Making Migrant Solidarity in Cities: Successful Local Patterns and Approaches Across Europe

An Analysis of Moving Cities Data

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Abstract:

In recent years, over 700 cities across Europe have actively supported solidarity-based migration policy. Often, these initiatives are responding to regressive and anti-migrant policies enacted at the national and multi-national (i.e., European Union) level. To effectively document good practices from these cities, the Moving Cities project highlighted 28 case studies of migrant and refugee support initiatives across the continent.

Building on the Moving Cities case studies, this report analyses local patterns and processes that facilitate the implementation of urban migrant solidarity policies. Through a thematic meta-analysis of Moving Cities data, the report highlights key themes across European cities that adopt solidarity-based migration policies.

This report documents good practices in urban migrant solidarity policies across Europe, demonstrating the vital role of empowered municipal actors, collaborative approaches, integrated frameworks, and the importance of local context. By highlighting (i) the proactive efforts of mayors and municipal staff, (ii) collaborations between municipalities and civil society, and (iii) the adoption of holistic integration strategies, this report underscores the diverse and innovative ways that cities are responding to migration challenges. The case studies and thematic meta-analysis reveal that successful migrant solidarity policies are adaptable, inclusive, and context-sensitive—reflecting the unique socio-political and economic landscapes of each city. This comprehensive examination provides valuable insights and practical guidance for other municipalities aiming to enhance their migrant support and advocacy initiatives.

This report highlights not just where migrant solidarity successes have occurred, but also the patterns and processes that have facilitated the implementation of good policies and practices. As such, the report is aimed at those working in activist and civil society organizations, city networks, municipal governments, and students who are seeking to reaffirm and expand efforts toward solidarity with migrants in Europe—which is particularly relevant in the context of rising backlash against migration across the continent.

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Introduction

Moving Cities project overview

The Moving Cities project was launched in 2019 by a coalition of activists from civil society movements and researchers from Germany and Italy. It documents good practices and approaches to migrant support and advocacy. Moving Cities initially identified 781 cities across Europe that have publicly declared some form of solidarity with migrants and refugees. Between 2020–2021, a team of researchers examined 28 case studies of cities through interviews with political actors, scholarly research, and the analysis of existing records. Reports on these cities have highlighted their progressive approaches to migrant solidarity, while providing in-depth examples of some of the promising policies and good practices in Europe.

Background

The information in this report builds on the core Moving Cities data set, as part of a collaboration between Moving Cities and Soli*City. Soli*City (the Urban Sanctuary, Migration Solidarity, and Hospitality in Global Perspective partnership) is a Canadian-funded research partnership that brings together dozens of academics and partner organizations to co-develop and share evidence-based knowledge. It focuses on the policies and practices of accommodating vulnerable and precarious migrants and refugees across major urban centres in Africa, Europe, North America, and Latin America.

Previous Moving Cities research highlights specific policies and approaches of selected cities, with its website displaying the impact from effective policies and practices across Europe. The current study takes a different approach by conducting a thematic meta-analysis of the Moving Cities data, focusing on the patterns and processes that unite European solidarity cities. As such, this report highlights the characteristics of municipalities that facilitate the successful development and implementation of migrant solidarity initiatives.

Methodology

This thematic meta-analysis of Moving Cities data focuses on patterns and processes that facilitate the development of solidarity-based policy and practice. The author reviewed all publicly available Moving Cities information, including the 28 city profile reports and website materials. Data was inductively coded through a line-by-line analysis and organized into a codebook in Microsoft Excel. Initial codes were developed into themes and subthemes. Theme development was informed by academic scholarship on urban migrant solidarity.

Key Themes

The thematic meta-analysis identified four overarching themes, which characterize the local patterns and approaches to urban migration solidarity across the Moving Cities data set. These themes highlight the conditions on the ground in progressive cities across Europe, focusing on what makes them particularly effective at developing and implementing policies and practices to support the needs of migrants and refugees. The four principal themes are:

Theme 1 → Empowered municipal agents

Theme 2 → Collaborative approaches

Theme 3 → Integrated approaches

Theme 4 → Local contexts matters

These themes are not exhaustive; rather, they represent the patterns and approaches that are most cross-cutting throughout Europe. Each of these four themes is organized into further sub-themes. The next few sections discuss these themes and their respective sub-themes in detail.

Theme 1 – Empowered municipal agents

Individuals working at the municipal level—both political leaders and staff—play key but distinct roles in facilitating the enactment of migrant solidarity policy. Three sets of municipal actors were found to be particularly important:

- Leadership and mayors
- Municipal staff and bureaucrats
- Immigrant councils

1.1. Proactive leadership and mayors

Political leaders, especially mayors, are key agents in shaping municipal migrant solidarity agendas. The majority of cities in the sample identified mayors and political leaders as important actors—including cities in France, Italy, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, and Spain.

Mayors are spokespeople for pushing forward and promoting local solidarity projects with their cities.

Palermo (Italy) has been recognized as a solidarity city in Europe, largely through the agenda presented by Mayor Leoluca Orlando; despite many solidarity city policies being implemented outside of his time in office. Across several multi-year terms (1985–1990; 1993–2000; 2012–2022), Mayor Orlando promoted a "migrant friendly" branding of the city.

