portugal, model transferable to European contexts) High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI). (2012). Projeto de Mediação Intercultural em Serviços Públicos (MISP). This pilot program developed in in Amadora, Cascais, Loures and Setúbal aims to show

### \* Key issues

**Intercultural mediation has been shown to be effective for:**

- **Facilitate access to health and social services for migrants.**
- **Reduce language and cultural barriers.**
- **Abandonment of care processes decreases.**

An illustration at the top of the page shows three stylized figures in a meeting. On the left, a person with dark skin and short hair is seen from the side, wearing a teal shirt. In the center, a person with light skin and long dark hair is seen from the back, wearing a yellow shirt. On the right, a person with dark skin and long hair is seen from the side, wearing a purple shirt. They are all looking towards the center. The background consists of large, soft-edged shapes in teal, yellow, and purple.

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how intercultural mediation fosters new forms of intercultural coexistence, strengthens social cohesion and can help resolve tensions in public services through teams of mediators linked to migrant communities.

Dialogic mediation and community cohesion. Turchi and Romanelli (2019). They analyze how dialogic mediation in community settings operates as a tool to reduce conflicts, promote public health and promote local cohesion.

Mediation in refugee communities in Germany, Winter (2022) shows how peer mediation between refugee communities reduces conflicts, empowers participants, and promotes trusting relationships among equals.

### 3. Institutional efficiency

Intercultural mediation reduces costs arising from misunderstandings or repeated procedures, improves interdepartmental coordination, and eases the burden on emergency services. For example, a study at the Necker Hospital in Paris indicated substantial savings in hospitalizations after implementing cross-cultural mediation (Lachal et al., 2019). And in Portugal, in the National Support Centres for the Integration of Migrants, intercultural mediators cover the gap between immigrant users and the administration, facilitating procedures and improving user satisfaction.

### 4. Commitment to human rights and non-discrimination

Equal access to social services is a basic right recognized in the European Social Charter (1996) in its article 14: "Right to benefit from social services: States should ensure universal access, without discrimination, to adequate and accessible services". Intercultural mediation contributes to realizing this right for all people, regardless of their origin.

The example of Mediation in Turin (Mosaico – Azioni per i Rifugiati) in which street mediators contact homeless people or people in situations of physical/health fragility to connect them with local services (health, social, accommodation, etc.). It is about building trust through listening, breaking down walls of cultural miscommunication and preventing conflicts.

## \* Key issues

### Intercultural mediation:

- It fosters social cohesion in multicultural contexts.
- Reduces conflicts in public services through community mediators.
- Promotes community dialogue and public health (Italy).
- Empowers and strengthens trust among refugees through peer mediation.

### Institutional Efficiency:

- Reduces costs due to misunderstandings and process repetitions.
- Improves coordination between departments and services.
- Eases the burden on emergency services.
- It facilitates administrative procedures and improves the satisfaction of migrant users.

## 4. Political Commitment

Making intercultural mediation a structural component of social services is not just a technical measure, but a political commitment to social cohesion, equal opportunities and dignity for all people living in Europe. Evidence shows that mediation improves the effectiveness of public policies, reduces costs derived from exclusion and strengthens trust between citizens and institutions.

Intercultural mediation, therefore, is not a luxury or a complement: it is a structural necessity in diverse European societies. Fully integrating it into social services will strengthen social cohesion, guarantee the rights of migrants and improve the effectiveness of public policies.

It is urgent and strategic that intercultural mediation should cease to be an abstract recommendation and should be effectively integrated into the social services of all Member States. The lack of implementation can no longer be justified: evidence shows that intercultural mediation not only improves social cohesion, but also optimizes public resources and strengthens institutional effectiveness.

Europe cannot afford to continue postponing the real incorporation of intercultural mediation: every year of inaction entails avoidable social, institutional and economic costs. The founding principles of the Union lose force if they are not translated into concrete policies: intercultural mediation is one such policy that should already be fully operational. Continuing to delay the implementation of intercultural mediation means ignoring a proven, efficient tool aligned with the cohesion and sustainability objectives of the European social model.

The evidence is clear: the benefits of intercultural mediation are manifold. The question is no longer whether it should be implemented, but why it has not yet been done. Europe cannot continue to be late to solutions that we already know work. Every day that its implementation is delayed is a missed opportunity for social cohesion and good governance.

### \* Key issues

- **Migrants face obstacles that hinder their social rights, hence the importance of proximity work and direct contact to facilitate mutual understanding, build trust and guarantee access to rights, especially in contexts of cultural diversity capable of overcoming standardised care models.**
- **Integrating mediation implies a commitment to social cohesion and equality, reduces costs and strengthens institutional trust.**
- **Every year of delay in its implementation means social, economic and institutional losses.**
- **The benefits are proved; Continuing to procrastinate is politically inadmissible.**

## 5. Public policy recommendations

### 1. Recognition and Strategic Framework

- Institutionally recognize intercultural mediation through the approval of a European Directive.
- Explicitly include it in strategic frameworks such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Integration Agenda and the Pact on Migration and Asylum.
- Link mediation to strategies to combat racism and xenophobia.
- Strengthen their preventive and conflict resolution role in community settings.
- Encourage the active participation of migrants in the design of public services.
- Promote participatory processes where mediators act as a bridge between administrations and migrant communities.

### 2. Financing and Structural Support

- Guarantee financing through structural funds for intercultural mediation in social services.
- Support the stable hiring of mediators by prioritizing the financing of projects that seek to incorporate and stabilize mediators in municipal social services.
- Include the figure of mediators in the job lists, as a regular part of the professional teams in the services.
- Incorporate mediation as a priority line when applying for European structural funds and investment.
- Encourage collaboration between public administrations and private organizations for the development of projects that incorporate mediation.
- To finance innovative mediation experiences integrated into social services for their subsequent replication.

### 3. Professionalization and Quality of Service

- Establish European standards for the professional profile of the mediator by defining common competences, training criteria and ethical principles.
- To promote specialised vocational training and qualification by promoting transnational programmes in collaboration with universities.
- Support the creation of digital resources to support the work of mediators.

## 4. Multilevel Governance and Local Cooperation

- To promote cooperation between administrations and civil society by creating collaboration mechanisms between city councils, NGOs, community entities and migrant associations.
- Creating a European network of cities for intercultural mediation
- Establish a platform for technical cooperation and exchange of good practices at the local level.

## 5. Evaluation, Evidence and Innovation

- Promote comparative research and impact evaluations by generating evidence on the effectiveness of intercultural mediation in local social services.
- Include specific indicators in the monitoring and evaluation frameworks of social policies.
- Measure the impact of mediation in terms of cohesion, access to rights and effectiveness of the public service.
- Incorporate mediation in reception and initial integration processes.
- Ensure their presence in the care circuits for asylum seekers, refugees and newly arrived migrants.

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**Website:** <https://proyectos.ugr.es/global-answer/>

**WP 4:** RESEARCH DATA GATHERING: MULTI-SITE CASE STUDIES.

**WP 5:** DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH.

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## Policy Brief

July 2025

# The right to housing for migrants and applicants for international protection: a challenge for migration policies.

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### \*Executive Summary

Access to decent housing is a fundamental human right, recognised in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 34 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. However, migrants and applicants for international protection in the EU face significant barriers to exercising this right, resulting in social exclusion, precariousness and vulnerability.

In the specific case of access to housing for migrants or applicants for international protection, the problem becomes a complex and multifaceted issue that is aggravated by a combination of structural, regulatory, socio-economic and discriminatory factors. In host countries, despite the recognition of housing as a right, its effective implementation for this population group faces serious challenges for local administrations and for the entities involved in these interventions.



# Policy Brief

This policy brief is based on existing European regulations and their application by member states on the guarantee of the right to housing for migrants and applicants for international protection in the European Union, within the framework of the European project Global-ANSWER (Grant Agreement No 872209).

Specific measures are proposed aimed at public administrations and social entities based on fieldwork and professional experience in the field of housing with the aim of offering recommendations to the authorities on how to make effective the right to decent housing for a dignified life of migrants and applicants for international protection based on the demands made by the groups involved. professionals from the administrations and social entities.

## 1. Introduction

The arrival of migrants and applicants for international protection in the EU has revealed structural deficiencies in the reception and housing systems of the Member States. A structural situation from which local administrations are not immune and which, despite the European regulations that seek to ensure adequate reception conditions, challenges persist such as the insufficiency of affordable housing, segregation in the rental market, the lack of coordination between the different levels of government and the limited capacity of local administrations to respond to these growing needs. Situations that aggravate the conditions of origin from which many of the migrants and applicants for international protection who arrive in our contexts depart.

This situation not only contravenes the fundamental principles of national and international regulations on the recognition of the right to decent housing for a dignified life, but also generates long-term negative consequences, including the marginalization of migrants, difficulties in their inclusion processes and increased risks in other dimensions such as health, security or access to employment (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020).

Despite the fact that the competences in housing policy correspond to the member states, social housing began to be seen as a service of general interest essential in the processes of social cohesion or in the fight against poverty in the European Union after the Lisbon Summit. An approach to social policy that focused on strengthened coordination, aimed at stimulating structural reforms in social protection models. An asset, that of social housing, which should be recognised as accessible and of quality throughout the territory of the European Union, an essential part of European citizenship, necessary to fully enjoy its universal rights (COM, 2004).

In the Green Paper on services of general interest (SGI), social housing is included within the social services of general interest (SSGI), with a specific role to play, together with health care, long-term care or social security, integrated into the European model of society and envisaged by the Lisbon Council of Europe in March 2000 (COM, 2004).

These essential services would include helping citizens to face life's immediate challenges; activities aimed at the acquisition of skills for their insertion into society and the labour market; those activities to guarantee the inclusion of people with long-term care needs and, finally, social housing "that allows access to housing for people with low incomes" (COM, 2006, p. 11).

## 2. Analysis of European Regulations and their implementation challenges.

European regulations establish a framework to guarantee access to housing and reception conditions for migrants and applicants for international protection:

- \* Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down rules for the reception of applicants for international protection (Reception Directive): This directive establishes common minimum standards for the reception conditions of applicants for international protection, including accommodation. It provides that Member States must ensure that they are provided with accommodation that ensures a decent standard of living and protects their health (Article 18). However, the implementation of this directive is heterogeneous between Member States, and emergency or temporary accommodation is often used that does not always meet the standards of dignity and safety.
- \* Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 laying down rules on the conditions for the recognition of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons entitled to subsidiary protection and for the content of the protection granted (Qualifications Directive): Although it does not focus directly on housing, this directive sets out the rights of people who have been granted international protection, including access to social benefits and livelihoods on the same terms as nationals. This implies, theoretically, access to the housing market on equal terms, although in practice barriers persist.
- \* Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2007/C 303/01): Article 34 recognises the right to social assistance and housing assistance, establishing that "everyone who is lawfully resident in the territory of the European Union has the right to social security benefits and social services which guarantee a dignified existence". This principle is fundamental for the interpretation and application of specific directives.

However, and despite regulatory development, we encounter structural challenges in the implementation of initiatives that guarantee rights at the local level (Council of Europe, 2023).

### \* Key issues

**- However, and despite the generation of documents carried out by the European Union itself since 2000, almost half a century later, most member states do not contemplate social housing within the benefits of public responsibility, which continues to keep this service outside the existing resources in social services despite the fact that, increasingly, it is a social need not covered by the market and with multiple structural difficulties that affect, especially, migrants and applicants for international protection.**



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- \* **Management capacity and resources:** The vast majority of local governments lack adequate financial and human resources to manage the accommodation of a growing number of migrants and protection seekers, leading to overcrowding of reception centres and a lack of dignified alternatives.
- \* **Lack of coordination:** There is a frequent disconnect between regional policies (with competences in housing management) and the needs of local authorities.
- \* **Legal framework and bureaucracy:** The complexity of administrative procedures and legal requirements to access housing can be overwhelming for migrants and protection seekers, especially those with language or information barriers.
- \* **Stigma and discrimination:** At the local level, discriminatory attitudes and stigmatisation can make it difficult to access the private rental market, even when people have the financial means to do so.
- \* **Access to information and transparency:** At the local level, there is a lack of the necessary information to offer advice and accompaniment in terms of access to housing in the intervention with migrants and applicants for international protection.

## 3. Legal and administrative barriers to access to housing for migrants and applicants for international protection

Migrants in an irregular administrative situation are the most vulnerable due to legal factors, but also to the situation of invisibility that they often present for local administrations. Excluded from access to social housing and a large part of the administrative support in terms of economic aid or professional interventions, they are excluded from any itinerary aimed at obtaining decent housing for a dignified life (FOESSA, 2023)

It has been detected that the absence of a residence permit makes it difficult or impossible to rent legally in the private market, forcing them to resort to informal networks, precarious housing and even substandard housing in overcrowded situations. In many cases, the legislation favours the creation of what has been called the "irregularity circle" where non-access to the right to registration prevents access to housing, and the lack of housing makes it difficult to register or obtain an employment contract (Andalucía Acoge, 2022).

