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# REBUILDING AFTER CRISIS: EMBEDDING REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN MIGRATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

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## COUNCIL STATEMENT

By Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Meghan Benton,  
and Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan

# REBUILDING AFTER CRISIS

## Embedding Refugee Integration in Migration Management Systems

*The 16th Plenary Meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration*

### Council Statement

By Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Meghan Benton,  
and Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan

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## Executive Summary

The migration and refugee crisis of 2015–16 put pressure on asylum, reception, and integration systems in advanced and developing economies alike. Even in some traditional destination countries, the scale and speed of flows stretched the capacity of national systems to receive and process newcomers,<sup>1</sup> while the mix of new arrivals' personal circumstances challenged the asylum framework through which their protection claims were adjudicated. At the local level, the rapid growth of immigrant populations created pressures on schools and housing and ushered in rapid social change, including in communities unaccustomed to cultural diversity. And the uneven geographic distribution of these pressures exposed cracks in systems of multilevel migration governance—not least in the fraught efforts of European institutions to forge an effective burden-sharing agreement.

As the immediate pressures of the crisis have begun to abate in Europe, policymakers have refocused their energies on two goals: anticipating and preventing the next crisis and ensuring that newcomers—and the communities in which they settle—have the tools to thrive.<sup>2</sup> These two objectives are in fact deeply interdependent. Getting it right with these cohorts of new arrivals is the linchpin on which all future asylum and immigration policies will be built. Without the financial and political capital to manage the settlement of the most recent newcomers—including those whose skills destination societies need—policymakers will be unable to earn the confidence of their electorates and with it, the mandate to experiment with more creative immigration and integration policies.

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But the path to the successful achievement of integration objectives is not always a clear one for policymakers. They must navigate increasingly complex public sentiments, colored by what is now deep skepticism and even anger about the prioritization of the needs of newcomers at the expense of other investments—real or perceived. At the same time, policymakers must make tough choices about how best to ensure that migration systems consistently adhere to and promote fair, rule-based principles of governance for the whole society. Preserving the integrity of the system as a whole, in other words, can present a particularly complex paradox: while it hinges strongly on sound integration outcomes, it is simultaneously threatened by the investments needed to foster integration if they are perceived as unfair, counterproductive, or designed in a way that is not obviously anchored in the broader society's values and concerns.

As governments seek to rebuild frayed migration management systems—minimizing chaotic and uncontrolled flows, clearing backlogs, and restoring public trust—a number of tradeoffs arise for refugee integration in the following four areas:

- **Preserving and strengthening the integrity of migration management systems.** In designing migration management systems, policymakers must often make hard choices to reduce the incentives for future migrants to misuse the asylum route (e.g., by delaying asylum seekers' access to family reunification and the labor market). The scale of the recent crisis forced

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1 In some countries, these capacity challenges were very real—especially at the local level. However, in others the perception of things being out of control was the major driver of anxiety both among publics and policymakers.

2 While this report focuses on refugee integration, to the extent that the migration crisis has brought in mixed flows—and the need to absorb at least some of these newcomers, regardless of whether they receive asylum status—it also addresses the broader question of integration for refugees *and* migrants. This report uses the term “refugee” when discussing newcomers who have either come through refugee resettlement routes or who have received asylum status; it uses “newcomers” or “migrants” when referring to this broader population.



some countries to choose between competing values, including whether to absorb greater numbers at the cost of public confidence or even the ability to maintain an adequate level of service provision for these newcomers.

- ***Managing expectations of successful integration.*** Work is a fast track to economic and social integration, but may not be a reasonable short-term goal for all vulnerable newcomers—especially given acute pressures on housing and services and the extent of their physical and mental health needs. Yet public confidence relies on evidence that refugees are quickly attaining self-sufficiency. As policymakers tread the fine line between allaying immediate public fears without jeopardizing future confidence, they must emphasize refugees’ potential economic contributions without raising expectations beyond what can be delivered.
- ***Restoring effective governance and coordination systems.*** Pressures on infrastructure and the uneven local effects of national decisions have strained multilevel governance institutions in recent years. Numerous new partners (from volunteers to social enterprises and private companies) have also sought to engage with refugee issues, injecting additional complexity into migration management and integration systems. Governments face the challenge of rebuilding longstanding relationships and creating fresh ones—and strengthening coordination between the efforts of all involved.
- ***Creating systems open to continuous innovation and learning.*** Newcomer—and particularly refugee—integration is an area crying out for experimentation, but is also an area in which policymakers can ill-afford to make mistakes. The challenge is thus how to foster new solutions without neglecting the hard, less sexy process of creating robust evaluation systems and bringing what works to scale.

Negotiating these challenges and tradeoffs requires a rare combination of wisdom and careful maneuvering so as to ensure that decisions taken in one part of the system don’t create unintended consequences in another. A targeted strike in the area of refugee integration, however well intentioned or well resourced, will not be enough if not embedded within a comprehensive plan that addresses how integration measures fit together with other pieces of the migration management puzzle.