> *Every time a ship arrives in the port of Palermo with migrants stranded in the Mediterranean, I am present to welcome them. On such occasions the harbour becomes a model of civil organisation, everything works to perfection, associations and institutions together. Over the years I have obtained from the Chief of State Police the guarantee that the area will not be militarised, that the immigrants at the time of landing will not see a single uniform, neither police nor military.* —From a conversation with Mayor Leoluca Orlando, June 2017

Gdańsk (Poland) mayor Paweł Adamowicz (1998–2019) was a major advocate in promoting a local pro-immigrant agenda. Referring to Christian values and the city's global responsibility, Adamowicz was one of the few Polish politicians to openly advocate for helping refugees in 2015. He was instrumental in creating the city's Immigration Integration Model.

> *Gdańsk is generous, Gdańsk shares its good, Gdańsk wants to be a city of solidarity. This is a wonderful time to share the good. You are loved. Gdańsk is the most wonderful city in the world.* —Paweł Adamowicz

Political leaders are also important advocates in city networks, as well as in pressuring national governments to adopt more progressive and migrant-friendly policies.

Potsdam (Germany) mayor Mike Schubert (2018–) has been a key organizer of the German network Cities of Safe Harbour Alliance, through which he has advocated for national-level policies. Schubert has also served as an expert witness to the Bundestag's (Federal Parliament) Interior Committee on the topic of refugees (see also 2.3 City Networks: Berlin).

Rottenburg (Germany) mayor Stephan Neher (2008–) has also been a leader within the Cities of Safe Harbour Alliance, using this position to contest state policy by calling for direct admission of refugees from the Mediterranean:

> *If it comes down to it, I'll call a bus operator in my town afterwards, and he'll go to Italy and pick up the people.* —Stephan Neher

Bologna (Italy) mayor Virginio Merola (2011–2021) has actively contested the regressive national government in public statements, such as in 2019, when he declared that the city's civil servants would carry out municipal policy that contravened national decisions.

Barcelona (Spain) mayor Ada Colau (2015–2023) was an active leader and initiator of several city networks within Europe and internationally, including the Spanish network of Solidarity Cities ("La Red de Ciudades Refugio").

The importance of political leadership at the local level is also evident in their capacity to block or delay migrant solidarity initiatives.

In Halle (Saale) (Germany), the mayor was commissioned to develop a Welcome Centre for migrant and refugee populations in the city. The programme was not implemented due to the mayor's refusal to comply. Mayor Bernd Wiegand (2012–) reached out to the state government of Saxony-Anhalt to gain their support in declaring the city council's plan illegal. While the city eventually forced the implementation of a similar program ("Welcome Treff"), the case of Halle (Saale) shows how executive opposition can delay policy implementation, regardless of its strong support from city council and civil society.

1.2. Municipal staff and bureaucrats

While highlighted less frequently than mayors and political leadership, municipal staff and bureaucrats are important actors in the implementation of solidarity-based migration policy. Successful cities often dedicate funding for specialized staff to facilitate the implementation of migration-related policies. Important municipal staff roles include: (1) coordinating with civil society organizations; (2) acting as case managers for migrants; and (3) developing policy.

Rottenburg (Germany) employs a number of specialized staff to fill these roles—particularly 1 and 2—which is essential in the effective implementation of solidarity initiatives. By creating these roles, the city has made clear and direct channels through which migrants and civil society organizations can engage the municipality around urban migrant needs.

The city's Welcome Culture Coordinator is a permanent staff person who acts as a liaison between the municipality and civil society. In addition to serving as a single and permanent point of contact, the Welcome Culture Coordinator also plays a support role in helping to coordinate civil society activities.

Rottenburg also employs a team of ten integration managers. These staff members serve as case managers for migrants and refugees by helping them with a range of activities—including immigration, housing, healthcare access, language acquisition, and finding employment.

Swansea (United Kingdom) funds three staff members on long-term (3-year) contracts to facilitate collaboration with civil society in the Swansea City of Sanctuary group.

1.3. Immigrant councils

Several cities have established dedicated immigrant councils, which bring migrant voices directly into the policymaking process. Cities that have introduced an immigrant council or similar program include Amsterdam (Netherlands), Gdańsk (Poland), Grenoble (France), and Valencia (Spain).

Amsterdam (Netherlands) established a refugee advisory working group in 2016, making it one of the first Dutch municipalities to do so. This group consists of longtime Amsterdam residents who arrived as refugees and provides recommendations on policy development, implementation, and communication.

The Immigrants' Council of **Gdańsk (Poland)** was established as a consultative body that advises the mayor and city council on migration- and refugee-related policies. The council is an elected body of 16 members (serving 2-year terms) and consists of immigrants "from different countries, with varied migration experiences, different socio-demographic background, and varied periods of residence in Poland or Gdańsk" (Mikulska Jolles, 2023, p. 5).

In **Grenoble (France)**, the Consultative Council of Foreign Residents of Grenoble ("Conseil Consultatif des Résidents Etrangers Grenoblois-CCREG") was established in 2000 as an avenue for migrants to provide input on government decision-making.