Bureaucratic requirements in access to housing is another element that is detected as a hindrance to access housing, even for migrants in a regular situation.

With increasingly extreme and limited conditions of access to free market housing, the requirements requested for migrants who are

### \* Key issues

**- The lack of stable and decent housing is a fundamental obstacle to the inclusion processes of migrants. It affects various dimensions of social exclusion and hinders access to numerous rights ranging from employment, education or health care, perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability.**

looking for housing are practically unattainable (stable employment contracts, bank guarantees, high deposits, etc.). Real estate companies and landlords often demand disproportionate conditions, such as very high incomes or the need for Spanish guarantees, which excludes many migrants who have just arrived or are in precarious jobs.

Access to decent housing is also a fundamental constraint to family reunification: Family reunification regulations may require the justification of adequate housing and sufficient economic resources, which becomes an additional barrier for migrant families to live together in decent conditions (CEAR, 2024).

These legal and administrative barriers have direct consequences on the processes of social inclusion of migrants and applicants for international protection but, above all, they account for how housing is a cross-cutting and essential issue for the regularization of migrants and access to the rights that are recognized and that are associated with the existence of housing. of a household (CEAR, 2023)

## 4. Discrimination and Xenophobia as structural dimensions in access to housing in the free market

Access to housing is a fundamental human right and an essential pillar for an adequate process of social inclusion in host societies for migrants and applicants for international protection. However, numerous reports show that migrants, especially those belonging to ethnic or racial minorities, face significant obstacles in the rental and home purchase market (CEAR Reports 2023, 2024; FOESSA 2023 Reports; Andalusia Hosts 2022; Provivienda, 2025)

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has repeatedly published reports highlighting discrimination in access to housing. For example, its report "Being Black in the EU" (2019) and "Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II)" (2017) document experiences of discrimination in various areas, including housing, based on racial or ethnic origin. Highlighting the gap between legislation and the effective enforcement of anti-discrimination laws.

Direct and indirect discrimination against landlords who reject tenants based on their national origin, ethnicity, or appearance, or practices that, while not explicitly discriminatory, have a disproportionate impact on migrants (e.g., excessive income requirements or lack of recognition of qualifications obtained abroad) (Provivienda, 2025)

### \* Key issues

**- Housing precariousness exposes migrants to situations of exploitation by unscrupulous owners who rent inadequate housing at exorbitant prices, taking advantage of their desperation and limited bargaining power.**

**- It is essential that the administrations are involved in the control and monitoring of all discriminatory manifestations present in the right of access to housing of migrants and applicants for international protection**

Xenophobia and prejudice that are visualized through negative attitudes and stereotypes that lead to stigmatization and rejection of migrants in the neighborhood or by owners. Episodes of rejection that not only have to do with access to housing but also with the public resources in which they are housed within, for example, international protection systems.

## 5. Socio-economic and information barriers in the management of the right to housing in local administrations

Socio-economic and information barriers in the management of the right to housing in local administrations pose a serious barrier to access to decent housing for migrants and applicants for international protection.

Some socioeconomic barriers to access to housing are detected that have to do with job instability and low income of migrants, especially newcomers or those with precarious status, who face difficulties in finding stable and well-paid employment, which limits their economic capacity to access housing on the free market or even meet the requirements for social housing (CEAR, 2024).

Information and management barriers in local administration and social services have also been identified and highlighted, among others, the lack of accessible and multilingual information on social housing programmes, rental assistance, legal requirements and administrative procedures that is often not available in languages that migrants understand or in easy-to-understand formats.

In addition to the bureaucratic complexity in which the procedures for applying for social housing or aid can be long, complex and require extensive documentation that migrants may have difficulty obtaining or understanding, there is a lack of knowledge of rights and resources that many migrant migrants who are not aware of their rights as tenants may have. nor of the support services they can access.

According to CEAR (2024) it is important to highlight the linguistic and cultural barriers, the lack of training of the staff of social entities and social services who often lack adequate training in intercultural competences and in the particularities of the situation of migrants and the lack of coordination between services in which the fragmentation of services (housing, employment, social services) can hinder comprehensive and effective care.

These barriers perpetuate social exclusion, increase the risk of homelessness and make it difficult for migrants to fully participate in society.

### \* Key issues

**- The absence of a system of information, advice and specialised support from the administrations themselves for migrants and applicants for international protection in housing matters generates situations of inequalities and violation of rights.**

**- Centralizing information and training professionals is essential for access to accessible, dignified public housing.**

## 6. Inadequacy of reception and housing policies

Access to housing is a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for the social, economic and cultural inclusion of migrants. However, the current reality often exposes migrants to a series of barriers intrinsic to reception policies themselves and the lack of adequate housing strategies.

In this regard, it is important to highlight how the insufficiency of reception places with a chronic lack of decent accommodation places in the reception systems of many Member States, especially during peaks of arrival, is highlighted as a relevant barrier in the care of migrants from social services. Overcrowding, the use of inadequate facilities (such as gymnasiums or makeshift camps) and, in some cases, homelessness among asylum seekers and migrants are violations of rights that are evident in daily professional practice.

The reported overload prevents reception systems from fulfilling their role of providing stability and initial support.

Migrants, even after obtaining legal status (refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection), often remain in reception centres or temporary accommodation for excessively long periods due to a lack of market-available housing options or support to access them. This extension of the status of "fostered" hinders autonomy, access to employment and community integration, as well as generating uncertainty.

There is a link between reception policies and long-term housing strategies in which competent administrations omit any public responsibility they may have, without public housing strategies or coordination between institutions. Often, reception policies are designed as temporary emergency solutions, without a clear connection or transition strategy towards long-term housing solutions and integration into the general or social housing market.

Many national and local housing policies are not adapted to address the particularities of migrants, such as lack of credit history, the need for linguistic/cultural support, or trauma and specific vulnerabilities.

Prioritizing national citizens in social housing or waiting lists can indirectly discriminate against migrants (Juan, 2012)

In addition, the lack of adequate support and advice for the "leap" of the reception system to the housing market or social housing is a serious problem that favors that all these barriers not only violate human rights and the principles of solidarity established in the different regulations, but also generate long-term economic and social costs. by hindering social inclusion and favouring spaces of chronic exclusion or situations of extreme vulnerability.

## 5. Public policy recommendations

### 1. Strengthen the implementation and monitoring of the Reception Directive

- Actively monitor and enforce the standards of the Reception Directive, including the right to decent accommodation, and establish sanction mechanisms for Member States that do not comply with them.
- Establish more rigorous monitoring mechanisms to assess the quality of housing provided, including indicators on privacy, access to basic services, and safety.
- Support the collection of disaggregated data at local and national levels on migrants' access to housing and social services, identifying the specific barriers they face. This data is crucial for evidence-based decision-making.

### 2. Encourage investment in affordable and social housing

- Promote the use of EU funds (such as the European Regional Development Fund and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) for the creation of social and affordable housing adapted to the needs of these populations.
- Explicitly prioritise access to decent housing for migrants in the allocation of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESF+, ERDF), and ensure that the projects financed have a direct impact on improving housing conditions and integration.
- Study and disseminate good practices from Member States that have succeeded in integrating a significant number of migrants into the housing market (e.g. through supported social rental schemes, bank guarantees or access to finance).

### 3. Strengthen the capacities of local authorities

- Develop specific funding programmes and technical assistance for local administrations, enabling them to improve their capacity for management and coordination in housing and sheltering.
- To promote the exchange of good practice between local authorities in different Member States.
- Explore and share good practices in microcredit or public guarantees to help migrants cover the initial costs of rent.

### 4. Combat discrimination and promote inclusion

- Support awareness-raising campaigns at the local level to combat stigma and discrimination in access to housing.

## 4. Combat discrimination and promote inclusion (Cont.)

- Fund initiatives that provide legal advice and support to migrants and protection seekers to navigate the rental market and defend their rights.
- Collaborate in the financing from the administrations through financing and technical leadership projects of social housing, assisted housing and specifically aimed at migrants and refugees, which facilitate their autonomy and roots in the communities.

## 5. Promote multilevel coordination and collaboration

- To facilitate platforms for dialogue and cooperation between European, national and local levels, as well as with civil society organisations, to develop more coherent and integrated housing strategies.
- Encourage the creation of "one-stop shops" at the local level that offer comprehensive information and assistance on housing and other essential services.
- Financially support social housing, assisted housing and "housing first" projects specifically aimed at migrants and people seeking international protection, which facilitate their autonomy and roots in communities.

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## Policy Brief

July 2025

# **Guarantee accessibility to local social services for the migrant population and applicants for international protection. The central role of social work.**

Eva María Juan Toset (Universidad de Granada, España)

### **\*Executive Summary**

Local administrations are the first line of contact for migrants and applicants for international protection in many member states, and their social services are essential to ensure access to rights and inclusion processes. Social work, a reference profession for protection systems at the local level in the European Union, plays a central role in the implementation of regulatory measures. In addition, it makes it possible for social policies and social services to guarantee rights, favour people's dignity and promote the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups.

This Policy Brief includes a work of systematization and review of sources that highlights the value of social work as a profession of reference in social services, but, fundamentally, how social work should be a profession that guarantees practices with a human rights approach, focusing our attention on interventions with migrants and applicants for international protection.

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Although the European Union does not directly legislate on national social welfare systems, it does set common objectives, coordination frameworks and financing that influence national policies. In this context, social work is crucial for accessibility, practical implementation and the analysis of elements that interfere in this implementation, which is why recommendations are included, within the framework of the European project Global-ANSWER (Grant Agreement No 872209).

## 1. Introduction

In the construction of a European social model, since the Lisbon Strategy, the European institutions have contributed to the creation of what has been called the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2017). It highlights adequate and sustainable social protection, as well as access to high-quality essential services. Employment services and social services are an integral part of active labour market policies, but they are also a reinforcement in the face of emerging situations related to poverty and social exclusion, in order to combat the generational transmission of poverty, the situation of the working poor or the needs of families.

We could say that, since the Lisbon Strategy and to date, key concepts, such as social inclusion and/or exclusion, have been consolidated beyond the scientific literature, and will favour their dissemination at the institutional level in the different community documents, incorporating processes associated with the social risk of vulnerable groups and extending them to new population groups (Haynes, 2015). New socially disadvantaged communities appear that are included in the scope of intervention of social services of general interest, initially and, subsequently, of the successive strategies that reach the present day.

However, one of the reasons why these interactions have not had the expected impact from the Community institutions is because, despite the undeniable role of the transnational processes that take place in the field of European social policy, the weight of national institutions and intellectual traditions is still strong and the analysis of the language of social policy must place the concepts in the study of their national context (Béland, 2011).

Although it is considered that social services should be included among the services that guarantee a dignified life, they are key to well-being and social inclusion, the truth is that their accessibility differs significantly depending on the context. Also according to the practical approaches from which these strategies are applied (European Commission, 2024).

In short, the efforts of the European institutions do not cross borders, even at the local level. What is observed is an absence of follow-up in the processes of translation, from supranational structures to more micro scenarios, with the consequent negative consequences for the objectives of the European regulations themselves and the loss of knowledge and its application.

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## 2. The "non-perception" or "non-take-up" of social services, as a human right, in migrants.

The phenomenon of "non-perception" is defined by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter (2022), as a waste of public resources that significantly undermines the effectiveness of social protection in reducing poverty and inequalities. According to the Rapporteur, it is possible to cushion this effect by rethinking "social protection as a human right and not as a work of charity" (De Schutter 2022; 1) carrying out a series of changes that involve not only the modernisation of protection systems but also their accessibility, monitoring and evaluation.

Some of the factors located in social services for "non-perception" can be found in the lack of information to people about their rights, the imposition of obstacles in the name of detecting possible fraud or the stigmatization of applicants, mainly in the most marginalized populations, including migrants. Finally, it is important to note that "non-perception" may have its origin in the design of the services themselves and in the functions designated and assumed by the different professions, present in these services, which generates a perception of failure not only in the individual, but also in the services themselves and in the protection systems in general (De Schutter, 2022)

According to the Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur (2022) on the non-perception of rights in the context of social protection, although much progress has been made in recent decades in the development of social protection systems and in their consolidation in the national legislation of the different countries, the gaps in coverage are still significant. and people are left out of social protection schemes due to legal exclusion, over-targeting and needs-based rather than rights-based approaches.

This situation of inaccessibility not only contravenes legislation, but also makes the normative and legislative production that occurs at the national and international level paradoxical. In other words, while supranational bodies continue to move towards models based on the Europeanisation of social services, there are elements specific to local contexts that impede regulatory development but also access to human rights that are subordinated to charitable care models, or to professional approaches that are inappropriate for the rule of law. subject to democratic principles and standards.