Policymakers should consider the following recommendations as they seek to embed refugee integration within a systemwide plan:

- ***Align immigration, asylum, and integration policies.*** Strong coordination structures and evaluation procedures are critical to ensuring refugees have a path to full inclusion from the earliest possible moment without jeopardizing the system as a whole—or public confidence in it.
- ***Unlock the multiplier effects of integration.*** Policies that benefit the whole of society (or at least disadvantaged groups within it) are preferable to those that exclusively target immigrants or refugees. Governments should consider innovative ways to empower newcomers to support the communities in which they live, for instance through child and eldercare, volunteerism of all forms, or even initiatives like community gardening. Focusing solely on economic indicators of success may be overly narrow.
- ***Create incentives for new actors to get involved.*** The energy and enthusiasm civil-society and private-sector actors bring to early crisis and settlement efforts can amplify capacity in significant ways. Policymakers, however, will need to carefully coordinate efforts if these initiatives are to deliver real value. Being more mindful of incentive structures will help sustain this support after the initial novelty has worn off.



- **Engage all parts of society to (re)build public trust.** Storytelling can be more powerful than facts and figures or economic arguments, especially if it emphasizes individual migrants' histories and their embodiment of national values. But helping everyone feel they have a stake in the successful integration of large-scale arrivals requires a more all-encompassing approach: truly collaborative policy design and delivery that involves all levels of government and a wide range of stakeholders.

## I. Introduction

The global migration crisis has had a destabilizing effect on rich and poor countries alike, with few parts of society left unaffected. In countries of destination that received deeply disproportionate numbers of newcomers, public institutions have faced immense challenges receiving, processing, and adjudicating the asylum claims of applicants whose vastly different personal circumstances and reasons for migrating often defy easy categorization. And many communities are still experiencing difficulty adjusting to visibly and religiously different minorities, particularly when the concentration of newcomers is very high or when a destination is experiencing cultural diversity for the first time. The result is that local authorities are scrambling to find the right mix of policies, services, and resources to house, educate, and care for needy populations amid limitations of infrastructure and capacity—a challenge that will persist well into the next decade.

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*Governments and humanitarian actors will be judged by their ability to transition from the provision of short-term, emergency care to the creation of long-term opportunities.*

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As the sense of immediate crisis passes—and perhaps gives way to awareness of a “new normal” in terms of large-scale flows—policymakers are trying to come to grips with the next challenge: ensuring the social and economic inclusion of those who have arrived. Over the next five years, governments and humanitarian actors will be judged by their ability to transition from the provision of short-term, emergency care to the creation of long-term opportunities. This will entail getting refugees into work and their children into school—and ensuring both have the chance to succeed, wherever they are. These concerns are compounded by the fact that almost all displacement occurs in the developing world, where other problems loom large: dramatic absolute and relative fiscal shortfalls, weak governance, and persistent violence and conflict. Left unaddressed, these conditions could become the root of the *next* migration crisis. But while policymakers in Europe and North America have acknowledged that migration can only serve as a solution for a tiny segment of these populations, they have not agreed to a plan or begun to provide the resources needed to create more meaningful protection and livelihood opportunities for those in need in the regions most affected by conflict, instability, and displacement.

Having convened to examine the integration challenges governments in Europe and North America can expect to face over the next five years, the Migration Policy Institute's Transatlantic Council on Migration has set out where greater policy investments are needed in order to realize the potential of the newest arrivals. This Council Statement explores the integration questions that the recent migration crisis has brought to the fore and how these questions, in turn, affect broader governance structures for managing migration. It analyzes how best to support positive integration outcomes among refugees while not undermining the *integrity* of asylum and migration systems—that is, the ability of governments to design



and implement systems based on rules and consistent principles; retain control over arrival numbers and procedures; and communicate the choices and tradeoffs inherent in these systems to their publics.

## II. Navigating the Challenges and Tradeoffs of Managing Large-Scale Refugee Flows

Integration is the policy and political terrain on which immigration succeeds—or fails. When done well, it unlocks the benefits of immigration for receiving societies, communities, and economies, while at the same time improving the opportunities available to those who seek protection or a better life for themselves and their children. By the same token, when integration fails—or publics perceive it to have failed—it contributes to declining public trust in the governance of migration and ultimately undermines support for immigration. The strength of a country’s immigrant integration strategy is therefore more than the sum of its many parts; integration policies, however effective alone, must be embedded within a systematic approach to all aspects of migration made up of mutually supportive components.

The recent migration crisis has threatened the integrity of migration management systems in a number of ways. Processing backlogs, as well as acute pressures on public infrastructure, have overwhelmed most national asylum and broader reception systems. And perceptions of unfair burden-sharing have chipped away at multilevel governance cooperation. Each of these pressures threatens to erode public trust, which in many ways is the glue that holds migration systems together. Such pressures have not only made it harder to maintain high-quality reception and settlement services, but have also imperiled longer-term immigration and integration goals.