Valencia's (Spain) Local Council on Immigration and Interculturality was developed as a new participation structure for migrant voice in 2016. The council was designed to bring migrant and refugee perspectives into the municipal policy-making process.

Theme 2 – Collaborative approaches

Solidarity-based migration policy is not an endeavour of the municipality alone. Implementation of many programs draws on close collaborations between many local and regional actors. In almost every city identified by Moving Cities, civil society has been a crucial participant in the development and implementation of solidarity-based policies. Regional collaborations can be effective approaches for smaller municipalities, as well as municipalities that have progressive regional governments. Leading solidarity cities are often members (and sometimes leaders) of national and EU-wide city networks.

2.1. Collaboration between civil society and municipality government

Civil society organizations are the primary partners or leaders on many migrant-solidarity municipal initiatives. Although these organizations typically consist of the non-profit sector, they can also include activist groups and religious associations.

Municipalities collaborate directly with civil society in the development and implementation of migrant-solidarity policies. Certain municipal roles and approaches promote effective collaboration with civil society; in particular, municipalities as financer and facilitator of civil society initiatives. This section highlights several successful approaches from Moving Cities.

Civil society leading the way. Across the sample, the active role of local civil society was paramount in the development and implementation of solidarity-based policies and practices.

> In **Barcelona (Spain)**, the city's "Barcelona, Refuge City" plan was developed during the 2015 election campaign by a migration workgroup consisting of citizens, activists, researchers, municipal staff, and NGO workers.

> In **Bremen (Germany)**, anti-racist and migrant-solidarity civil society groups have pushed the city to adopt policy changes on numerous occasions—including efforts that led to the closure of the department of deportation in 2010, as well as implementation of the "Solidarity Cities" approach.

Municipality as financer. One of the most direct and obvious roles of the municipality in fostering a collaborative environment with civil society is through financial support. Multiple municipalities directly fund civil society organizations that run programs in support of migrants, as demonstrated in these two case studies:

> **Berlin (Germany)** funds NGOs that provide counselling services to asylum seekers through the asylum process. The city took this action in response to federal backtracking on funding.

Swansea (United Kingdom), in collaboration with grants from the National Lottery, has supported the Welcome to Swansea mentoring initiative—a project of the Wales City of Sanctuary movement.

The case of **Valencia (Spain)** highlights some challenges that can come with municipal funding of civil society organizations. NGOs from the city have advocated to replace one-off or short-term agreements with a more long-term approach to partnerships, aiming to facilitate more effective and secure collaborations.

Municipality as facilitator. Beyond financial support, solidarity municipalities often position themselves as facilitators or supporters of civil society initiatives. Rather than taking ownership of projects, these cities position themselves to provide necessary support while allowing civil society to take leadership. Often, this approach involves recognizing these civil society groups as longstanding experts in migrant solidarity.

Municipalities take on these roles through a variety of methods—from establishing networks, forums, or physical centres for civil society collaboration, to mapping migrant solidarity social services and including civil society in the policymaking process.

Amsterdam (Netherlands) is notable for taking on a facilitative role that gives civil society organizations significant influence in the implementation of projects. For example, the city handed over the LVV Shelter System—the city's reception centre for migrants—to a coalition of NGOs to implement the program.

Naples (Italy) positions itself as a mediator and facilitator by enabling civil society to be at the forefront of initiatives to support migrants and refugees. For example, the municipality developed the Siproimi housing programme, but passed over coordination to local NGOs. Despite the success of this model, challenges persist due to bureaucratic procedures that challenge collaboration.

Ghent (Belgium) collaborates with civil society through a variety of programs, in both official and unofficial capacities. The city's "holistic, tailored, and socially-oriented (instead of merely results-oriented) approach" has been recognized through numerous acknowledgements for solidarity practice (Vandenhove et al., 2023, p. 2).

Rottenburg (Germany) has made several notable efforts to support civil society in coordination and support roles. One notable approach is a volunteer-matching program coordinated by the city—named Paten (godmothers/godfathers)—which provides matching support for mentor volunteers from civil society with refugee families.

Case Studies: the Ghent approach

The city of **Ghent (Belgium)** is notable for its breadth of effective collaborations between the municipality and civil society on migration and integration policies. Rudy Coddens, a member of the city council, has described the Ghent approach: "various initiatives and organisations arise from bottom-up initiatives and the city of Ghent recognizes and supports these initiatives and organisations, without taking them over" (Vandenhove et al., 2023, p. 5).

Ghent's Migration Forum facilitates collaboration among various migration stakeholders, fostering cooperation and a comprehensive approach to integrating asylum seekers. This twice annual forum brings together a range of actors involved in migrant and refugee support—including policy makers and field staff from the municipality, civil society organizations, community members, and volunteers. The forum aims to sustain dialogue between these groups and act as a place to meet, exchange ideas, and debate migration and integration themes. Jobteam Gent, a civil society organization, expressed its appreciation for the Migratieforum: "[we] don't always agree on everything, but thanks to the Migratieforum everyone is forced to sit at the same table and problems can be discussed from different angles in a much more integrated way" (Vandenhove et al., 2023, p. 7).