### \* Key issues

**- The "non-perception" of the right to social protection is a failure of the rule of law and welfare, not of the individual.**

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The right to social protection, including social services, has very direct implications and is included in national and regional legislation. For many vulnerable groups, including the migrant population, access to these systems is essential for a dignified life, but, above all, to recognize these people as holders of rights. In this sense, it is essential to recognize that the right to social services does not end with the provision of resources and/or benefits on paper, but must be translated into effective coverage and the perception of rights in practice for the most vulnerable groups, especially migrants, making the rights that welcome them accessible and perceptible.

"Non-perception" has enormous costs related not only to structural aspects (increased poverty, reduction of economic income, inaccessibility to education, health or housing systems, social exclusion, etc.) but also to psychosocial repercussions that erode trust in states, in their professionals and in inclusive social models.

Despite the fact that "non-perception" is a phenomenon that is still little known by public and private institutions, estimates as an indicator of the ineffectiveness of public policies are scarce since governments do not regularly collect this data. Despite this, according to Eurofound (2023), the rate of "non-perception" in the European Union is over 40% among the population.

In the European context, the "non-perception" of social rights is a serious problem in the lives of millions of people in Europe that affects, paradoxically, the most vulnerable people such as migrants. Those people who are most in need of social protection because the procedures are too complex and are the source of discrimination and the non-appropriation of social rights and services (Council of Europe, 2023).

## \* Key issues

**- Addressing "non-perception" should be a priority for all administrations and for all professionals involved in the different protection systems, including local social services.**

### 3. The central role of social work in social services as a profession that guarantees rights: a pending issue.

In Europe, growing neoliberalism is changing the institutional framework and policy orientation of these states to the local level. This is a challenge for the continuity of protection systems as we have understood them until now, by questioning what the role of the State is and how the principle of solidarity inspires the regulatory and distribution function, through its social policies. Among the challenges faced by these services, it is worth noting that many policy guidelines limit support for migrants or other vulnerable groups. (Dewanckel et al., 2022).

In this heterogeneous scenario, we observe how the different social services create unequal access to resources, while at the same time imposing discourses in which the most vulnerable groups are held responsible for their lack of success or prolongation of exclusion despite the

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ideas all of which are linked to neoliberalism. These stories focus on migrants, applicants for international protection, people of color or people from ethnic minorities.

In these situations, social work is a privileged profession to be able to observe the growing discrepancy between the formal recognition of rights and how these rights are substantially realized in practice (Dewanckel et al., 2022: 7). A profession oriented towards the defence and achievement of human rights that, on too many occasions, is immersed in systems with charitable or needs approaches, where procedures focus on determining who is or is not worthy of receiving aid by evaluating their behaviour and considering their causes of marginalisation, poverty or disease (Mapp et al. 2019).

The Rapporteurs on the Human Rights of Migrants (e.g., Gehad Madi) and on Adequate Housing (e.g., Balakrishnan Rajagopal) have consistently emphasized that States must ensure unconditional access to essential services (health, education, emergency housing) for all people, regardless of their migration status, and have criticized administrative barriers and discrimination (OHCHR, 2024; OHCHR, 2024b). Social work is key to facilitating this access.

Human rights are essential to social work and to the practice of this profession. And training is essential to acquire knowledge, which materializes in the necessary competencies to address professional functions in the different protection systems, and which are aimed at promoting equality, social justice, participation, non-discrimination or accountability, within the different welfare states (Gabel et al. 2022).

However, theory is one and practice is another. The practice of human rights in professional interventions in the different social protection systems continues to be a pending subject for social work as a reference profession, historically linked to the protection systems in the different states (Reynaert et al., 2022).

The remnants of welfare states and neophilanthropy (Dewanckel et al., 2022) are favouring a changing reorientation of social work that, on too many occasions, go hand in hand with the reconfigurations of protection systems and social services. These practices increasingly involve the distribution of food, donations of clothing or furniture, and where social benefits such as housing, welfare services, education or long-term care are no longer part of social protection systems, which are increasingly distant from the exercise of rights.

With a strong roots in contexts as a profession, social work has remained in a complex place while social services modernized, contemporary challenges hit the realities of social policies, democracies advanced and states took on new challenges hand in hand with diversity, interculturality or the development of second and third generation rights. through national and international regulations. A scenario in which we cannot ignore the fact that States – and where appropriate, the relevant government authorities – are responsible for guaranteeing adequate human rights preparation, fundamentally, of those that, like social work, must integrate rights into training and practice (United Nations, 2011).

## \* Key issues

**- Human rights training is a prerequisite for realizing all human rights.**

## 4. Public policy recommendations

### 1. Promote the universality of social services and ensure a human rights approach in social protection systems

- Develop information strategies on access to rights for migrants with the participation of racialized or ethnic minority experts with effective communication and information tactics.
- Reduce the administrative complexity of benefits, paying special attention to the monitoring of people and groups with the greatest risk of exclusion.
- Monitor the "non-perception" in the different services for the evaluation of incidents and the development of effective strategies.
- Generate coordination mechanisms between local, regional and national administrations to ensure that migration policies are implemented with a rights-based approach and from the accessibility of services and benefits.

### 2. Prioritize Continuous Training in Human Rights by promoting Research and the Generation of Evidence in social work

- Include as a mandatory condition in projects and initiatives funded by the European institutions training in a *rights-based approach* for social workers. Training provided by public bodies and that favours social innovation and good practices with migrants and asylum seekers.
- Prepare studies on the real impact of migration policies on people's human rights, identifying the role of local social services with a rights-based approach and good social work practices transferable to other states.
- Urge the collection of disaggregated statistical data to the administrations with European funding, which allow a more precise understanding of the living conditions and violations of rights that affect the different groups of the migrant population.
- Compile in a research bank the successful experiences that demonstrate the value of a human rights approach in migrant social work, through the different existing commissions and with expert voices from social work.

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## Policy Brief

July 2025

# The importance of interculturality in ensuring the rights of migrants and persons seeking international protection within local social services.

Eva María Juan Toset (Universidad de Granada, España) &  
Belén Morata García de la Puerta (Universidad de Granada, España)

### \*Executive Summary

The effective protection of the human rights of the migrant population and those seeking international protection requires the incorporation of interculturality as a key factor in migration and social policies at the local level. Interculturality has been understood as a model of diversity management, as an emerging paradigm and an ethical-political project. In the European normative framework and in international human rights law, the two issues are deeply linked. However, on-the-ground implementation often raises gaps that violate the dignity and fundamental rights of migrants.

Migration policies are formulated at the European and national levels, but it is the cities and municipalities that are in contact and interaction with the migrant population and who are responsible for implementing the processes of social inclusion, in all its dimensions. Consequently, incorporating an integrated intercultural perspective into the human rights approach is not only a legal responsibility but is also the social cohesion strategy that allows, at the local level, to effectively relate interculturality with the principles of identity and mutual understanding.



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This *Policy Brief* considers that the intercultural perspective, integrated into the rights-based approach, fosters social cohesion in the reception and care of migrants and applicants for international protection at the local level, as a guarantee of human rights. Based on the review of European and international reference documents and on the research carried out in the European project, Global-ANSWER proposes the inclusion of interculturality as a dimension to be considered in the rights-based approach, which should inspire migration management at the local level, in order to bridge the gap between migration policy-making and implementation, ensuring that both municipal policy and services are in line with international and European commitments. This document recommends how to make effective the recognition of the rights of migrants and applicants for international protection, valuing cultural diversity as an asset, and transforming social services, adapting them to the needs of a diverse society.

## 1. Introduction

The social inclusion of migrants in host societies is one of the most relevant issues that are occurring in the global world, whether it is an issue included in the political agenda of national governments or if there are no public strategies for its consideration. Human mobility not only poses challenges in the management of flows and borders but also impacts the quality of life and well-being, affecting human rights and, especially, those of those who may face various vulnerabilities.

Europe is devoting significant regulatory and financial efforts to ensure that the principles that underpin the values of its social model and which are the basis of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights) are fully applied in the member states, in their social protection systems. Strictly speaking, it means that national legislation and policy frameworks are aligned with international human rights standards and that there are no gaps between formal applicability and the actual enjoyment of such rights (IOM, 2009).

It is essential, therefore, that policies are designed and implemented with a rights-based approach, and this is where interculturality makes sense. Unlike multiculturalism, interculturality pursues equitable interaction, mutual respect and dialogue, and the recognition of diversity as an engine of human and social development (UNESCO, 2001). The defence of cultural diversity is inseparable from respect for human dignity, and this implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Consequently, human rights are the guarantors of cultural diversity (Donders, 2010)

In this context of multilevel governance, cities and municipalities are the main places in the lives of the people who inhabit them and it is at the local level where the challenges and opportunities of migration are experienced. Improving the population's life expectancy is connected to access to housing, education, health care, employment and community participation. All of these issues are linked to the respect and promotion of the human rights of migrants that must be guaranteed through politics.

However, migration policies often focus on issues more related to security and control, neglecting the dimension of integration at the local level (Caponio & Jones, 2018; Ruiz, 2013).

Migration policies, social services and inclusion strategies appear as watertight compartments, without an integrative vision that addresses the rights of migrants and those seeking international protection, prioritizing their dignity and well-being.

If migration policies and social services do not take these approaches into account, the migrant population faces situations of discrimination that contravene human rights and hinder inclusion processes, which can be seen in barriers to access to housing, or the lack of culturally sensitive support or the establishment of incomprehensible bureaucracies or the absence of accessible information (FRA, 2017; OECD/European Union, 2023). In addition to being contrary to the fundamental principles of the European Union, it exposes the vulnerable population to the social reproduction of poverty, perpetuating situations of exclusion for future generations.

## 2. The promotion of the intercultural perspective, integrated into the human rights approach, for the local management of migration.

Integrating a human rights approach into local migration policies means that all people, regardless of their migration status, must be treated with dignity and have their fundamental rights guaranteed (Chemelil, 2024). Their origin or identity does not matter (FRA, 2023). This approach is intrinsically linked to the principle of non-discrimination and seeks to empower individuals as rights-holders. From a practical point of view, it leads to adequate responses to the needs of migrants, especially those seeking international protection, who often face systemic barriers that hinder inclusion and recognition of rights (Catarci, 2021).

Guaranteeing the human rights of the migrant population is related to access to basic services without discrimination, protection against xenophobia, and the promotion of their participation in civic life. In this sense, local administrations and, specifically, their social services become the appropriate scenario in which to translate the principles of human rights into concrete practices that are oriented from an intercultural perspective. Doing so improves the effective interaction and social mobility of newcomers, which translates into proper recognition of rights. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has repeatedly emphasised the importance of the local level for the protection of migrants' human rights (FRA, 2019).

### \*Key issues

**- Human rights are the guarantors of cultural diversity.**

**- Guaranteeing the human rights of the migrant population is related to access to basic services without discrimination, protection against xenophobia, and the promotion of their participation in civic life.**

It also means that institutions and services make the effort to adapt in order to respond effectively to the rights of a diverse population. It should not be expected that it is the migrant population that necessarily carries out unilateral integration processes, with the consequent damages that may arise (Zapata-Barrero, 2017). Among them, inequality and discrimination are pointed out, starting from a disadvantaged position. The situation of vulnerability, sometimes of exploitation. Also the lack of social networks and isolation, in addition to the multiple language and cultural barriers. All these factors highlight the complexities of the process and the need to avoid individual or collective harm, so change must be promoted by public institutions, as a host society.

Interculturality, on the other hand, goes beyond the mere coexistence of different cultures (multiculturalism). In the local context, it implies the recognition of diversity; interaction and dialogue; equal opportunities or institutional transformation by adapting institutions and public services to be sensitive to diversity and respond effectively to the needs of all people (Council of Europe, 2017). It is defined as a process of equitable interaction between diverse cultures, which seeks to generate shared cultural expressions, acquired through dialogue and an attitude of mutual respect (UNESCO, 2001). The literature refers to it as "the conflictive relationship between the promotion of human rights and the promotion of cultural diversity" (Ekern, 2017), which goes a step further by wanting to make a simultaneous treatment: cultural belonging is fundamental for the construction of the human self. And if the "culture" we consider denies its members human rights, it will not be able to respond to their aspirations for

## \*Key issues

**- It is institutions and services that must make the effort to adapt in order to respond effectively to the rights of a diverse population, not the other way around.**

**- Interculturality is a process of equitable interaction between diverse cultures, which seeks to generate shared cultural expressions, acquired through dialogue and an attitude of mutual respect (UNESCO, 2001).**

## 3. Factors that hinder the incorporation of interculturality, a human rights approach, in local social services.

A human rights approach to social services means that the provision of social services is neither discretionary nor ex-gratia, but the realization of an inherent right, which means that services must be: (1) Accessible: Without geographical, economic, physical or informational barriers. (2) Available: In sufficient quantity and quality to meet the needs of the population. (3) Acceptable: Culturally appropriate, ethical, and respectful of diversity. (4) Quality: Effective, professional and focused on individual needs. (5) Non-discriminatory: Offered to all equally, without distinction. (6) Participatory: Users must be involved in the decisions that affect them. (7) Transparent and Responsible: With clear accountability and grievance mechanisms (Council of Europe, 2010).