While much has been written about each of these policy areas on their own, innovation within each areas is insufficient if policymakers do not understand the *tradeoffs* inherent to different investments. These tradeoffs arise in four key areas related to integration, each of which policymakers will need to navigate in order to ensure that systems function well and to restore public confidence in the governance of migration:

1. how to better align migration and integration systems and reconcile the inherent tensions between them;
2. how to balance the need to get refugees into jobs quickly against more time-consuming efforts to enable them to find quality jobs—and against investments into the broader communities in which they settle;
3. how to better coordinate integration policies, including sharing responsibility between the local and national levels of government and working more effectively with new actors; and
4. how to weigh the need for new solutions against of the risks of experimentation.

### A. Recognizing the Interdependence of Migration and Integration Systems

Integration policies do not operate in isolation. The investments countries make in their asylum reception infrastructures—ranging from how asylum seekers’ claims are processed and adjudicated, to where they are housed and educated—can profoundly affect the types of resources and economic opportunities available to new refugees and how quickly they can begin the integration process.





These investments can come at a cost. On one hand, a lengthy gap between when refugees arrive and when they gain access to the tools necessary to enter the labor market and learn the host-country language can put them at an initial disadvantage that is difficult to overcome. On the other hand, deciding to invest in providing asylum seekers and refugees with earlier access can have repercussions for migration management systems down the line—with some critics fearing a “pull factor” that may attract future flows. This interdependence between migration and integration management can put policymakers on the horns of a dilemma: whether to invest heavily in the integration of individuals already in the country (even if this may create unintended consequences for another piece of the system, for example border enforcement) or whether to prioritize the survival of the system as a whole (even if this means delaying access to services for some groups in need).

Policymakers must navigate a number of tradeoffs associated with this interdependence:

- **Balancing short-term needs with longer-term investments.** The first priority for any country faced with a surge of mixed arrivals is to address short-term needs (how to receive, process, adjudicate, and house—and most of all, how to manage the flows). But focusing on these immediate concerns at the expense of longer-term strategies could prove shortsighted. A myopic focus on humanitarian needs, without a concomitant examination of long-term integration needs and even longer-term pressures on the system, will not change the big-picture dynamics of the crisis. The real policy prize is in mitigating the negative effects of displacement within countries and regions of origin that drive onward migration; yet such a goal requires enormous up-front investments (not least, high levels of cooperation among government actors with often divergent priorities and objectives) that are unlikely to pay off in the same political cycle.<sup>3</sup>
- **Prioritizing among conflicting values.** Many countries have had to face difficult questions about how to balance their humanitarian responsibilities with their duties to their own citizens. Some have begun to conclude that rapid change (especially without an end in sight) threatens to destabilize society’s institutions. Others have had to make hard choices about how best to meet their humanitarian responsibilities: by admitting greater numbers or by securing the integration—a more demanding proposition—of a smaller number of admissions. For instance, in the last two years, countries with a tradition of welcoming refugees, such as Sweden, have had to confront the question of whether there is a limit to the number of newcomers they can absorb.<sup>4</sup> This challenge is compounded by the fact that elected officials are not always perfectly attuned to which values are most important to the societies they represent. Angela Merkel, for example, staked her position on the recent crisis in an assumption about what was most important to the German people. But the defeats suffered by her party in 2016 regional elections suggest that the public mood has shifted.
- **Smoothing integration pathways without creating a “pull factor” for future flows.** Asylum seekers face a distinct disadvantage in that their legal status can be mired in uncertainty for months or even years—reducing employers’ willingness to take a gamble on hiring and

3 Broadly speaking, development investments tend to lead to *more* migration in the short- to medium-term, not less. A rise in income levels can empower migrants who have a desire to move, but previously lacked the resources to do so; this trend is likely to persist until the country of origin is able to create stable opportunities at home. Investments in countries of first asylum, however, may have more immediate short-term benefits, as forced migrants typically prefer to remain close to home if conditions permit. For a discussion of migration and development, see Carlos Vargas-Silva, *Policy Primer: Migration and Development* (Oxford: The Migration Observatory, University of Oxford, 2011), [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PolicyPrimer-Migration-and-Development.pdf](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PolicyPrimer-Migration-and-Development.pdf).

4 Insufficient capacity to meet historic asylum caseloads forced hard compromises: in 2015, Sweden imposed external border controls and published a law that will grant refugees temporary instead of permanent status. See Henrik Emilsson, “New Approaches to Facilitating Refugee Integration in Sweden” (discussion paper tabled at the 16th plenary meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration, Migration Policy Institute, Toronto, June 27–28, 2016).



training them<sup>5</sup> and limiting the introduction services for which they are eligible while they are in limbo. To ease some of these barriers, some countries are expanding access to the labor market or employment and integration programs to a wider pool of asylum seekers.<sup>6</sup> But policymakers must walk a fine line between reducing the legal and practical barriers that hinder early economic self-sufficiency among refugees, while maintaining the integrity of the asylum system by preventing it from being used as a labor migration channel.<sup>7</sup>