The Refugee Taskforce demonstrates effective collaboration methods through the dedicated efforts of professional staff, civil society organizations, volunteers, and engaged citizens. Structured around three working groups—reception, integration, and sensibilization—the task force's participatory approach is a key aspect of its success.

Jobteam Ghent operates through an inter-organisational team with staff from 10 municipal and civil society organisations, who each bring expertise in areas such as youth work, substance abuse, social services, education, and reception. The project employs an outreach approach focused on long-term, tailored support. Staff actively engage with job seekers by directly visiting social services, youth groups, neighbourhoods, individual homes, and job sites; rather than relying on job seekers to travel to an office. This model emphasises the importance of neighbourhood-based support and direct engagement.

For more details, read the full Ghent city profile.

2.2. Regional collaborations

Many solidarity cities also form collaborations at the regional or sub-national level. These have primarily developed in two ways:

1. Multi-level collaborations with higher levels of government, including regional governments or Prefectures (e.g., Milan and Valencia). In this case, the municipality works closely with regional or state authorities or negotiates special dispensation for autonomy on some areas of policy.
2. A group of local municipalities collaborate as a way to pool resources, share knowledge, and strengthen their collective capacity (e.g., Bologna and Tilburg).

Milan (Italy) has advocated for a special form of autonomy for implementing migrant integration initiatives. This is seen in the case of the Municipal CAS (Centro di accoglienza straordinario – Extraordinary Reception Centre). Typically, a CAS is run by the central government through the Prefectures; however, through a special agreement, Milan took over the operations of its reception centre. In this case, collaboration with higher levels of government came in the form of additional autonomy for the municipality to manage affairs related to asylee reception.

Valencia's (Spain) municipal approach is very closely tied with the regional government. The two governments are described as in "constant and fluid cooperation" through a number of cooperative programs (Climent-Fernando, 2023, p. 3). Through the Valencia inclou agreement and PANGEA network, the city and regional governments effectively work in tandem on migration, integration, and migrant housing policies in collaboration with civil society. This e collaboration has also enabled the city and region to act together as an effective advocacy voice to the national government. As such, the success of the Valencia approach relies on an alignment between municipal and regional authorities on migration-related issues.

Bologna (Italy) engages in several inter-municipal cooperation arrangements with neighbouring cities. These facilitate the sharing of knowledge and capacities among local municipalities in multiple areas, including refugee inclusion and health. One prominent example is the MondoDonna project—which coordinates among municipalities to offer a variety of supports for women confronting gender-based violence. Bologna's approach has effectively expanded services to migrants and the welcoming system from "urban to territorial scale" (Collini and Furri, 2023, p. 4).

Tilburg (Netherlands) is part of a cooperation model in the Heart of Brabant region, where municipalities (many of which are small and under resourced) pool resources and governance structure. Through this approach, they have gained more leverage in negotiating with central government authorities—including the Central Agency for Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA)—as well as applying for funding from the EU and the Dutch state. Collaborative projects, such as Inburgering+ (Civic Integration+) and the Regioplaatsing (Regional Placement project), span across the various municipalities and incorporate civil society as well.

2.3. City networks

Solidarity cities are active members and often leaders of city networks. Many participate in multiple domestic and international networks simultaneously. Involvement in city networks serves two primary functions: advocacy and knowledge sharing.

Amsterdam (Netherlands) participates in several national networks that serve as venues for mobilising support, including the Dutch Association of Municipalities (VNG) and Dutch Coalition of the Willing—which facilitated the relocation of unaccompanied minors from refugee camps in Greece. Amsterdam is also a member of the International Alliance of Safe Harbours (IASH).

Berlin (Germany) is active in both national and international networks for migration. At the national level, Berlin has been a leader in the Seebrücke movement since 2018, using this network and its position to push for more autonomy on migrant admission at the local level. It is also a part of the German network Cities of Safe Harbour Alliance and the International Alliance of Safe Harbours (IASH).

Cadiz, Barcelona, and Valencia are among the leaders of Spain's City of Refuge network, which has advocated to bring the concerns of vulnerable migrants and refugees to the national government. These cities drafted a letter in November 2022 that urged the government to reinstate the Reception and Integration Fund.

Montreuil (France) actively promotes the unconditional reception of migrants and refugees alongside the Seine-Saint-Denis department and other local municipalities. To foster a unified approach and develop action plans, cities within the department build networks with one another and organize workshops for regional exchanges on reception practices.

2.4. Collaborations with International organizations

In some cases, municipalities have developed useful collaborations with international organizations; particularly with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). These collaborations have been documented in southern European cities, focusing on programs that host incoming refugees.

Livadia (Greece), in collaboration with UNHCR, launched the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) program in November 2016. Since its inception, this initiative has housed over 1,500 refugees in city apartments. Key institutional actors who manage this support include city authorities and the Public Benefit Organization of the Municipality of Livadia (KEDIL). The success of these projects is ensured through close cooperation with relevant ministries and international bodies such as UNHCR (Lafazani, 2023).

Palermo (Italy) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) renewed their partnership in June 2023 to support unaccompanied minors, refugees, and migrant families. This renewal demonstrates Palermo's ongoing commitment to protecting the rights of vulnerable individuals, despite changes in government (Alagna, 2023, p. 11).