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For European regulations, the systematic integration of a human rights approach in local social services provides guarantees for people who require special interest, such as migrants or applicants for international protection. These translate into more effective and person-centred services, considered as rights-holders, and where services and resources are designed to defend their rights and promote their autonomy.

However, incorporating interculturality as a dimension of the human rights approach in the local management of migration faces different obstacles that hinder its effectiveness and that, in a simple way, can be catalogued as follows: the lack of a coherent strategy that connects apparently disconnected or watertight areas is evident: inclusion policies, social services, employment and culture. There is also no cross-cutting approach to human rights and interculturality and the participation of minority groups is scarce, so that very often, the voices and needs of migrant and minority communities are not adequately included in decision-making (Caponio & Jones, 2018).

At the macro level, there is a principle of cultural homogeneity in host societies, as European states have been built on the premise that this is natural and desirable (Ruiz, 2013). Cultural or identity aspirations could be perceived by the indigenous population as a dangerous threat. In a democracy, conflicts of diversity can be solved by law. However, the cultural norms and values of the majority influence the interpretation and application of human rights. As long as the law continues to be the patrimony of the State, there will be no balance between the different interests represented by the State (those of the homogeneous majority) and those of minority communities (Agyare, 2024)

As a consequence of the above, the culture and organization of local services serves and is designed for the homogeneous majority. There is an added factor, which is the recurrent insufficiency of financial and human resources. Establishing services that are adequate, with inclusive and human rights-based policies, may be a desirable issue (a "must-be") but one that is postponed due to structural deficiencies; Strategies to eliminate or minimize all those obstacles that prevent the migrant population from fully accessing basic services are relegated over time. In other words, there are no resources for a greater understanding of the needs and realities, to approve more inclusive or adapted measures, to prevent

## \*Key issues

**- There is no coherent strategy that connects apparently disconnected or watertight areas: inclusion policies, social services, employment and culture.**

**- The cultural homogeneity and structural deficiencies of social services hinder the incorporation of interculturality as a dimension to be incorporated into the management of local social services.**



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discrimination and xenophobia, to encourage the participation of the migrant population and, in short, to value diversity as an asset, a source of wealth and opportunities that enriches the organisation and functioning of services and improves opportunities for local development.

Finally, in the field of professional intervention with migrants, there is a lack of intercultural competences, which include both self-awareness and awareness of other cultures, respect and empathy, and intercultural communication skills. Knowing how to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers and adapt messages to the sensitivities of the migrant population requires specialized training that is frequently omitted from the training plans of the personnel who attend social services and that is left to each professional who, in a particular way, decides and spends their time outside of work. In acquiring tools that allow overcoming many of the problems they face daily in the intervention. Many of them arise from cultural misunderstandings, from not respecting the culture and decisions of migrants, from not knowing how to deal with ethical dilemmas or difficulties of understanding, which, in the long run, increases the situation of discomfort and emotional fatigue of professionals who are already very saturated and pressured with the daily functioning of services.

The organisation of social services does not consider the migrant population as an asset, but quite the opposite: as a problem for which they have no solution and prefer to refer to the third sector. This vision ends up going beyond professional intervention, which continues to act as if the beneficiary population were EU nationals or foreigners, with a standardised perspective on the use of available resources and services. This partly explains why migrants and social protection seekers are excluded from participation, who act as passive subjects in the processes that manage and decide their own inclusion in the community.

Social services and professional intervention in the front line cease to be a fundamental safety net because the application of rights cannot be thought of today if it does not incorporate diversity and minority approaches. Inclusion and diversity is an indispensable binomial that, otherwise, perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability and exclusion, which undermines social cohesion and the potential for inclusion of the migrant population.

## \*Key issues

**- It is not possible to work with the migrant population without having intercultural skills that must be trained by the public administration itself.**

**- Migrants and social protection seekers are excluded from participation, who act as passive subjects in the processes that manage and decide their own inclusion in the community.**

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Along with all this, there is one factor, and no less important, that must be considered. The incapacity and lack of competence of organizations and their professionals, as a result of the absence of social inclusion policies, from an intercultural perspective, and the focus of migrations on issues of control and public order, can favor the emergence of hostile discourses that can have a boomerang effect and impact on the policies themselves. tightening and further restricting access to rights for migrants, reinforcing the risk factors of social exclusion that, logically, will also impact the social and economic development of cities.

To improve this situation, a new reading of human rights based on the ideas of inclusion and diversity is needed, as an inseparable binomial. The management of diversity, from a human rights perspective, requires a reinterpretation of these rights of the majority and a redefinition of the creation of the mechanisms of law (Agyare, 2024).

Integrating a human rights approach and the principle of interculturality in migration policies and social services is not a luxury for good times, but an indispensable element for a European Union, of respect for its own values to promote inclusive and prosperous societies. The European Commission has a unique opportunity to lead this change, providing the strategic framework, financial support and political momentum needed to ensure that the dignity and rights of all people, including migrants, are fully realised. In doing so, the EU not only strengthens its democracies and social cohesion, but also positions itself as a global benchmark in the humanitarian and inclusive management of diversity.

## \*Key issues

**- The absence of social inclusion policies, from an intercultural perspective, and the focus of migrations on issues of control and public order, can favor the emergence of hostile discourses that, with a boomerang effect, have a negative impact on the policies themselves.**



## 4. Public policy recommendations

### 1. Develop an EU Framework on Social Services with a Rights-Based Approach.

- Explicitly integrate the principles of human rights and interculturality into migration and social services policies, including clear objectives and monitoring mechanisms.
- Establish clear operating principles and minimum standards in the provision of municipal social services, with a human rights approach, establishing that they include accessibility, participation and non-discrimination.
- Improve European funding for projects that promote accessibility to the migrant population, with a focus on human rights and interculturality.

### 2. Introduce an intercultural dimension in the organization and management of local public services that serve the migrant population and those seeking international protection.

- Promote mandatory training programmes for social service personnel, migration authorities and other public administrations, focusing on intercultural competence, non-discrimination and the rights-based approach.
- Facilitate intercultural exchange by seeking interaction and mutual enrichment for a better understanding of needs and realities, with more inclusive and adaptive strategies
- Promote the hiring of intercultural mediators and bilingual staff in all public services serving the migrant population, to overcome language and cultural barriers.

### 3. Strengthen Monitoring and Accountability.

- Support the collection of disaggregated data at local and national levels on access to social services and the impact of migration policies on different groups of migrants, to identify gaps and assess the effectiveness of measures.
- Strengthen the role of equality bodies and national human rights institutions in monitoring the application of a human rights and intercultural approach in social services and migration policies.
- Integrate human rights indicators into social policy monitoring and evaluation frameworks at EU and Member State level, with the support of the FRA.

## 4. Promote the Exchange of Good Practices and Innovation.

- Establish a "European Network of Intercultural Social Services" to facilitate the exchange of good practices, tools and methodologies between Member States and local authorities in the provision of culturally sensitive and rights-based services.
- Fund innovative pilot projects that explore new models of social services and migration policies that demonstrate successful integration of these approaches

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**WP 4:** RESEARCH DATA GATHERING: MULTI-SITE CASE STUDIES.

**WP 5:** DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH.

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## Policy Brief

July 2025

# Data in Action: Towards Evidence-Informed Management of Social Services for the Care of the Migrant Population

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### \*Executive Summary

Social workers, in their professional practice, generate a huge amount of data every day from case histories, observations, digital records, questionnaires, and more. Yet, the lack of training in research methodology—particularly quantitative methods—limits their capacity to transform that information into actionable evidence that can enhance decision-making at the micro level (direct intervention with individuals, families, and communities).

Despite an awareness of the importance of quantitative data analysis, qualitative approaches still predominate; quantitative methods are perceived as “difficult” or “of little use”, which reduces the adoption of predictive analytics, impact evaluation, or data visualisation.

This policy brief sets out the importance of data analysis for decision-making in the field of migration and the need for training along these lines. Addressing this gap is urgent, as biases can be reproduced, resources wasted and transparency towards users and funders limited.

The proposed methodology is based on the proper systematisation of data collection by social workers at the micro level, their analysis by multidisciplinary teams and the transfer of results for the improvement of actions, following European guidelines (Jensen, 2019; Metcalfe & Dencik, 2019).

## 1. Introduction

In the European Union there is not yet a single, daily-use form for all countries, comparable to Spain's Social Services Users Information System (SIUSS), into which the autonomous communities and hundreds of municipalities dump their case files in the field of migration. It is a common form that essentially includes socio-demographic, family-related and social-intervention variables.

Certainly, in the EU there are regulatory and technical instruments that allow a common and cumulative data collection, although this is an ongoing and unfinished process. Starting from the Spanish case—but the same happens in countries such as Italy—two main problems can be identified, which can be extrapolated to the whole of the EU:

- The existence of uneven coverage: although the state SIUSS system is open to all municipalities, provincial councils and autonomous communities, not all use it with the same intensity. Some municipalities load all their social case files in real time; others only upload quarterly summaries or have not yet connected. The result is an incomplete data map, with areas rich in information and others practically without any.
- The diversity of local adaptations to the common web version offered by the Ministry (standard form). Several autonomous communities and municipalities have created their own form, adding extra modules, additional fields, integrations with other local databases, etc. These local adaptations may work well for each territory, but they almost never fully fit the national schema.

This lack of uniformity in the protocols causes the information flow to be uneven and, when gathering it at national or European level, extra work must be done to put the pieces together and ensure we are 'speaking the same data language'.

A second problem affecting social-work units concerns the limited training of social workers in data management and processing. Various studies point to a weak capacity among social-work professionals to handle data and use it in decision-making, a situation worsened by the scant digitalisation and use of paper records, affecting the reliability and effective management of information (Oceretnii, 2023).

The problem of social workers is the low capacity to operate with data and the poor digitalisation of the system has significant implications for public policy, especially the ability to develop evidence-based policies.

### \*Key issues

**- The absence of a single, standardised form across the EU prevents a homogeneous and comparable database among Member States.**

**- Problems of interoperability and integration of information systems**

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The main implications are detailed below (Cariceo, Nair & Lytton, 2018; Griffin, 2020; Oceretnîi, 2023):

- Difficulty in developing evidence-based policies. Public policies, especially in social work, require an innovative, evidence-based approach to be effective. The need to use data in drawing up policy documents is set at national level by government decisions, emphasising the analysis of the situation through quantitative and qualitative data.
- Limitation in the identification and understanding of social problems. Data from scientific and administrative studies are crucial to facilitate the identification and understanding of common factors in risk situations and the root causes of social problems. If professionals have a low capacity to work with data, this restricts their ability to provide robust information to inform policy-making.
- Inefficiency in resource management and allocation. Data are used to plan future activities, evaluate services and plan budgets. Poor data-handling capacity can lead to an inefficient allocation of financial resources and an inability to justify the need for new services or projects.
- Difficulty in evaluating and monitoring interventions. Data are essential to assess the impact of services and determine whether they should be developed further or their direction adjusted. The lack of skills to work with data hampers this critical evaluation.
- Biases and inequalities in the implementation of technology. A lack of understanding of how technology and data affect the populations served by social workers can have negative consequences, especially in marginalised communities. For example, predictive algorithms (such as predictive policing or recidivism tools) can adversely affect these communities, perpetuating or creating biases if social workers are not involved in their development or in policy-making that regulates them. Technology can be as racist, sexist and xenophobic as the people who design it.
- Obstacles in digitalisation and interoperability. The lack of interoperability of information systems between different institutions creates deficiencies in data collection and use, requiring manual requests and hindering a comprehensive view of the beneficiary.

## \*Key issues

**- There is limited training of social-work professionals in data management and analysis, which hinders work with quantitative and qualitative information.**

## 2. Critical aspects in data management for the care of the migrant population

Findings from the Global-ANSWER project reveal a common thread: the information that underpins social intervention with migrants is weak at origin, fragmented in its management and insufficiently supported by specific professional competences. At the micro level, social workers report unreliable initial data, bureaucratic hurdles and decisions guided more by intuition than by evidence. At the meso- and macro-levels, the European Union has legal and technical frameworks that harmonise certain aspects, but still lacks a sector-specific, operational data model for social case files, which perpetuates heterogeneity and limits interoperability. This structural gap is further amplified by training deficits: the lack of digital and analytical skills prevents these frameworks from being translated into effective and ethical practices. Taken together, a vicious circle emerges that forces simultaneous action on data quality, European standardisation and professional capacity-building.

According to information collected within the Global-ANSWER project, social workers note various problems relating to data, its collection and analysis, including the following:

- With regard to the reliability and collection of initial data, they report police alteration of personal data and the language barrier (aggravated by the lack of translators), which compromises the accuracy and reliability of migrants' information.
- Access to and management of data is excessively bureaucratised; a 'black market' has even been detected in the booking of administrative appointments for processing procedures, especially those related to regularisation. This situation leads to greater system collapse and makes legitimate access more difficult.
- Identification of a certain lack of effectiveness, efficiency and professional evidence. Professionals act out of goodwill or intuition, when data-validated practices (systematic evaluation and analysis of impacts) are what is required.
- Disconnect from the migrant's perspective: professionals and migrants hold very different views on what constitutes an innovation or a need, revealing a distortion in the collection and analysis of migrants' real opinions and needs.