In many destination countries, the persistent belief that government is unequal to the task of managing immigration well—exacerbated by the perception that asylum routes are being misused and local infrastructure overwhelmed—is poisoning the well of policy innovation.<sup>8</sup> It requires enormous public trust to persuade citizens to prioritize long-term integration investments (which may not yield results until the second generation) over short-term enforcement (and even security) measures that can provide immediate comfort. Greater transparency about the values underlying political choices, including seemingly procedural ones, is at the heart of regaining public trust and winning the political capital to make long-term investments.<sup>9</sup>

## **B. Balancing Labor Market Integration against Other Integration Goals**

The most important vehicle for full social integration is finding sustainable employment. Work helps people become self-sufficient, interact with other ethnic and cultural groups in their local community, and learn about the host-country society. The importance of work—and the ease with which economic outcomes can be measured vis-à-vis other indicators of integration—has historically meant that successful integration is often defined as progress in the labor market.<sup>10</sup>

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*Refugees are also more likely than other immigrants to face difficulties in the labor market.*

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Resettled refugees are, by definition, not selected based on their propensity to integrate, but instead on their need for protection (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees explicitly prioritizes the most vulnerable for resettlement, as do many countries through their national resettlement programs). This may mean that these new arrivals are less able to find work, and that they may thus create extra costs for the receiving society. Refugees are also more likely than other immigrants to face difficulties in the labor market since they may have left their country of origin with minimal planning (meaning they may not have brought proof of qualifications and other documents) or at a suboptimal time in their career or studies (such as midway through a degree). They may also have spent a large amount of time out of work

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5 Difficult decisions about access to services may be more straightforward for some asylum seekers whose nationalities have a high protection rates, meaning investments in them are less risky.

6 Germany temporarily suspended its priority test for asylum seekers, which required employers to prioritize German citizens and other European Union (EU) nationals in hiring decisions, and Sweden instituted a fast-track system to more swiftly channel skilled newcomers into in-demand professions. See Maria Vincenza Desiderio, *Integrating Refugees into Host Country Labor Markets: Challenges and Policy Options* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integrating-refugees-host-country-labor-markets-challenges-and-policy-options](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integrating-refugees-host-country-labor-markets-challenges-and-policy-options).

7 For a detailed discussion of recent policy changes and their implications, see *ibid.*

8 Demetrios G. Papademetriou, *Maintaining Public Trust in the Governance of Migration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/maintaining-public-trust-governance-migration](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/maintaining-public-trust-governance-migration).

9 For a more in-depth discussion of the drivers of anxiety about immigration, see Demetrios G. Papademetriou and Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, *Understanding and Addressing Public Anxiety about Immigration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/understanding-and-addressing-public-anxiety-about-immigration](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/understanding-and-addressing-public-anxiety-about-immigration).

10 See Demetrios G. Papademetriou and Meghan Benton, *Towards a Whole-of-Society Approach to Receiving and Settling Newcomers in Europe* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/towards-whole-society-approach-receiving-and-settling-newcomers-europe](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/towards-whole-society-approach-receiving-and-settling-newcomers-europe).



during transit, processing, and/or resettlement.<sup>11</sup> Such delays in labor-market entry, if perceived as a failure to integrate, can limit the future political and financial capacity to receive other refugees.

The large-scale arrival of refugees puts strain on the economic approach to integration in a number of ways, revealing both limitations and unintended consequences inherent in a narrow focus on economic integration. This can be seen in the following policy challenges:

- **Meeting newcomers' housing needs without jeopardizing economic opportunities.** Many countries are confronting a tradeoff between placing refugees in areas with ample housing (often rural or peripheral areas) versus in locations with plentiful job opportunities but less readily available accommodations. Housing pressures often exacerbate public anxiety about immigration—either because of a perception that social housing is being unfairly allocated to newcomers,<sup>12</sup> fears of ghettoization, or concerns about overcrowding and housing decline. A long wait for a placement can itself be detrimental, as it means a delay in accessing labor market integration programs. And even when identified quickly and located where jobs *are* available, the place of initial settlement may still be poorly suited to the specific skillset of the individual refugee. There are thus two sides to debates over how to best and most equitably disperse refugee arrivals: while policymakers must settle people in places where their needs will be met, a surge of diversity only in urban, job-rich areas will further divide societies.
- **Balancing early entry into work with investments in training.** The pursuit of full labor market integration—meaning the ability to get a job commensurate with one's skills and experience, and with good prospects for upward progression—can compete with the goal of finding work quickly. In countries such as the United States, the expectation of early economic self-sufficiency has been associated with overqualification and newcomers becoming “locked in” to low-skilled work that does not pay a family-sustaining wage<sup>13</sup>—although some commentators have argued this is a worthwhile sacrifice to ensure a better life for subsequent generations. By contrast, countries with more regulated labor markets (such as Sweden and Germany) often have a larger pool of middle-skilled jobs, but higher hurdles to labor market entry. In any case, refugees and policymakers must weigh carefully the value of investing in training courses or apprenticeships that may yield better long-term prospects against more immediate earnings and entry into work.<sup>14</sup>
- **Creating incentives to work while acknowledging other contributions.** Many countries have seen a shift in recent years towards policies that use sticks instead of carrots to get people into work (e.g., by removing benefits for failure or refusal to participate in training or workfare).<sup>15</sup> While it is important to create incentives to work, imposing coercive measures without helping people upgrade their skills risks exacerbating problems of poverty and

11 For a thorough discussion of these challenges, and how the needs of refugees differ from those of other groups, see Desiderio, *Integrating Refugees into Host Country Labor Markets*.