In **Valencia (Spain)**, the Agermanament Comunitari Valencià project is a collaborative initiative involving the Valencian Regional Ministry for Equality and Inclusive Policies, the Spanish Ministry for Social Security and Migrations, UNHCR; and social organizations including Servei Jesuïta a Migrants Spain and Càritas Diocesana. Originally launched by UNHCR in Canada in 2016, this project has also been implemented in the Basque Country, reflecting its strong capacity for international policy transfer and adaptation (Climent-Fernando, 2023, p. 11).

In **Tilos (Greece)**, several projects and initiatives were launched through collaborations with UNHCR, Solidarity Now, Doctors of the World, and the municipality of Meinier in Switzerland. Over time, a more organized reception space was established with ten containers—each featuring two rooms, a bathroom, and a kitchen—to accommodate ten Syrian families. Unlike other locations, the accommodation in Tilos remained open and unfenced, without security measures, promoting a sense of openness and inclusion (Lafazani, 2023).

Theme 3 – Integrated approaches

Across Europe, programmes are considering the complex experiences of migrants and communities. This holistic approach is reflected in three different categories: whole-of-migrant, whole-of-government, and whole-of-society integration

3.1. Whole–of-migrant approach to integration

The 'whole-of-migrant' approach refers to a model of integration that addresses the complex and holistic needs of migrants and refugees. Rather than addressing one or two core needs (e.g., housing and employment), solidarity cities taking this approach develop programmes that simultaneously address the diverse needs of migrants—from basic needs like access to food and shelter to others such as employment and subjective experience of belonging.

The **Barcelona Refuge Plan (Spain)**, including the Nausica program, focuses on "help with housing, legal aid, job, and language training"—receiving accolades for its success in supporting asylum seekers toward "social and economic autonomy, as well as Spanish language skills" (Kron, 2023, p.7). The programme has proved to be a model for other cities in Valencia and Zaragoza.

The **Amsterdam Approach (Netherlands)** to refugee inclusion emphasizes a simultaneous and holistic plan for supporting refugees. This approach is a direct response to critiques of the 2016 national asylum policy and the time lags in its enactment. Amsterdam's integrated approach focuses on complementary measures across different domains. These include work experience, language training, access to education, healthcare, housing, and civil participation as part of a simultaneous approach to supporting the integration of refugees.

3.2. Whole-of-government approach

The 'whole-of-government' approach is referenced in the Global Compact for Migration.

> *Whole-of-government approach. The Global Compact considers that migration is a multidimensional reality that cannot be addressed by one government policy sector alone. To develop and implement effective migration policies and practices, a whole-of-government approach is needed to ensure horizontal and vertical policy coherence across all sectors and levels of government* (GCM, 2018: para. 15).

Examples of cities that take this approach include:

Bologna (Italy) has integrated social services for migrants and other vulnerable groups into a single agency: the Azienda Pubblica di Servizi alla Persona (ASI). Consolidation of various services (e.g., housing, health, and social support) into a single agency has streamlined service provision.

Gdańsk (Poland) adopted the Immigration Integration Model (IIM) in 2016. This strategic document is designed to implement a comprehensive integration policy across all municipal organizations. This model is now considered a good practice for other Polish municipalities. Developed between 2015 and June 2016, the IIM was created by a diverse group of around 150 experts, practitioners, and officials from 70 local institutions and organizations. The development process included input from international experiences with mentoring support through the Eurocities network—including cities such as Barcelona and Ghent, as well as the UK-based organization 'MigrationWork' (Mikulska Jolles, 2023).

In **Utrecht (Netherlands)**, the programmes designed to support refugees are closely linked and were developed by the same team of policy advisors. These programmes aim to provide an early and promising start for refugees in the city, emphasizing tailored support that meets the individual needs and ambitions of each refugee. This integrated approach reflects a belief in the benefits of simultaneous and personalized assistance (Miellet, 2023).

3.3. Whole-of-society approach

The 'whole-of-society' approach focuses on programmes that aim to serve the needs of all members of society, often with vulnerable populations (including migrants and refugees) as focal beneficiaries. This approach is effective where specialized services for migrants and refugees may be contentious.

Berlin (Germany) supports the needs of migrants and refugees with a healthcare assistance programme, "Clearing House." This programme provides assistance to anyone without healthcare, regardless of residency status. Thus, the programme has a broad range of beneficiaries, while placing some priority on benefits for migrants and refugees.

Milan (Italy) has a variety of programmes that provide benefits to the disadvantaged populations in the city. Milan's social services have been reoriented toward addressing vulnerability and inclusion across the whole population, which includes support to precarious migrants as key beneficiaries. These programs are:

- Sammartini Hub, a service centre for "adults experiencing serious social exclusion" including homeless people as well as asylum seekers and irregular migrants.
- Centro Diurno Bassanini-Tremontani (Day Centre Bassanini-Tremontani), a space organised through civil society and municipal collaboration, which provides holistic services to disadvantaged people—including access to meals, showers, and recreational facilities. Because of intersectional dimensions of precarity in Italy, irregular migrants are key beneficiaries of the programme, despite its accessibility to a broad population.
- Celav (Centro di Mediazione Lavoro) supports disadvantaged populations in seeking employment in the city, with a large range of beneficiaries including those with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and migrants.