In the same vein, at the meso-macro level in the European Union there are a number of common legal and technical aspects relating to data management, but there is still no unified protocol for social case files. These include:

- Regulation (EC) 862/2007 standardises a set of basic variables and definitions—such as migrant, citizenship, country of birth or residence permit—ensuring that the 27 Member States provide Eurostat with comparable statistics on migration flows and stocks. Its scope, however, is limited to aggregated data submitted once a year; it therefore does not cover the micro-level information handled in everyday social case files (European Parliament & Council, 2007).

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- The European Migration Network (EMN) Glossary offers more than 500 multilingual terms on asylum and migration, used in directives and projects to avoid terminological ambiguities. Nonetheless, its adoption is voluntary: no IT system is obliged to name its fields according to this taxonomy, which maintains semantic heterogeneity between countries and programmes (European Migration Network, 2025).
- The regulations governing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) 2021-2027 and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) impose standard indicators. These are valuable for assessing the effectiveness of funded projects, but they are recorded once or twice a year and do not cover all the variables in social case files, so their day-to-day operational usefulness is limited (European Commission, Data Support Centre, 2021).
- The Interoperable Europe Act (Regulation 2024/903) introduces the obligation to carry out interoperability assessments before deploying or renewing public digital systems and promotes the creation of common data models among administrations. The text establishes a robust horizontal framework, but there is still no specific semantic model for social services that details entities, attributes and relationships (European Commission, 2024).
- The European Data Space for Smart Communities (2024-2026) pilots a federated space where different European cities share layers of local data via Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and common formats such as JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) to co-create algorithms and dashboards. It is a pilot and voluntary project whose territorial representativeness is limited as it covers only a small number of municipalities (Open & Agile Smart Cities, 2023).
- The Quality Assurance Framework of the European Statistical System and its Handbook for Quality & Metadata Reports complete and detail missing values, properly code data and clean databases by removing duplicates, which the national statistical institutes of each country must apply before publishing information. Although these procedures can be applied directly to social case files, their implementation in the day-to-day work of social services is not mandatory and is left to the discretion of each administration (Eurostat, 2021).

## \*Key issues

**- Although there are horizontal frameworks, the absence of a single semantic scheme maintains heterogeneity and limits the operational use of social case files.**

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- The Data Act (in force, applicable from 12 September 2025) dedicates its Article 33 to promoting the development of common technical standards to facilitate data exchange across platforms and sectors. It sets essential interoperability requirements—metadata, APIs and taxonomies—so that the statistical centres of the different EU countries can connect seamlessly. The regulation establishes clear principles, but each sector (health, social, etc.) must now specify its own technical profiles to fully comply (European Parliament & Council, 2023).

In short, the EU's immediate challenge is to translate these horizontal frameworks into a sector-specific data model for social services and migration, accompanied by practical tools (automated checklists, mandatory APIs and taxonomies) that enable the information collected in each municipality to flow with the same clarity throughout Europe and be interoperable.

Finally, regarding the training of social workers in the collection and processing of data in the migration field, several key findings emerge:

- Training and skills gaps. Research shows that social workers often lack specific training in digital skills and data management, hindering the integration of technological innovations into their professional practice (Cariceo, Nair & Lytton, 2018). Although the importance of data science and information technologies to improve the quality of interventions and decision-making is recognised, their adoption is still incipient and requires specific training interventions (Alhassan et al., 2025).
- Initiatives and proposals for improvement. Some recent initiatives, such as data-science training projects aimed at social-work students, have demonstrated that it is possible to introduce skills in data analysis and management, enabling future professionals to explore and better understand social problems using secondary data and technological tools (Alhassan et al., 2025). In addition, improvements are proposed in data-labelling and collection systems to align these processes with social-workers' objectives and facilitate the integration of qualitative and quantitative data (Gondimalla, 2024).
- Impact of digitalisation and ethical challenges. Digitalisation and the use of information systems have transformed social work, shifting part of the professional focus to the management and processing of information. However, this has generated tensions between professional values and bureaucratic demands, as well as challenges in privacy protection and responsible data management (Stoyanovich, Howe & Jagadish, 2020).

In summary, the training of social workers in data management and processing is insufficient and needs to be strengthened through specific training programmes, technology integration and the development of digital skills, in order to meet the current demands of the sector and ensure ethical and effective information management.

## \*Key issues

**- Divergent views between professionals and migrants, together with excessive bureaucracy, collapse the system and distort the detection of real needs.**

## 3. Public policy recommendations

The situation described entails proposing a set of concrete measures aimed at improving data management and decisionmaking in social services that serve the migrant population. The recommendations are formulated taking into account the resources available to local and regional administrations, as well as third-sector entities, and anticipate possible implementation obstacles together with viable alternatives to overcome them.

### 1. Standardise data capture at the micro level.

- It is essential to design and incorporate a 'minimum common module' of variables—identification, administrative status, detected needs, interventions carried out and results—that can be built into existing forms. The intention is not to abruptly replace already customised systems but to add a mandatory layer with basic fields while keeping other optional ones. To minimise the administrative burden and resistance to change, these new fields will be automatically mapped through Extract, Transform, Load (ETL) processes that translate local forms to the common schema.

### 2. Progressively build data skills among social-work staff.

- Improving information quality requires internal competencies. An annual programme of 20–30 hours is proposed, structured in four blocks: data literacy, basic descriptive analysis, impact evaluation and ethics/privacy. We know that the main obstacle will be available time and perceived difficulty. Therefore, the proposal combines longer modules with one-hour micro-capsules delivered just when needed, supported by real cases from the service itself and accompanied by trained internal staff acting as mentors.

### 3. Create an analytical support unit at the meso level (provincial council or autonomous community in the Spanish case and their equivalents in other countries).

- To turn collected information into useful knowledge, a multidisciplinary social-data unit should be created to clean, integrate and visualise the information. This unit can be staffed with people who already have ICT or statistical profiles, relying on free-software tools (R, Python, Metabase, among others). The main risk is lack of coordination between administrations; to mitigate this, simple interoperability protocols inspired by recent European frameworks should be agreed and clear governance rules established from the outset.

## **4. Integrate quality and ethics guides and checklists into daily work.**

- Therefore, simple lists should be included within the capture systems themselves to remind us of three basics: that the person gives informed consent; that we do not leave key fields blank or with inconsistencies; and that we are not introducing biases inadvertently. If part of these checks is automated and small quality indicators are shown instantly, the team will see the added value and will not perceive it as a bureaucratic burden.

## **5. Promote accessibility and language mediation in information collection.**

- To avoid data distortion and ensure equitable treatment, information collection must be accessible. This implies offering multilingual forms, having interpreters or mediators –human or digital– and including fields where doubts or inconsistencies expressed by the user can be recorded. The main problems will be costs and data protection; it is suggested to use controlled glossaries, manually review sensitive cases and sign strict confidentiality agreements.

## **6. Digitise basic information and gradually remove paper.**

- Full digitalisation can be costly, but a viable minimum strategy is feasible: scanning old case files and stipulating that all new cases are already entered in digital format with standard metadata. Even if interoperability between institutions is limited, exchange agreements can be established via lightweight APIs and common formats such as JSON while a more ambitious model is developed.

## **7. Integrate migrants into the design and evaluation of indicators.**

- To align the views of professionals and users, it is key to involve migrants in designing indicators and evaluating interventions. Participatory workshops and co-designed surveys are proposed. We know that fatigue or cultural clashes may arise, so it is advisable to offer small incentives, use easy-to-understand formats (audio, pictograms, etc.) and publicly return the results so that participants can see that their contribution leads to real change.

## 8. Strengthen data governance and transparency towards funders and citizens.

- Transparency strengthens legitimacy. Publishing dashboards with aggregated data—without identifiable microdata—on demand, processing times, results and investment enables accountability without compromising privacy. Fear of exposing shortcomings can be mitigated with pilot tests of agreed metrics, robust anonymisation processes and communication focused on continuous improvement rather than punitive comparison between services.

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**Policy Brief**

**July 2025**

## **Service-Learning (S-L) with Migrants: An Educational, Political, and Social Alliance for Inclusion**

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### **\*Executive Summary**

Service-Learning (S-L) is an active educational methodology that combines academic learning with community service. It has been applied in areas such as health, education, the environment, and social intervention. Drawing on international experiences (Italy, Germany, Canada, the U.S., etc.) and based on initiatives developed at the University of Granada in collaboration with social organizations and public services in the cities of Granada and Melilla (Spain), this policy brief focuses on the outcomes of applying this methodology in work with migrant populations.

The results, supported by scientific evidence, show that implementing S-L in this context enhances students' learning, motivation, and prosocial competencies, while also generating benefits for participating organizations and migrant communities themselves (García-Carmona et al., 2025).

Despite its potential, S-L remains largely absent from migration-related public policies and from university curricula in fields working with migrant populations. To address this gap, we present a series of policy recommendations for public administrations, universities, social organizations, and private actors, calling for the systematic integration of S-L into their training, organizational strategies, and inclusion policies. Doing so would help improve institutional and civic responses to the challenges of human mobility through a lens of inclusion, interculturality, shared responsibility, and social transformation.

## 1. Introduction

Migration policy is currently one of the main challenges facing European Union countries. At the same time, migrants arriving on the continent—particularly at its southern borders—face psychological, economic, and institutional risks (García-Quero et al., 2024). However, public policies aimed at integration and inclusion often respond in a fragmented way, lacking meaningful coordination with educational actors in the territory.

University curricula in fields closely related to migration (Social Work, Education, Public Policy, Sociology, Economics, among others) often remain rooted in traditional teaching models that are disconnected from local realities. This gap between universities, local communities, and public policy weakens the potential of higher education to enhance students' professional development and contribute to improving the communities they inhabit. In response, Service-Learning (S-L)—an educational methodology used with diverse social groups—offers an innovative approach. It enables students to connect academic content with the acquisition of professional and critical competencies, while providing a meaningful service to the community or to vulnerable populations.

S-L promotes the opening of educational institutions to their social surroundings, fostering a teaching model where students and society engage in reciprocal learning (Ruiz-Montero et al., 2019). Its use in university teaching reflects the institution's social commitment and typically includes the following phases (Santos-Pastor et al., 2021): Preparation (analyzing the context and identifying a social need or injustice, while assessing the group's capacities and motivations); Planning (setting objectives, designing the intervention and evaluation); Implementation; Evaluation and recognition (reflecting on the impact and outcomes of the process).

This policy brief builds on the work carried out by the authors in the framework of the European project Global-ANSWER Network “Social Work and Human Mobility”, as well as on S-L projects developed since 2018.<sup>[1]</sup> It presents evidence on the effectiveness of this methodology in working with migrants and addresses the following question: What can be done from a public policy perspective—in higher education and in migration—to harness the transformative potential of S-L?