12 For a discussion of the frustrations that can arise among existing populations if refugees are perceived as being prioritized for social housing, as well as recent efforts to brand new social housing construction projects as for everyone, see Victoria Rietig, *Moving Beyond Crisis: Germany's New Approaches to Integrating Refugees into the Labor Market* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/moving-beyond-crisis-germany-new-approaches-integrating-refugees-labor-market](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/moving-beyond-crisis-germany-new-approaches-integrating-refugees-labor-market).

13 See Michael Fix, Kate Hooper, and Jie Zong, *Refugee Integration at the National and State Level in the United States: Is There a “Lottery Effect”?* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, forthcoming).

14 For a discussion of how participation in the prestigious German dual system can be perceived as overly costly for refugees who owe debts to smugglers and want to get well paid work, see Rietig, *Moving Beyond Crisis*.

15 Most of these are targeted at the general population rather than refugees per se, but there has been a trend toward making benefits more conditional for refugees. For instance, Denmark intentionally gives a lower level of financial support to refugees relative to social assistance in order to increase the incentives to work, and a recent program proposed for the low-income Mjølnerparken area of Copenhagen could impose sanctions, including eviction, on people unwilling to take workfare jobs. See Martin Bak Jørgensen, “New Approaches to Facilitating Refugee Integration in Denmark” (discussion paper tabled at the 16th plenary meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration, Migration Policy Institute, Toronto, June 27–28, 2016).



destitution among vulnerable groups such as older migrants, single parents, or people with limited education and literacy.<sup>16</sup> Such programs can also overlook opportunities to target real needs in receiving societies. For example, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) San Diego initiative to help refugees build a community garden aims to help meet the region's growing appetite for farm-fresh produce.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, engaging immigrant women in home-based child- or eldercare businesses can greatly benefit aging societies and communities with few childcare providers. Capitalizing on these opportunities requires a new perspective on evaluating and matching skills, and more broadly about the diversity of ways in which people can meaningfully contribute to their communities.<sup>18</sup>

While work is undoubtedly important, it is not the sole route to broader societal integration. Policymakers may need to develop new paradigms for what “success” looks like for highly diverse populations; an expanded definition may include less-easily quantified measures, such as psychological wellbeing, civic participation, and volunteerism that encourage cultural interactions and reduces isolation—while also potentially benefiting the wider community. Integration policies that are evaluated on employment metrics alone are likely to fail to capture the policies' effect (or lack of it) on other dimensions of integration, such as social cohesion.<sup>19</sup> It is also important to manage the expectations members of the public have for what new arrivals will achieve, while conveying the message that refugees can be an economic asset.

### C. Repairing Cracks in Burden-Sharing and Governance Structures

The complexity inherent to the multilevel governance of integration can create a number of challenges, from difficulties sharing data between departments and regions to misaligned interests between actors at the local and national (or supranational) level.

The uneven local effects of the 2015–16 migration crisis created a perception of unfairness, straining fragile multilevel relationships. At the European Union (EU) level, tensions over the fair distribution of asylum seekers and burden-sharing came to a head over EU-wide relocation efforts. Member States that had not received a large number of refugee arrivals refused to sign up to a mandatory quota, causing countries that were initially more open to newcomers to modify their policies to make them more restrictive and comparable to those of their neighbors.

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16 Single parents, migrants with limited host-country language proficiency, and people with limited education are all less likely to be able to fulfill so-called “conditionality” requirements or may trigger sanctions because they do not understand how the system works or what is required of them. See Herwig Immervoll, “Minimum-Income Benefits in OECD Countries: Policy Design, Effectiveness and Challenges” (Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 100, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, 2010), [www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/minimum-income-benefits-in-oecd-countries\\_218402763872](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/minimum-income-benefits-in-oecd-countries_218402763872). Moreover, recent evidence suggests that noncoercive approaches to getting people into work are more effective than coercive approaches. For instance, behavioral insights or “nudges” such as encouraging jobseekers to make commitments and building psychological resilience can be deployed to get people into work. A randomized controlled trial of jobseekers in Essex, United Kingdom found that the intervention group had 15 percent to 20 percent improvements compared to a control group. See Behavioural Insights Team, “New BIT Trial Results: Helping People Back into Work,” updated December 14, 2012, [www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/labour-market-and-economic-growth/new-bit-trial-results-helping-people-back-into-work](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/labour-market-and-economic-growth/new-bit-trial-results-helping-people-back-into-work).

17 The International Rescue Committee (IRC) San Diego's Food Security and Community Health program manages many different projects that enable refugees to grow their own food (including launching a school garden and two community gardens). Some refugees have begun selling their produce at local farmer's markets, creating a win-win situation. See IRC San Diego, “Food Security,” accessed February 16, 2017, <http://ircsandiego.blogspot.com/p/food-security.html>.