In **Tilos (Greece)**, local residents and authorities have made concerted efforts to integrate migrants into the social and economic life of the community. Migrants in particular are seen as important to boosting a struggling local economy. As such, local authorities have supported the integration of refugees and framed their success as the success of the community as a whole.

Zurich's (Switzerland) urban citizenship model includes the upcoming development of a City ID card, "Züri City Card". When implemented, this card can be used to access a wide range of city services, as well as discounts to cafes, museums, and stores in the city. It is accessible to irregular migrants (Sans Papiers), but also open to all citizens of Zurich. As such, the card will provide inclusive benefits and a sense of urban citizenship for all in the city; yet with particular benefits to irregular migrants. Zurich has also established the Meditrina programme, which aims to help all those who live in the city but lack access to health care—including unhoused people, sex workers, and irregular migrants. The project has been approved by the Zurich electorate, with the first preparatory work to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2026.

Integration of diverse migrants. The whole-of-society approach can also include consideration of the diverse experiences of migrants. Thus, programmes do not just focus on a particular category or population of migrants (i.e., asylum seekers or refugees), but are developed to consider the experiences of all kinds of migrants.

This is seen in Utrecht, where programmes for refugees have been structured in a way that undocumented migrants are beneficiaries of the programmes. In Zaragoza, this approach has led the city to consider the evolving and diverse nature of migrants—such as the different needs between migrants from Africa (generally transit migrants) and those from Latin America (planning to stay).

3.4. Neighborhood models and community hub spaces

Hub spaces and neighbourhood models in Europe are highlighted as particularly effective approaches to providing holistic and integrated benefits to migrants and refugees, as well as simultaneously serving local communities within cities.

In **Utrecht (Netherlands)**, Plan Einstein focuses on civic integration for migrants and refugees. It runs an asylum centre within a local neighbourhood and offers services and activities that are open to both long-term Utrecht residents and newly arrived refugees. Plan Einstein emphasizes the development of a shared ecosystem, through shared living and learning.

In **Halle (Saale) (Germany)**, Welcome Treff is a large civil society-run meeting place for refugees and local citizens. The space includes a meeting café and provides a variety of services locally—including support with job searching, German language training, and help filling out administrative forms. The programme also offers recreational activities such as games and sports.

Milan's (Italy) WeMi is a hub for family reunification and a multi-service centre. This centre considers the holistic needs of migrant families and offers a range of services including counselling, information, financial education courses, and volunteering activities.

Montreuil's (France) incubator hub space provides refugees with access to a variety of services and supports to help with entrepreneurial activities, including mentoring, networking, and a collaborative workplace.

Theme 4 – Local context matters

While Moving Cities and this meta-analysis have endeavoured to show cross-cutting themes in solidarity-based migration programs, an important takeaway is that understanding local context is vital when designing and implementing migrant solidarity approaches. Through examining these cases, the following considerations are clear:

- No one-size-fits-all solutions
- Current sociopolitical and economic factors, in addition to local historical context, shape what works well in different municipalities
- Engaging local experts, organizers, and community leaders is crucial

The differences in local context can be seen in three pairs of examples from Germany, Poland, and Greece.

4.1. Germany: contrasting political and civil society contexts

Bremen (Germany) has a long history of progressive, anti-racist politics driven by active civil society and social movements. Since the 1970s, these movements have influenced local policy, especially with the Greens joining the government in 2007. The Social Democrats, while generally progressive, have occasionally enforced strict deportation policies—but civil society has effectively mobilized against these actions, resulting in a collaborative approach between local government and civil society in developing migrant policies (Jakob, 2023).

Halle (Saale) (Germany) operates in a challenging context with strong right-wing political influence and inconsistent municipal support. Despite a robust anti-racist civil society, the local government often opposes these migration initiatives. This has led to many projects being led independently by civil society, without municipal collaboration. For instance, civic groups established a meeting café for refugees when the mayor refused to set up an integration centre. Persistent activism has raised awareness and improved refugee housing, despite political resistance (Jakob, 2023).

Overall, Bremen benefits from a collaborative relationship between civil society and the progressive local government, fostering inclusive migrant policies. Halle (Saale), however, faces political resistance, resulting in civil society-led initiatives operating independently to support refugees. This contrast underscores how migration initiatives are shaped by each city's unique local political context.

4.2. Poland: Integrated versus siloed approach

Gdańsk (Poland) exemplifies an integrated approach to migrant and refugee support through its Immigration Integration Model (IIM). Developed from 2015–2016, the IIM is a strategic document created through extensive consultations involving 150 people from 70 local institutions and organizations. This collaborative process also drew on international

expertise from cities like Barcelona and Ghent, as well as the 'MigrationWork' initiative from the UK. The IIM serves as the cornerstone of Gdańsk's comprehensive and coordinated migration policy (Mikulska Jolles, 2023).

Warsaw (Poland) employs a disaggregated approach to migration policy. Despite a challenging national political climate and the absence of a formal local migration strategy, individual municipal offices address migrant and refugee needs independently. These offices leverage their long-term experience to integrate migrant support into their statutory duties—resulting in effective, decentralized support mechanisms for migrants (Mikulska Jolles, 2023).