### \*Key issues

**- S-L connects academic learning with social action involving migrant populations.**

**- It benefits the organizations involved, the migrants themselves, and improves students' learning and development of prosocial skills.**

**- Despite its potential, S-L remains largely absent from academic curricula, public policies, and organizational strategies.**

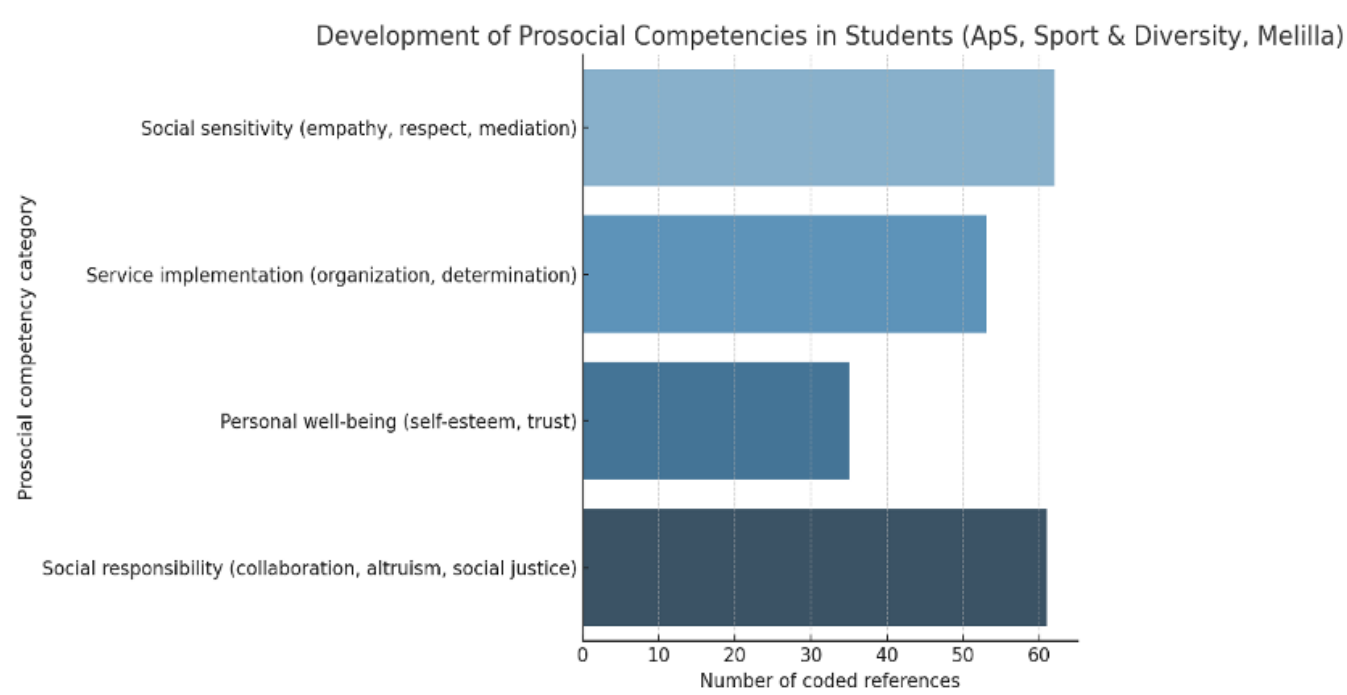
**- Integrating S-L into migration inclusion plans through partnerships between universities, NGOs, and public administrations is essential.**

<sup>[1]</sup> The projects referenced here have been funded through competitive public calls (e.g., UGR Plan FIDO, PID2022-141644OB-I00, UGR-Solidarity 2018-572, INCLUSO PID2022-141644OB-I00 from the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities). Among their various outcomes are scientific articles published in leading international journals such as *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *PUBLICACIONES*, and *Espiral*. More information on some of these projects can be found here <https://digibug.ugr.es/handle/10481/105571>

## 2. Results: working with migrants through S-L – a brief international overview

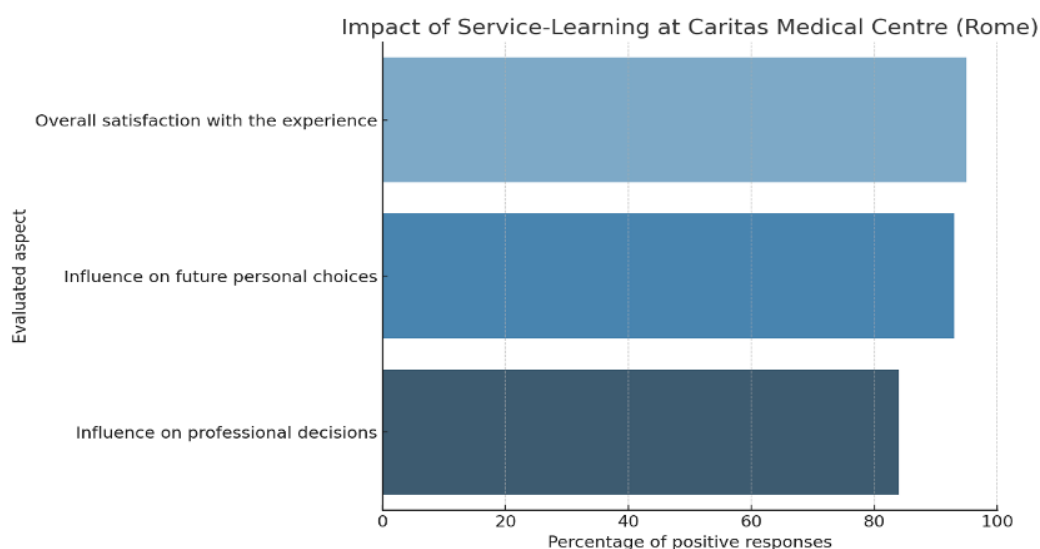
There is abundant local, national, and international evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of S-L in work with migrant communities. Some examples of university-level S-L actions involving migrants include: Linguistic and cultural support (e.g. education and philology students organizing Spanish language workshops); Legal and administrative advice and support (law and social work students assisting with regularization processes); Health promotion (students in physical education or nursing leading sessions on healthy habits and nutrition); Intercultural storytelling (communication students collecting and sharing migrants' life stories to raise awareness).

The results of Ruiz-Montero et al. (2019) show benefits for both university students (e.g. improved empathy, organizational skills) and the target population (in this case, unaccompanied minors in the Autonomous City of Melilla). Building on those findings with a larger sample, Ruiz-Montero et al. (2023) identified significant improvements in students' acquisition of prosocial competencies (see chart below, based on the article's findings).



Source: Ruíz Montero et al. (2023).

Service-Learning (S-L) is an active educational methodology that combines academic learning with community service. It has been applied in areas such as health, education, the environment, and social intervention. Drawing on international experiences (Italy, Germany, Canada, the U.S.,



Source: Civitelli et al. (2021).

In Germany, students from various universities participated in Service-Learning (S-L) programs supporting newly arrived refugees. These programs included tutoring, language exchanges, and community integration activities. Such initiatives improved students' intercultural sensitivity and political awareness, while also fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among migrant populations (Dallmann & Sandmeyer, 2020).

Outside the European Union, there is relevant evidence from several countries. In the United States, initiatives such as Crossing the Border through Service-Learning (Tilley-Lubbs, 2011) connected preservice teachers with immigrant families, particularly Spanish-speaking communities in Virginia. These experiences allowed future teachers to confront their own stereotypes and gain a more accurate understanding of the challenges related to migrant integration and inclusion. The results demonstrated a stronger commitment to social justice and a deeper awareness of the importance of incorporating diversity into their future professional practice.

Finally, in Canada, Lund and Lee (2018) describe how S-L programs in culturally diverse communities in Alberta promote cultural humility among preservice teachers. Their analysis, based on multiple experiences, shows how direct engagement with marginalized groups fosters reflective teaching practices grounded in equity and social responsibility.

The evidence presented in these studies highlights that this methodology not only enhances students' academic and personal competencies but also fosters prosocial values cultivated through direct contact with migrants—essential for students' holistic development. At the same time, S-L improves the well-being and integration of migrants by strengthening their skills, support networks, and inclusion opportunities. Thus, this methodology not only enriches theoretical learning, but also promotes an intercultural education approach rooted in solidarity, empathy, and civic responsibility.

## 3. Public policy recommendations

**1. Integrate S-L as an intervention tool within local, regional, and national inclusion plans for migrant populations, enabling alliances between universities, the third sector, private organizations, and public administrations. This includes:**

- Stable institutional cooperation programs to support its design and implementation.
- Funding for pilot projects that rigorously evaluate their impact on migrant integration, students' professional training, and benefits for partner organizations.
- Establishing incentives to encourage its use.

**2. Train university faculty, public policymakers, and professionals working with migrants in the principles and practices of the S-L methodology.**

**3. Facilitate the formal inclusion of S-L in university curricula.**

- Encourage its use and recognize the teaching work it entails, especially in degree programs related to social intervention, education, and health. This involves curricular adaptations, integration into course syllabi, recognition of work done in professional placement settings, and facilitation of the administrative permissions needed for its implementation.

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**Website:** <https://proyectos.ugr.es/global-answer/>

**WP 4:** RESEARCH DATA GATHERING: MULTI-SITE CASE STUDIES.

**WP 5:** DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH.

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## Policy Brief

July 2025

# Participatory Communication on Migration: A Proposal from Social Work and Constructive Journalism

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### \*Executive Summary

The way we communicate about migration largely defines how societies understand migration and what kind of public policies are adopted to manage it. In a media ecosystem marked by disinformation, digital polarization and the *tyranny* of algorithms, it is urgent to rethink narratives from a critical, sustainable and participatory perspective. Overcoming the frameworks of crisis and victimization implies incorporating new voices, languages and formats that reflect the diversity of migratory experiences.

This document proposes an innovative approach from social work and constructive journalism, articulating proposals for transformative communication that recognize the knowledge and agency of migrants. Based on the learnings from the European Global-ANSWER project, specific communication proposals are made for fourteen good practices identified by researchers from Spain, Italy and Sweden.

The proposal is committed to transmedia, collaborative communication anchored in audiovisual language, which connects traditional stories with emerging formats such as podcasts, community theatre, TikTok or interactive narratives. The aim is to build a narrative ecosystem where migrants are not objects, but protagonists of the collective story, contributing to a fairer, more plural and cohesive social climate. This *brief* not only proposes to communicate *about* migration, but to do so *with* its protagonists, from an ethic of recognition, symbolic reparation and commitment to human rights.



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## 1. Introduction

The way we communicate about migration largely defines how societies understand migration and what kind of public policies are adopted to manage it. In a media ecosystem marked by disinformation, digital polarization and the tyranny of algorithms, it is urgent to rethink narratives from a critical, sustainable and participatory perspective. Overcoming the frameworks of crisis and victimization implies incorporating new voices, languages and formats that reflect the diversity of migratory experiences.

This *policy brief* proposes an innovative approach from social work and constructive journalism, articulating transformative communication proposals that recognize the knowledge and agency of migrants. Based on the learnings from the European Global-ANSWER project, specific communication proposals are collected based on good practices identified in Spain, Italy and Sweden.

The aim is to build a narrative ecosystem where migrants are not objects, but protagonists of the collective story, contributing to a fairer, more plural and cohesive social climate. This proposal not only proposes to communicate about migration, but to do so with its protagonists, from an ethic of recognition, symbolic reparation and commitment to human rights.

## 2. Justification of the problem: towards transformative communication in migratory contexts

This *policy brief* is part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), SDG 4 (Quality education), SDG 5 (Gender equality) and SDG 17 (Partnerships to achieve the goals). From a more specific perspective linked to communication, it aligns with target 16.10, which advocates ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms, and target 4.7, which promotes education based on human rights, inclusion and diversity.

In this context, promoting inclusive and participatory communication on migration must be understood not only as an aspiration for justice and social cohesion, but also as a political and ethical commitment within an ecosystem in profound transformation marked by worrying disinformation and polarization and where the digital impact and prominence of social networks is unquestionable but where traditional media (*legacy media*) continue to play a decisive role.

### \* Key issues

**- Inclusive and participatory communication on migration promotes social justice and cohesion. It is also a political and ethical commitment in a context characterised by misinformation and polarisation.**

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This paradox of media tensions between the *old* and the *new*, where citizens have ceased to have a passive role to compete in the generation of content, reflects a hyperconnected but distrustful citizenry, which consumes polarized information while seeking reliable narratives. As the Reuters Institute (2025) highlights in its *Digital News Report* in recent years, although social networks are a key source of information for a large part of the population, traditional newspapers still retain a higher level of trust. We would be talking about the *brand effect*, the confidence that professional journalism continues to have in a panorama of growing disinformation. The current panorama therefore requires decisive action from institutions, the media and civil society to generate fairer and more accessible communication environments capable of addressing the challenges but also opportunities of the new ecosystem.

Focusing on human mobility and migration, we are facing an *agenda setting* issue that tends to occupy a prominent place in the media and in political discourses, but often from a crisis, alarmist or victimizing perspective. This narrative not only perpetuates stereotypes, but also weakens the public perception of cohesion and diversity as positive values. In view of this, this document states that transforming narratives is key to combating stigmas, strengthening recognition and promoting more equitable public policies. Participatory communication – supported by social work and constructive journalism – thus appears as an essential tool to move towards narrative justice, making migrant agency visible and promoting social cohesion.

As we will show in the section on proposals for good communication practices, promoting narratives of agency, rather than victimisation or criminalisation, taking advantage of the transformative potential of digital, interactive and audiovisual narratives and the use of artificial intelligence in an ethical way can be key for communication to truly contribute to social inclusion and sustainable development.

In this regard, let us remember that the way in which the media represents migrants has direct effects on public perception, stereotyping, and institutional policy responses (Heath, Richards, & Ford, 2020; Esses, Medianu & Lawson, 2013). This is supported by recent studies that warn of how the prevailing media coverage tends to focus on negative aspects such as criminalization or

## \* Key issues

**- Migration often occupies a prominent place in the media and political discourse, but is frequently portrayed in a crisis-oriented, alarmist or victimising manner. This narrative perpetuates stereotypes and weakens public perception of cohesion and diversity as positive values.**

victimization, feeding a reductionist and dehumanizing vision of migration (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Breitegger & Bertel, 2022). Evidently, this type of framing, in line with the historical concept of framing developed by Goffman (1974), diverts attention from the structural causes of human mobility and hinders the creation of public policies based on social justice and human rights.