18 For a full discussion of this point, see Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan and Heaven Crawley, “Refugee Integration through a Gendered Lens” (discussion paper tabled at the 16th plenary meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration, Migration Policy Institute, Toronto, June 27–28, 2016).

19 The point that economic measures of integration are easily quantifiable, but that other important measures of integration such as civic and political participation are not, is discussed in Fix, Hooper, and Zong, *Refugee Integration at the National and State Level in the United States*.



Within affected countries, some national governments were forced to broker new agreements with subnational governments to help address the uneven distribution of refugees. For instance, when the Swedish agreements to encourage municipalities to take newly arrived refugees (including through financial incentives) proved unworkable, the national government made accepting refugees compulsory. By contrast, a new German integration law made it possible for *Länder* to prohibit refugees from settling in certain localities in order to alleviate high concentrations in urban areas. While these distribution policies can improve the perception of fairness, they may also delay integration if they place refugees away from jobs or other opportunities.<sup>20</sup>

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*While these distribution policies can improve the perception of fairness, they may also delay integration.*

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The sharing of responsibility between levels of government and different agencies creates a number of system pressures:

- **Managing pressures on local infrastructure and services.** Tensions between the local and national levels can arise if localities have to deal with the fallout of national decisions or fill funding gaps. For instance, the U.S. federal government policy of prioritizing the most vulnerable individuals for resettlement has had knock-on effects at the local level; it has meant that states and localities must find new ways of meeting the complex needs of increasingly diverse groups of newcomers, including by expanding translation and interpretation services to keep up with greater linguistic diversity. These extra costs can create a local backlash, which, in turn, undermines the ability of national governments to fulfil their humanitarian responsibilities (either because refugees are not receiving adequate support or because localities may mount opposition to the reception of refugees in the future).
- **Addressing uneven local effects.** National policies can create uneven and unintended consequences for localities if they are insufficiently attuned to local conditions. For example, in regions where fewer jobs are available, policies that make permanent residence, family unification, or benefits conditional on finding work will result in greater uncertainty, alienation, and poverty within already vulnerable populations.
- **Coordinating increasingly complex networks of actors.** While authorities in many countries have long relied on civil society organizations for support with refugee protection and integration, the last two years have seen the beginnings of a shift in engagement, with new actors signing up to help. This broader societal involvement is vital as it brings to the system new energy and ideas. But in many cases, these movements have outpaced the ability of governments to manage them—straining governance institutions further as initiatives burst onto the scene and fade away, making the integration-services landscape less stable.

Communities faced with rapid social change can quickly lose trust in migration management systems. The placement of refugees in areas less accustomed to migration (and without the infrastructure to keep up with the pace of arrivals) can generate significant public anxiety—even if the absolute number of refugees is relatively small. This is especially the case if local authorities and their constituents feel they have not been given a voice in a process that affects their lives in significant ways. Policymakers at the national level

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, a study of the German approach observed that the 2016 law that aims to distribute refugees more evenly—avoiding concentration only in urban centers—could be used to send refugees to places with limited jobs and training options, overriding refugees' natural attraction to traditional immigrant hubs and big cities where they may find the greatest economic opportunities. See Jefferson Chase, "Study Says Refugee Allocation Doesn't Help Integration Chances," *Deutsche Welle*, November 22, 2016, [www.dw.com/en/study-says-refugee-allocation-doesnt-help-integration-chances/a-36481827](http://www.dw.com/en/study-says-refugee-allocation-doesnt-help-integration-chances/a-36481827).





must balance the need to share the responsibility for refugees equitably with efforts to restore trust in communities, particularly by making decisions in partnership with them.

#### **D. Fostering Innovation While Managing Risk**

Recent years have seen an explosion of new refugee integration initiatives—especially those that use technology—from tailored distance learning and freelancing platforms to apps that help newcomers navigate host-country public services.<sup>21</sup> At a private-sector meeting on the margins of the UN Summit on Migration and Refugees in September 2016, companies pledged up to U.S. \$650 million to support refugee initiatives (with up to U.S. \$500 million coming from financier and philanthropist George Soros). And many companies have offered more than money; a number have adapted their offers by tailoring or introducing new services to better meet the needs of refugees.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, several countries have sought to replicate Canada’s success with its private sponsorship model, which allows community groups to assume primary responsibility for receiving and integrating a certain number of refugee families (including agreeing to cover the financial costs of their settlement for the first year).<sup>23</sup>

These new actors and initiatives bring vital energy and ideas, but most have moved quickly, without grounding in a solid evidence base. These movements have cast light on a number of tradeoffs associated with innovation:

- **Balancing speed with the need for stability and data privacy.** The agile, iterative approach valued by social enterprises prioritizes learning on the job and incrementally improving a product or service while in use. This method stands in contrast to the traditional government-led approach of only opening a service to the public after completing a thorough design and evaluation process. But the speed with which refugee integration challenges have emerged demands a more rapid response than the usual policy cycle, leading policymakers to make significant up-front expenditures in programs whose outcomes may not yet be supported by robust program evaluation. While the need to act quickly lends itself to social innovation, it also carries risks. Perhaps the most concerning of these is that innovations—particularly those on which vulnerable groups rely—may cease to operate with little notice.<sup>24</sup> Tech companies may also be less careful with their use of refugees’ personal data, and may not understand the important data security and privacy issues associated with vulnerable groups.
- **Balancing experimentation with evaluation.** New approaches are in great demand, but they are also *by definition* untried. Such experimentation may be overly risky when it comes to meeting refugees’ basic needs. However, for labor market integration programs—which have often been small in scale and where previous interventions have had mixed success—these risks may be worthwhile. New or old, all initiatives should be paired with thorough evaluation to identify and scale what works. Yet new technologies and innovations can also make it harder for rigorous evaluations to be completed, for instance when newcomers are supplementing

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21 Meghan Benton and Alex Glennie, *Digital Humanitarianism: How Tech Entrepreneurs are Supporting Refugee Integration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/digital-humanitarianism-how-tech-entrepreneurs-are-supporting-refugee-integration](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/digital-humanitarianism-how-tech-entrepreneurs-are-supporting-refugee-integration).

22 For instance, the online-education company Coursera is providing refugees with financial aid and tailored guidance for its distance learning programs. Mastercard has been working with Mercy Corps to provide prepaid debit cards to refugees in transit countries to enable them to make purchases to meet immediate needs.

23 Argentina, Australia, Ireland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and 15 of 16 German federal states have all experimented with or introduced some form of private sponsorship in recent years.

24 For instance, the platform Migreat, described as “Skyscanner for Migration,” was being used by 2 million users per month as of January 2016. It ceased operations in March 2016, but the platform and website are still available with outdated information. In other cases, apps to help newcomers navigate services have not been updated regularly, and so offer users information that is out of date. See Benton and Glennie, *Digital Humanitarianism*.



official language training with language training apps and other digital support.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the proliferation of pilots and programs that go nowhere (either because they do not receive sustainable funding or because early indications suggest low levels of adoption by users) preclude efforts to learn from this experimentation over a longer timeline.

- **Using human resources effectively.** Governments also need to harness the creativity and talents of new actors in strategic and sustainable ways. The basic dilemma will be how to channel new energy toward the greatest needs (for instance, creative ways to support the core functions of government) rather than delivering the most eye-catching innovations. Since the public often gravitates toward donation or volunteer opportunities that fit their skills or interests, rather than those that fill gaps or address the most pressing needs, it can be a challenge to channel the energy and good will of well-meaning people toward projects that make effective use of these resources. For instance, Canada's private sponsorship program attracted more private sponsors than refugees,<sup>26</sup> while social and technological innovation initiatives in Germany have led to considerable duplication.<sup>27</sup>

Refugee integration is clearly an area that is ripe for new ideas: governments will not be able address the most entrenched social challenges without harnessing the collective intelligence of a much broader range of stakeholders that goes beyond the "usual suspects." But there is a risk that the hype around tech and social innovation may be detracting from efforts to better understand and thoughtfully address deeper problems facing refugees, host societies, and the governments that seek to support both. Moreover, because even the most promising new initiatives are often small scale, these new avenues for experimentation should be balanced with solid investments in more well-established and more widely accessible educational and employment systems.

### III. Conclusion: Prioritizing Investments

Countries cannot always choose who arrives at their borders requesting protection, as the chaotic nature of recent flows has shown. But they can choose where to invest, how quickly, and in whom. While there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint for improving refugee integration outcomes, there are four approaches that policymakers should consider (even though specific tradeoffs and challenges will vary between countries and localities):

#### A. Align Integration Investments with Immigration Policy Goals

Policymakers must find the appropriate balance, given the political and social context in which they operate, between investing in integration at the earliest possible moment and being mindful of not fueling public concerns that refugees are being prioritized at the expense of long-term residents and particularly

25 A recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report on Sweden points out that online tech can help strengthen language training in reception centers, but makes it harder to track the learning outcomes of refugees completing training outside of targeted courses and thus harder to identify what works. See OECD, *Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and Their Children in Sweden* (Paris: OECD, 2016), [www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/working-together-skills-and-labour-market-integration-of-immigrants-and-their-children-in-sweden\\_9789264257382-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/working-together-skills-and-labour-market-integration-of-immigrants-and-their-children-in-sweden_9789264257382-en).

26 Then Canadian Immigration Minister John McCallum said in 2016 the Canadian program worked so well that one of his biggest challenges as immigration minister was to find enough refugees to satisfy all the Canadians who want to bring more humanitarian migrants to Canada. See Jennifer Chevalier, "Refugee Sponsors Frustrated by Delays Hold 'Emergency Meeting,'" CBC News, March 30, 2016, [www.cbc.ca/news/politics/power-politics-refugee-sponsorship-1.3513374](http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/power-politics-refugee-sponsorship-1.3513374).