Overall, Gdańsk and Warsaw represent contrasting models of migrant support in Poland. Gdańsk's integrated approach, centred on the comprehensive IIM, ensures coordination and strategic support for migrants and refugees. In contrast, Warsaw's disaggregated approach relies on the independent efforts of municipal offices to meet migrant needs without a cohesive strategy. Both models offer unique solutions tailored to their respective contexts, highlighting the variety of methods that cities develop to implement local migration policies.

4.3. Small Greek communities as unique contexts

Livadia (Greece), a key entry point for Syrian migrants in Europe, has seen significant involvement from international organizations like UNHCR; particularly through the ESTIA program. Unlike other regions, Livadia's poor economic conditions and local distrust of NGOs led to a preference for municipal actors like KEDIL, which are more accountable to the local community. This situation has fostered a more sustainable and holistic approach to refugee support. Despite Greece being a transit country for many refugees, several local civil-society initiatives—such as the Citizens Collective for Human Rights Network— play a crucial role in supporting refugees (Lafazani, 2023).

Tilos (Greece), another smaller community and initial entry point for refugees, showcases a unique, community-driven approach to migration. The visionary leadership of ex-mayor Tasos Aliferis set a progressive tone for the island over the last 20 years. Collaborating with UNHCR and Solidarity Now, Tilos established open, unfenced accommodation for Syrian families, reflecting a welcoming attitude. This approach integrates refugees into the social and economic fabric of the community, emphasizing participation and coexistence. Tilos stands out for treating refugees as an asset rather than a problem, fostering an inclusive, whole-of-society approach (Lafazani, 2023).

Overall, Livadia and Tilos represent distinct yet effective models of refugee support in smaller Greek communities. Livadia leverages municipal actors to foster trust and sustainability in refugee programs, countering local economic challenges and NGO distrust. In contrast, Tilos emphasizes a community-driven, inclusive approach, integrating refugees into the local society under progressive leadership. Both approaches highlight the importance of context-specific strategies in managing refugee support.

Conclusion: Some Innovative Ideas and Challenges

This report has documented good practices in urban migrant solidarity across Europe. It demonstrates the vital role of empowered municipal agents, collaborative approaches, integrated frameworks, and the importance of local context. In wrapping up, the report will highlight some innovative ideas and challenges across these cities.

1. Innovative ideas: Municipal staff and bureaucrats

1.1. Bringing migration policymaking and practice into a single office or institution

In **Amsterdam (Netherlands)**, policy advisors and frontline social workers share office spaces. Working in the same environment allows for more informal connections between policy development and practice—which enables knowledge transfer and adaptability to variable political environments at the state level.

Valencia (Spain) has consolidated all programmes in its migration portfolio into one institution: the Social Rights and Inclusion Department. Since 2015, this approach has created a single entry-point for migrants into the complex local bureaucratic infrastructure. It has also allowed for increased social visibility and political support for migrants and refugees.

Bern (Switzerland) has identified the establishment of a municipal migration office as a key feature in achieving consistent local impact.

1.2. Hiring migrants for key municipal positions

In **Utrecht (Netherlands)**, the department of Work and Income employs several team members with recent refugee experience. This background is useful in communication between the municipality and local refugee communities.

1.3. Providing training on integration and equity across municipal offices

Gdańsk (Poland) has introduced a special training regimen for all city officials that emphasizes how to take integration and equity issues into account across their programmes. This special training includes courses on the city's Immigration Integration Model and Model for Equal Treatment, as part of the preparatory services for civil service employees. The city has also hired specialized city officers whose role includes introducing migrants' point of view into the workflow and considerations of municipal units.

1.4. Developing policy in flexible language that can adapt to national politics and agendas

In **Tilburg (Netherlands)**, local policy advisors have taken a proactive, learning-by-doing approach that is designed to fill gaps in national level policymaking—working directly with migrants to modify and improve programmes. In particular, the city's policy advisors have been recognized for their ability to negotiate within the narrow national asylum and integration policies to develop a broad set of programmes.

Utrecht (Netherlands) has a core team dedicated to refugee policy, to avoid senior policy advisors being spread too thin over their diverse policy loads. Utrecht policymakers also draft local policy in complete awareness of the often anti-immigrant national context. By drawing on discourses of human rights, pragmatism, and humanitarianism, Utrecht's local policies are designed to be adaptable to uncertain national political agendas.

2. Innovative ideas: Collaborative approaches

2.1. Mapping local actors and services

Several cities facilitate the work of civil society organisations through mapping local actors and services that support migrants. In a few cases, this practice led to the development of digital platforms that help to match migrant needs and organisations providing services. These projects help to bring service providers into contact with migrants and refugees, as well as establish systems to track usage of these tools and services.

Grenoble's (France) Migrants Hub (Plateforme Migrants) is an online platform operated by the municipality that helps to coordinate and match civil society organisation services with migrant needs. Developed in 2015 and operated by the municipality, Migrants Hub gathers community offerings of support for French classes, donations, accommodation, and legal support, among other services (Collini and Furri, 2023, p. 4).