Hence, we consider it essential to transform the narratives of *legacy media*, one of the axes of analysis of this document, while at the same time committing to effective communication in *new media* and supporting transformative initiatives such as "promoting media managed by migrants", "supporting evidence-based campaigns" and "building alliances" between journalism professionals, social work and research; proposals that are already outlined in the *Global Compact for Migration* (United Nations, 2018) and are included as recommendations in recent European reports such as those of PERCEPTIONS (Bermejo & Carrasco, 2021; Van Caudenberg & Van Praag, 2022); FES & FEPS (2023); the Istituto Affari Internazionali (Barana, Vigneri & Daga, 2023) or the Whole-COMM project (Pettrachin & Caponio, 2024).

From social work, communication is understood as a tool for recognition, empowerment and social transformation. Thus, including migrants as co-creators of content and participants in stories about their own experience is essential for strengthening the social fabric and narrative justice (Red Acoge, 2020).

Connecting social work and communication, it is evident that there is an urgent need to move towards a narrative approach that recognizes the contributions, resilience and agency of migrants (Hovden & Zaborowski, 2024); narratives also focused on solutions that allow us to understand migration as a complex and interdependent process beyond the threat-victim binary.

The digital environment also aggravates this complexity. Social networks function as ambivalent spaces where both hate speech and solidarity movements are promoted (#RefugeesWelcome, #MigrantsRights). The proliferation of disinformation, coupled with algorithms that prioritize polarizing content, has reinforced information fragmentation (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015; Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021). However, forms of migrant self-representation have also emerged that dispute hegemonic narratives.

## \* Key issues

**- Social media are ambivalent spaces where both hate speech and solidarity movements are amplified.**

# Policy Brief

In view of this, various European reports recommend strengthening institutional and local capacities to communicate truthfully, ethically and contextually about migration. They highlight, among others: the need to improve language (FES & FEPS, 2023), strengthen training in intercultural communication (Whole COMM, 2024), build campaigns from the perspective of protection (PERCEPTIONS, 2021; 2022), and depoliticize discourse to facilitate human rights-based decision-making.

In addition, as highlighted in the report for Improving Migration Coverage in the Media by Breitegger & Bertel (2022), there is an urgent need to balance media approaches, make migrant voices visible, and ensure frameworks of self-regulation and information pluralism. The inclusion of journalists with a migrant background, the funding of alternative media, and cooperation between research and the media are key measures to democratize access to public narrative. Table 1 shows a selection of strategies and recommendations that, based on the aforementioned reports, may be relevant as a base point for our communication proposal.

**Table 1.** General strategies for improving communicative action

Actions	Aimed at	Objective
Funding communication spaces managed by migrants	Local/Regional Governments	Encourage communicative agency and self-representation
Establish cross-sectoral training in inclusive communication and narrative sustainability	Universities / professional colleges / associations	Professionalize rights-based communication practices and solution approaches
Incorporate the direct participation of migrants in institutional campaigns	Public institutions / NGOs / communication agencies	Increase the effectiveness, legitimacy and social impact of messages
Evaluate and measure the social impact of communication strategies	Public administrations / academia	Improving the quality, continuity and participatory orientation of public policies
Recognize, make visible and finance migrant cultural and artistic production	Ministries of Culture / City Councils / Cultural Foundations	Promoting diversity, strengthening a sense of belonging and combating stereotypes
Integrate the social work perspective in the design of communication policies	Public / educational institutions / communication managers	Addressing structural inequalities from a transformative narrative approach

Note: Prepared by the author based on recent European sector reports and policy briefs .



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From an applied communicative perspective, we believe that the liquid times of misinformation and bewilderment in which we live invite us to incorporate the sustainable communication approach, understood as that which seeks a balance between inclusion, participation and narrative justice, both in content and in channels and forms of expression. Such challenges imply betting on narratives that not only make migrants visible, but also encourage their active participation in the production of public narratives. In fact, sustainable communication emerges as a key proposal that can allow us to intersect social work, media and participation. Beyond transmitting messages, it is about generating narratives that favor social justice, mutual recognition and cohesion. Sustainable communication must be inclusive, transformative and oriented towards the common good, paying attention to the diversity of voices, languages and media. This approach is especially relevant in the field of human mobility, where media representation has a direct effect on public policies, social perceptions and the experience of rights. In addition, recent research such as that of Leurs and Smets (2018) shows that digital environments must be approached from ethics and equitable access, to ensure that migratory narratives do not reproduce stigmas or biases, but rather promote empowerment and communicative agency.

Along these lines, solution *journalism* offers key tools to focus attention on integration processes, community solutions and examples of resilience. Alfredo Casares (2021) highlights its ability to generate more useful and action-oriented public conversations, especially applicable to sensitive issues such as migration. This approach allows us to go beyond conflict and catastrophe, bringing context, nuance and human perspectives to migration debates (Haagerup, 2017). In our opinion, combined with participation strategies from social work, it can have a reparative effect in the face of misinformation and media disaffection.

In the digital ecosystem, Salaverría (2005) and García-Avilés (2015), Sádaba et al. (2016) already underlined the need to innovate in formats, channels and production models to connect with audiences in a media paradigm of profound transformation and increasingly fragmented. Following his approach, the use of narratives adapted to emerging platforms and transmedia strategies emerges as an opportunity for effective and transformative communication on human mobility. This innovation must integrate both the major newspapers and new information actors and the so-called *newsinfluencers*, which are gaining space in the intermediation of information on social networks. According to studies such as those by the Pew Research Center (2024), *newsinfluencers* are already a key source of information for young people, and in many cases they report on public events and issues with great reach. Many are not affiliated with traditional media, but reach relevant audiences from platforms such as X, Instagram or YouTube.

If we look at the channels, through which media to communicate, the use of **transmedia** formats can reinforce effective communication to reach diverse audiences and create narrative experiences that cross platforms, codes and languages (Jenkins, 2006; Scolari, 2013). Henry Jenkins introduced the concept of *transmedia storytelling* to describe the dispersion of narrative content across multiple media, allowing audiences to actively engage in the story from different entry points; Carlos A. Scolari extended this notion to the journalistic context and,

extending it to our field of work, it is a perspective of enormous scope for migratory stories to expand in social networks, audiovisuals, messaging and traditional media, generating a more complete and accessible narrative ecosystem.

Migrants also consume information in a fragmented and multi-channel way, according to what we have just explained, while relying on instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp and Telegram for the forwarding of messages between trusted networks. Thus, platforms such as YouTube Shorts and TikTok are gaining relevance, especially among younger people, due to their accessibility, dynamism and low technical threshold for content production. All this leads us to bet on transmedia and audiovisual as means of representation and narrative empowerment to connect with today's audiences from a more horizontal and inclusive logic. We are facing innovations and approaches that, from multiple dimensions, can contribute to that more participatory and inclusive communication on migration that we defend in this *policy brief* by connecting social work and constructive journalism.

### 3. Analysis and evidence: inspiring good practices and communicative proposals

As constructive proposals, this section applies the approaches presented from a transformative perspective, oriented to the recognition of the rights and agency of migrants. Based on the fourteen good practices previously identified and documented by the research team of the European Global-ANSWER project, we develop communicative proposals that allow them to translate their learning into concrete and replicable actions, with special attention to the digital, audiovisual and transmedia fields.

Rather than understanding communication as an instrumental tool, these proposals show how stories, formats and languages can become spaces for care, empowerment and social transformation. Through them, communicational paths are activated that range from intercultural mediation and linguistic justice to artistic creation, citizen journalism or digital accompaniment.

Far from reproducing paternalistic or victimistic approaches, it is committed to participatory communication that strengthens community ties and contributes to a more inclusive public culture. In a context marked by polarization, disinformation and hate speech, these experiences show that another narrative is possible: one that is built from listening, participation and mutual recognition.

#### \* Key issues

**- Communication, in addition to being an instrumental tool, can also be considered a space for care, empowerment, and social transformation.**

# Policy Brief



## ➤ Good Practice 1: The Role of the Mother Language

**Abstract:** Intervention with a Syrian family in Granada that puts the use of the language of origin as a fundamental right at the center. The inclusion of professional interpreters and respect for the pace of language learning fostered a more dignified, autonomous and participatory integration.

### **Communicative proposal**

- **Mini-documentary or podcast:** "Speaking in my language", a piece in which migrants tell why communicating in their language is not a luxury, but a right.
- **Creative workshop:** "My language, my voice", a stage space where migrants build theatrical or poetic scenes from their original language.

**Objective:** To make visible the importance of one's own language for inclusion and well-being.

**Participants:** Migrants, translators, social work professionals, sound or performing artists.

**Expected results:** Public awareness, linguistic empowerment, institutional advocacy to integrate translation services.

## ➤ Good Practice 2: Community Theatre with Migrant Women

**Abstract:** Artistic project in Malmö with migrant women over 55 years old. Through art (photo, video, audio and theatre) they express their experiences of freedom, exile, racism or isolation. Result: exhibition in shopping mall and participatory play, in Arabic and Swedish.

### **Communicative proposal**

- **Urban performance:** "Older voices in movement", reproduction of scenes in public spaces such as markets or squares.
- **Traveling exhibition:** photography + sound with portraits and stories of older migrant women.
- **Experiential escape room:** where players "discover" the life story of a migrant woman overcoming stereotypes. It is transmedia, because it combines narrative, physical objects, image and sound; it is experiential, which increases the emotional impact and retention of the message; it can be adapted to institutes, fairs, public spaces, festivals, civic centers or universities; it allows us to work on empathy and critical thinking in the face of simplified or xenophobic discourses; It gives prominence to personal stories, in line with narrative justice and migrant agency. Although it was not used in the original practice, this proposal is inspired by its participatory, narrative and multi-format approach to innovate from the language of games and experiential immersion.

**Objective:** To break stereotypes of gender, age and origin; to make visible the right to narrate oneself and belong.

**Speakers:** Migrant women, feminist associations, visual artists, civic centers.

**Expected results:** Greater symbolic representation, reinforced self-esteem, intercultural dialogue.

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## ➤ Good Practice 3: Language Justice and Disability

**Abstract:** Project in Malmö for migrants with disabilities, promoting accessible multilingual environments and the right to express oneself in one's own language. Training for interpreters, individual accompaniment and safe spaces.

### **Communicative proposal**

- **Workshop on the creation of pictograms or inclusive apps** with visual and auditory codes.
- **Inclusive audiovisual campaign** with testimonies of people with migrant disabilities: "I don't need to speak your language to have rights".

**Objective:** To raise awareness of how language barriers and disability intersect.

**Participants:** Disability associations, migrant groups, social technologists, graphic designers.

**Expected results:** More accessible environments, training of professionals, dissemination of inclusive language.

## ➤ Good Practice 4: Family Integration from the Everyday (Lund)

**Abstract:** Support programs for refugee families in Sweden: physical activities, health, art, youth leadership, free time, all from a multilingual and family perspective. In the communicative proposal, we include parallel groups for parents, adolescents and children, something distinctive of the *Barn i Start* program and that is not usually found in general family programs.

### **Communicative proposal**

- **Community wall mural:** children and young people paint "My new city". It enables intergenerational participation, creativity and appropriation of urban space.
- **Interactive board game / app** about the educational/health system of the receiving country. The original case includes sessions on health, school and daily life, so a playful and interactive resource reinforces it. In addition, this digital/playful format complements the multilingual and educational approach of the program.
- **Family theatre:** mothers, fathers and children as the cast of a playful play about everyday life. The idea is to foster bonds, self-esteem and mutual understanding. It would also make it possible to make visible emotions of the migratory process from several generations.

**Objective:** To To strengthen bonds, strengthen self-esteem, facilitate understanding of rights and services.

**Participants:** Schools, social services, artists, community educators.

**Expected results:** Greater family cohesion, integration from childhood, sense of belonging.



# Policy Brief

## ➤ **Good Practice 5: Communicative proposal to make visible the protection of women and children in forced mobility.**

**Abstract:** Reception and protection program aimed at sub-Saharan women and children forced to live in mobility, which incorporates a rights-based approach, care networks, institutional accompaniment and visibility of structural vulnerabilities.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- **Audiovisual microcapsules:** brief testimonies of women or children about the accompaniment received, under the slogan "I am not alone. We walk together."
- **Graphic campaign in health and educational centres:** simple illustrations with messages about the rights violated and restored in the reception process.
- **Network podcast:** "Stories in Motion", with the voices of professionals, volunteers and migrant women reflecting on accompaniment in mobility and the right to protection.

**Objective:** To make visible the realities of forced mobility with a rights-based approach, to generate institutional and citizen awareness about the need to accompany without criminalizing and to reinforce the value of the networks that sustain protection from below.

**Speakers:** Migrant women, technical personnel in health, education and social services, communicators, illustrators.

**Expected results:** Institutional and public awareness, humanization of the discourse on mobility, social recognition of networking.

## ➤ **Good Practice 6: Intergenerational coexistence as an integration strategy**

**Abstract:** Collaborative housing in Sweden that fosters intergenerational and intercultural integration through coexistence in common spaces between young migrants and older people.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- **Mini-documentary "The house we share",** crossed narratives of young migrants and older people living in Sällbo, exploring bonds, learnings and challenges of coexistence.
- **Traveling interactive installation:** model or immersive visualization of Sällbo that is exhibited at universities, fairs or civic centers. It includes sounds, testimonies and everyday objects from the house.
- **Stage laboratory:** "We live together", where diverse audiences represent scenes of coexistence between generations and cultures.