27 See Rietig, *Moving Beyond Crisis*.



citizens. This concern looms especially large in a time of budget concerns. In pursuing this equilibrium, policymakers should:

- ***Coordinate integration and asylum policies.*** Integration policy cannot be addressed in a silo, but must be part of a coherent, interlocking system. The survival of the system as a whole is the pre-eminent priority—no one will benefit from a total collapse of broader migration governance. Understanding and navigating the tradeoffs that create tension between policy areas demand strong coordination mechanisms, both across government and with other governments.
- ***Regularly and systematically evaluate what works.*** Governments must strike a balance between responding quickly and responding thoughtfully. Collecting and evaluating evidence—and, critically, adapting migration systems based on it—need to become integral parts of the policymaking ethos.

## **B. *Unlock the Multiplier Effects of Integration While Maintaining Realistic Expectations***

Medium- and long-term integration policies and programs that target refugees exclusively may risk undermining public trust. Though some of their service needs will be unique and rooted in the experience of fleeing persecution, others will be shared by members of the communities in which they settle. In many cases, it will be beneficial or even imperative to mainstream refugee integration efforts across the whole of government and to treat them as part of the puzzle of building social cohesion and resilient communities. This can be done through policies that:

- ***Focus on what benefits whole communities.*** Many of the best investments for newly arrived refugees (such as improving access to lifelong learning) will also hold value for other disadvantaged groups. And some programs, even those that primarily target refugees and other newcomers, may benefit the broader community and society at large if governments can build pathways for refugees to fill gaps in community services (such as through eldercare or urban farming).
- ***Rethink expectations for success.*** Policymakers will need to think carefully when developing metrics to measure successful integration, including examination of outcomes that go beyond economic success. This need to consider integration from many angles is important for two reasons: On one hand, one-size-fits-all markers of economic progress may not fit all refugee populations. And on the other, policymakers may not want to hinge their argument for future humanitarian admissions entirely on the idea of potential economic gain, particularly when such gain may be small or take time.

## **C. *Create Incentives for New Actors to Get Involved—and Carefully Coordinate Their Efforts***

Necessity can be the mother of invention, and this is proving to be a period of intense experimentation and activity. But a much more thoughtful, strategic approach is needed as government engages with new actors in the integration field. Such an approach is needed if private-sector and civil-society players are to become not just token invitees to meetings, but genuine partners in designing and delivering services. The following steps will help keep these actors at the table and ensure their energy has the chance to affect lasting change:





- **Recognize that innovation without coordination can backfire.** Harnessing public enthusiasm can amplify capacity in significant ways. But for this to work, up-front communication is critical to ensure that new actors understand the intricacies of the challenges societies face; doing so will help ensure that their contributions are truly solutions to the most pressing problems and that their efforts do not go to waste (or worse, are counterproductive). While this takes a great deal of coordination, it is the only way to ensure that promising innovations can be scaled up and that initiatives can be sustained after the initial novelty has worn off.
- **Create incentives for the private sector to get involved.** Government and civil society can also play an important bridging role in creating the conditions under which employers can more easily contribute, not just by donating money, but by creating career opportunities (rather than just jobs) for refugees. Showing employers that hiring refugees can be an economic plus, not just an act of philanthropy, can help shift the calculus behind their decision to engage with integration efforts. Governments can even play a bridging role by bringing refugees and employers together.

#### **D. Engage All Components of Society to Build Public Trust**

Policymakers must recognize that even the most generous societies have healthy skepticism about uncontrollable or fast-paced population change. One of the hardest lessons to learn—and for policymakers and advocates to incorporate into their activities—is that public trust cannot be won through facts and figures alone. It also cannot be won by burying bad news, as became clear with the backlash following the December 2015 Cologne attacks, when it became clear that police and media had deliberately delayed reporting to the public that many of the perpetrators were asylum seekers. Instead, policymakers should seek to:

- **Build a positive, inclusive narrative while being ruthlessly transparent.** Storytelling that emphasizes values shared by migrants and their host communities is often more powerful than stark arguments based on economics alone. One way to diffuse public anxiety is by emphasizing individual success stories. Such narratives can convey positive stories with the same emotional weight that has been so effectively used by anti-immigration activists. Importantly, such narratives should not promise that there will never be downsides to integration.
- **Make policy design and delivery collaborative—across all levels of government and between government and new actors.** Even the best policy interventions will not work if communities feel such measures are being done “to” them, without their organic input. Conversely, the most successful policies are those developed in the true spirit of partnership. Integration success depends both on smart policy design and on embedding social norms of welcoming people into the DNA of public institutions. Engaging communities through private sponsorship programs, for example, while not the panacea that advocates contend, can contribute to the sense that everyone has a stake in the success of newcomers.

Navigating tradeoffs in these four areas requires delicate maneuvering to maintain the integrity of the migration management system as a whole. At the very least, they highlight the need for greater collaboration across the entire policy and service delivery portfolio. This should be paired with a more well-rounded understanding of what success looks like and what a reasonable timeframe is in which to achieve it. And while embracing new innovations and experimentation, policymakers need to forge a systemic approach that takes into account the frequent unintended consequences that a change in one aspect of the system will have on its other elements.



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