Milano Aiuta (Milan Helps) combines efforts to map social services across the city with a digital platform that tracks the usage of these tools. The platform centralises information for volunteering and citizen support as part of a service-mapping exercise across the city. During COVID-19, this program facilitated connections between home care volunteers and people under quarantine or with special needs. The analytic dashboard helped to measure and track needs for food aid, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other critical items across the city.

In **Marseille (France), the Network Hospitality (Réseau Hospitalité)** conducted a systematic analysis and mapping of the local context for migrants and refugees. Although not a municipality-led initiative, this programme developed a comprehensive analysis of the "administrative, social, work and housing situation of asylum seekers in Marseille" (Collini and Furri, 2023, p. 5)

2.2. Bringing civil society into policy development

A key feature of successful solidarity-based migration policies across Europe is the inclusion of civil society in the development of migrant-related policy. Along with the inclusion of the migrant voice through immigration councils, the inclusion of civil society —in particular, migrant-led civil society at the beginning of the process—is a key feature of participatory policy design.

Amsterdam (Netherlands) involved civil society in the process of developing several policies, including the Undocumented Migrant Programme. The programme, which led to the shifting of migrant and refugee reception to smaller shelter facilities, was developed in close collaboration with over 25 NGO and activist groups, along with 60 undocumented refugees.

The **Barcelona Refuge City Plan** is a model for collaboration between city administration and civil society. The plan was developed out of a workgroup composed of citizens, activists, researchers, municipal staff, and NGO workers—providing a series of concrete measures to address the rights and needs for refugees.

In **Potsdam (Germany)**, new guidelines that enable the right to residence for foreigners were developed through a work group that involved civil society and migrant representatives. This process was noted as an important step in making the city's Foreign Authority more supportive of the needs of migrants and refugees.

2.3. Collaborative hubs: Co-organized spaces

A prominent approach to facilitating collaboration between civil society and the municipality is the creation of hubs that bring together a diverse range of actors in the city—including civil society organizations, municipal departments, universities, and social enterprises. In some cases, these hubs exist as permanent centres where municipal staff and civil society meet and work in the same environment. In other cases, they are regularly scheduled forums or network events.

Zaragoza (Spain)'s Casa de las Culturas is a hub for all collaborative efforts on migration policy. This centre ties closely with the municipality's participatory approach, enabling close collaboration with civil society programmes and urban citizenship approaches. Casa de la Cultura is the central hub for all migration programs in the city—which was established by the municipality yet is managed by civil society organizations.

Warsaw (Poland)'s Multicultural Centre is a municipal centre for collaboration between civil society and the city. Established in 2008, the Centre is managed by a rotating group of resident nonprofit organisations and follows a model that is similar to that of Zaragoza. It hosts many of the city's intercultural activities including cultural and education events, language learning programs, and counselling services. The city funds the centre, but it is managed by civil society organizations.

Milan (Italy)'s MSNA Service Centre is a space for collaboration between civil society and the municipality. It serves as a reception centre and a centralized space for various institutions and organizations—including the regional healthcare system, youth mental health department, the Prefecture, and NGOs.

Zurich (Switzerland)'s BAZ is a meeting space created to foster collaboration between civil society and the municipality. The space offers learning and recreational opportunities for participants, as well as being a meeting space for civil society organizations. It is managed in cooperation with the Zurich Community Centres Foundation.

3. Challenges: Creating effective models for collaboration and participation

The report has highlighted the importance of collaboration among citizens, civil society, migrants, and municipal staff in the development and implementation of policies and practices. However, Moving Cities research suggests that not all municipalities have been effective in engaging these various populations and groups in the development of initiatives.

Immigrant councils (Theme 1.3) are one example of participatory models that incorporate migrant and refugee voices into policy development and implementation.

Lewisham (United Kingdom) has developed a participatory approach to policymaking. Through the Lewisham Migration Forum and a Listening Campaign, the municipality has involved the needs and views of migrants in decision-making. **Ghent's (Belgium)** Migration Forum (discussed in the Ghent Approach insert) is another effective example of this approach.

At the same time, several prominent immigration councils were noted as ineffective or unsustainable, suggesting more work needs to be done in considering how to make the most of participatory models.

Interviews with local NGOs suggested that the long-running Consultative Council of Foreign Residents of Grenoble ("Conseil Consultatif des Résidents Etrangers Grenoblois-CCREG") in **Grenoble (France)** is no longer active in municipal decision-making.
Valencia's (Spain) Local Council on Immigration and Interculturality was developed as a new participation structure for migrant voice in 2016. However, the council has received criticism for underrepresentation of migrants and overrepresentation of NGOs.

4. Final thoughts

This report has documented some of the patterns and processes that have led to the development of migrant-solidarity initiatives across Europe over the last decade. It has been written in the context of rising backlash against migrant solidarity at national and local levels. As such, the report highlights not just where migrant solidarity successes have occurred, but also the 'how' that has facilitated the implementation of good policies and practices—even when cities are faced with opposition from certain segments of government and civil society.

This report is designed to help those working in activist and civil society organisations, city networks, municipal governments, and students. It aims to increase understanding of some of the most effective methods from the last decade—enabling dedicated supporters of integration initiatives to adapt these lessons for the next decade, continuing the development of successful programmes in solidarity with migrants across Europe.

Additional resources and reading

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