**Objective:** To make visible the transformative potential of coexistence as a driver of integration.

**Speakers:** Sällbo residents, students, community artists, social work professionals.

**Expected results:** promotion of inclusive housing models, inspiration for new community housing initiatives, strengthening of social ties.

## ➤ **Good Practice 7: Cooking as an Intercultural Bridge in Community Spaces**

**Abstract:** Culinary workshops between migrants and local people in community centers. The kitchen functions as a space for meeting, memory and cultural transmission, especially between women of different generations. Although the original practice does not specifically mention cooking workshops, the spirit of Community Centers does revolve around safe, community-based, and culturally sensitive spaces, especially with a focus on women. The kitchen as a space for cultural encounter and daily empowerment can be a symbolic and functional way to represent what happens there.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- **Video series "Recipes with history":** cooking + migrant story
- **Gastronomic podcast:** "What does my country taste like"

**Objective:** To promote intercultural dialogue and empathy from everyday life.

**Participants:** Migrants, community cooks, cultural associations, local media.

**Expected results:** Reduction of prejudices, building of links, positive visibility.

## ➤ **Good Practice 8: Technology with Purpose: Digital Access to Health and Other Rights**

**Abstract:** Young migrants teach other older migrants how to use digital tools to access health, housing, education or legal procedures. Although the original practice focuses on an existing app (La tua salute) with an institutional and health focus, by proposing that young migrants teach others, we introduce a dimension of collective agency and intergenerational learning coherent with the purposes of accessibility and digital justice.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- Video tutorials recorded by migrants themselves
- Interactive game (gamming) or simulator: "My path to the registry"

**Objective:** To democratize access to information and strengthen digital autonomy.

**Speakers:** Young migrants, digital volunteering, neighbourhood associations, ICT centres.

**Expected results:** Reduced digital divide, community empowerment, improved access to services.

## ➤ **Good Practice 9: Labor Mediation from the Migrant Experience**

**Abstract:** Socio-labor insertion practice in Palermo led by a migrant intercultural mediator, who accompanies people in vulnerable situations in their access to employment, with training activities, guidance, professional practices (tironcini) and detection of psychosocial needs.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- **Documentary miniseries** "Work is to integrate", video stories of migrants accompanied by mediators in their process of labor insertion.

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- **Video series "Recipes with history"**: cooking + migrant stories
- **Podcast "Labor Path: Migrant Voices"**, interviews with mediators, collaborating companies and users who have accessed employment thanks to this type of program.
- **Interactive digital map**: location of agencies with cultural mediators, employment resources and first-person testimonies.

**Objective:** To make visible the transformative impact of intercultural mediation on the labour insertion of migrants; to recognise mediators as key actors of social cohesion.

**Participants:** Cultural mediators, migrants, collaborating companies, journalists, employment and training entities.

**Expected results:** greater understanding of the role of the mediator, reduction of cultural barriers in employment, generation of positive migrant references, and promotion of inclusive public-private partnerships.

## ➤ **Good Practice 10: Communicate rights to dignify accompaniment**

**Abstract:** Legal empowerment programs aimed at migrants to learn about their labor, health, administrative and housing rights. The figure of the "community multiplier" is promoted.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- Micro-video campaign: "Knowing my rights protects me"
- Multi-language educational podcast on basic rights and local resources

**Objective:** To promote legal autonomy and the capacity to influence in their communities.

**Participants:** Migrant lawyers, community leaders, neighborhood collectives, public services.

**Expected results:** Increased legal literacy, support networks, decreased vulnerability.

## ➤ **Good Practice 11: Protocols to accompany with justice**

**Abstract:** Design and implementation of specific protocols for humanitarian care, adapted to different vulnerabilities and built in a participatory way between social organizations and the Ministry. The practice guarantees coherence, personalization and intersectionality in the accompaniments.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- **Short documentary series "Accompany with criteria"**: capsules on how the protocols are applied in real life, with testimonies from professionals and migrants.
- **Interactive website "Your rights, your routes"**: accessible and visual version of the different protocols, adapted to migrants so that they understand their rights and the ways of accompaniment in different cases (violence, minors, health, housing...)
- **Downloadable digital guide** for social organizations "Protocols that care": basic principles for developing your own adapted models.



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**Objective:** To make visible the importance of protocols built with a rights-based approach, to promote their adaptation to different contexts, and to empower professionals and migrants in their use.

**Speakers:** Ministry, NGOs, social workers, translators, reception professionals, UX designers, migrants in a host situation.

**Expected results:** Greater understanding of institutional processes, improved coordination, strengthening access to rights from a participatory and intersectional approach.

## ➤ **Good Practice 12: Communication for Advocacy and Remediation**

**Abstract:** Network of social organizations that work collaboratively to protect the rights of victims of trafficking, promote legislative reforms, denounce institutional violence and articulate a structured political dialogue between civil society and public administrations.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- **Documentary narrative podcast "Surviving is not enough".** Real stories of women victims of trafficking who have transformed their pain into action, with the voices of activists and professionals from the network.
- **Visual campaign "Figures with a face".** Series of infographics and short testimonial videos that make visible the reality of trafficking and the collective work of the network.
- **Communication guide "Narrating trafficking from the perspective of rights",** aimed at journalists, NGOs and institutional communicators.

**Objective:** To strengthen the legitimacy and impact of the Antena Sur Network against Trafficking, to give a voice to survivors and to convey public policy proposals from ethical, collaborative and transformative communication.

**Participants:** RASCT entities, victims and survivors, feminist journalists, illustrators, visual communicators, documentary filmmakers, human rights defenders.

**Expected results:** Greater institutional impact, destigmatization of victims, legislative impulse, active participation of migrant women in their own narratives and policies.

## ➤ **Good Practice 13: Right to exist in the system**

**Abstract:** The City Council of Ogíjares has launched a pioneering protocol to process in an agile, accessible and transparent way the reports necessary to regularize the administrative situation of migrants (roots, regrouping, housing). The practice shows how small municipalities can also innovate in inclusion.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- **Accessible and multilingual video guide:** "How to process my immigration reports in Ogíjares", with clear steps, explained rights and testimonies of migrants who have regularized their situation.



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- **Municipal graphic campaign** on marquees and social networks: "Here you count: register, request reports, access rights".
- **Participatory training workshops** for migrant associations and neighbourhood groups on how to accompany and disseminate the use of the protocol.

**Objective:** To make visible that the local administration can be a guarantor of rights; to facilitate access to documentation; to promote the active participation of migrant citizens in the institutional life of the municipality.

**Participants:** City Council, migrant associations, social services, immigration office, educational centers, intercultural facilitators.

**Expected results:** Increased number of successful applications; improved institutional perception; legal and community empowerment of migrants; strengthening of participatory local governance.

## ➤ **Good Practice 14: Right to housing, community communication and migration in the face of residential exclusion**

**Abstract:** Initiatives led by groups such as Provivienda, the Tenants' Union or neighbourhood associations in neighbourhoods such as Usera (Madrid) denounce discrimination in access to housing suffered by migrants. Communicative action and community organization make it possible to counteract invisibility and generate narrative frameworks that put the right to inhabit and belong at the center.

### **Communicative proposal:**

- **Short documentary series (YouTube or IGTV) "My neighborhood, my house"**. Life stories of migrants threatened by evictions, discrimination or gentrification, combined with interviews with neighbourhood activists and urban rights experts.
- **Interactive map "Right to Housing"**. Case locating, available resources, alerts on speculative practices and testimonial videos about the struggle for housing in multicultural neighbourhoods.
- **Campaign on networks with #DerechoATecho or #MiCasaMiBarrio hashtag**, promoted by migrant groups, alternative media and social organizations.

**Objective:** To give visibility to structural barriers in access to housing for migrants; to strengthen neighbourhood support networks; to influence public policies on inclusive housing; to promote community organisation in the face of gentrification and residential exclusion.

**Participants:** migrant collectives, neighborhood associations, housing rights activists, community journalists, organizations such as Provivienda or CEAR.

**Expected results:** greater public awareness; institutional pressure; generation of empowerment and self-defense tools for migrants; strengthening of the community fabric and the right to remain.

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An illustration at the top of the page shows three stylized figures in a meeting. On the left, a person with a beard and a purple head covering sits at a table. In the center, a person with long dark hair sits at the same table. On the right, a person with long dark hair stands and holds up a white object, possibly a piece of paper or a small trophy. The background is composed of large, overlapping shapes in shades of orange, teal, and purple.

The set of good practices included in this document illustrates innovative, collaborative and sustainable interventions in the field of social work with the migrant population. At the same time, it allows us to understand that all social action entails a communicative dimension: each intervention is also a way of narrating the world, disputing stereotypes and proposing horizons of shared meaning.

These experiences show that communication is not a complement, but a central tool for recognition, participation and social transformation. For this reason, an effort has been made to ensure that they are accompanied by well-planned narrative strategies, with a multi-channel presence (from the institutional to the community, from the face-to-face to the digital), capable of connecting with diverse audiences and activating processes of change.

In a context marked by disinformation, fragmentation and polarizing discourses, we believe that these communicative proposals allow us to work for a critical and co-responsible citizenship. It is not only about communicating about migration, but about communicating from migration and with its protagonists. Only in this way is it possible to build narratives that promote a more just, plural and democratic society.

## \* Key issues

**- We are committed to participatory communication that strengthens community ties and contributes to a more inclusive public culture.**

## 4. Public policy recommendations

These recommendations include key lines to strengthen the role of communication in policies of integration, social cohesion and defence of rights. They are based on documented good practices and are aimed at public institutions at all levels, as well as media, universities, social organizations and migrant communities. The objective is to move forward, from joint action, towards more inclusive, collaborative and people-centred communication. We follow the philosophy of the Global-ANSWER project from the approach of constructive journalism and social work that marks this *policy brief*.

### 1. Recognize communication as a strategic axis in integration policies

- Incorporate communication as a structural and cross-cutting dimension in public policies linked to migration, inclusion and diversity, betting on ethical, participatory and collaborative approaches, to strengthen coexistence, combat misinformation and promote a more critical and cohesive citizenry.

### 2. Promote the direct participation of migrants in the production of stories

- Guarantee spaces for expression and co-creation (audiovisual laboratories, podcasts, graphic campaigns or narratives on social networks) where migrants can tell their stories in the first person, combating hoaxes and stereotypes, reinforcing their visibility, their symbolic legitimacy and the right to narrate themselves.

### 3. Train social work professionals as narrative agents

- Integrate the communicative dimension in the training of social workers, promoting their role as critical spokespersons, capable of influencing public debate from evidence and human rights.

### 4. Promote constructive journalism and solutions narratives

- Promote constructive journalism, which offers informative models that provide context, represent diversity and prioritize solutions, in the face of sensationalism or the criminalization of migration.
- Use journalistic tools to make migrant resilience and contributions visible from an action-oriented perspective.

### 5. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

- These should be developed to assess both the participation of foreign minors and the qualitative impact of leisure programs on their well-being and integration. Without

## **5. Commit to narrative innovation in digital, audiovisual and transmedia environments**

- Integrating transmedia strategies and multiplatform narratives (TikTok, YouTube Shorts, instant messaging, community theatre or immersive games) to reach diverse, young and multilingual audiences is necessary.
- Promote resources, training and intersectoral alliances, focused on *how it is told*, rather than *what is told*, betting on narrative innovation.

## **6. Guarantee linguistic and technological accessibility in public communication**

- Ensure that all institutional messages are understandable and accessible to migrants, considering translations, easy reading, inclusive technologies and apps, and digital literacy.

## **7. Strengthening representation and diversity in the media: commitment to citizen journalism and UGC**

- Support citizen journalism, promoting the presence of migrant voices in traditional and alternative media, with their own contributions within their neighborhoods and communities (making visible and encouraging the creation of user-generated content -CGU-).
- Design actions that make migrants visible as experts and sources of authority when their profiles prove it.
- Supporting the presence of migrant voices in traditional media, promoting citizen journalism, creating networks of journalists with an intercultural perspective, and conducting narrative audits are key actions to democratize access to the media ecosystem.
- Establish review mechanisms to detect bias and improve coverage, carrying out narrative audits as actions for democratic improvement.

## **8. Facilitate alliances between media, institutions, academia and communities**

- Establish regulatory frameworks and adequate funding to facilitate synergy between diverse organizations and communities, reinforcing the role of communication in policies of integration, social cohesion and defense of rights.
- Promote collaborative projects that integrate professionals, migrant groups, as well as collaborative work between the media, universities, migrant groups and public services, which can lead to more open, effective and sustainable content.

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**Website:** <https://proyectos.ugr.es/global-answer/>

**WP 4:** RESEARCH DATA GATHERING: MULTI-SITE CASE STUDIES.

**WP 5:** DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH.

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