

# WELDI

BUILDING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES  
FOR MIGRANTS

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URBACT



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## Refugees and Migrants: Shifting Focus from National to Local. WELDI coordinator Hans Sackers, city of Utrecht

While media reports suggest increasing momentum in Europe to forge far-reaching agreements among member states on a new, stricter migration policy, these measures – supposedly necessary to address this constructed crisis – seem increasingly out of touch with the realities in our cities. For instance, the extreme right-wing government in the Netherlands aims to bypass parliament on all migration matters and is contemplating transferring rejected asylum seekers to Uganda. Simultaneously, the government is exacerbating the reception crises by closing down reception centres, fostering the belief that a so-called migration crisis is intensifying. These malicious actions only serve to create chaos and, in practice, violate human rights, which apparently is becoming a goal in itself.

Fortunately, some EU programmes continue to support a different, more constructive perspective on migration. But the rise of the far-right underscores the need for cooperation between cities and the European Commission more than ever. Our project shows that cities are the much more proactive and constructive partners for Europe compared to its member states, which today only seem to agree on policies that heighten division and exclusion.

In this journal, you will find numerous exciting developments in our partnership, including a reflection on our network meeting in Lampedusa in early October. This crucial and symbolic gathering allowed us to share best practices for organising health care for newly arrived refugees. The examples from Lampedusa demonstrate that specialised care for refugees, such as for pregnant women, also benefits the local population.

Additionally, this edition revisits the training sessions held in September. These sessions highlighted how human rights can inspire better local policies for refugees, migration, and integration. Another training focused on how cities can simplify and streamline services for refugees through local one-stop-shops for newcomers, reducing bureaucratic burdens and ensuring they receive the help they need efficiently.

We hope you enjoy reading this third WELDI journal and encourage you to reach out to us if you are interested in joining our project.

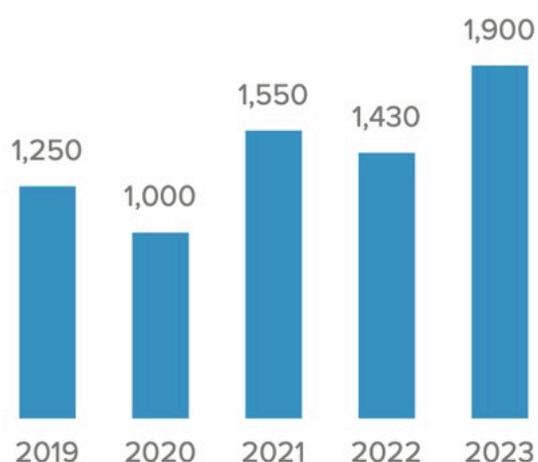


*The blue camel as a symbol of Africa serves as a lens for self-reflection here under the gigantic sci-fi canopy designed by Norman Foster and the landscape architect Michel Desvigne as part of Marseille-Provence 2013, at the Old Port of Marseille*

# Medical and mental health support in the initial reception of migrants at the “Gate of Europe”. The Lampedusa transnational exchange 2-3 October 2024



Lampedusa, the Italian island situated between Tunisia and Sicily, is a special partner in the WELDI network: it has 6,000 inhabitants and hardly any migrant residents. And yet it is one of the major points of migrant arrival in the EU, with more than 100,000 people having landed there by boat from Tunisia and Libya in 2023. The identity of this remote island with its recent history of tourism development has been strongly determined by the EU’s migration policies and their goal to deter migrants from crossing the Mediterranean. Yet the EU’s increased cooperation with governments, police and military forces in North Africa has not prevented migrants from arriving, but made the trip riskier and led to a rise in the number of people drowning at sea, and off Lampedusa’s coast.



**Dead and missing at sea along the central Mediterranean migrant route.**

Source: UNHCR / IOM.

WELDI's transnational exchange on Lampedusa coincided with the annual commemoration of the 2013 shipwreck, in which more than 350 people died. This was a reality check for WELDI partners to think about the conditions under which some migrants arrive in Europe before they come to their cities, and the gulf that separates us from our goal of human dignity in migration, when the only way for many to move to Europe means taking unimaginable risks for themselves and their families.



### **Coordinated physical and mental health care in Lampedusa's Action Plan**

Reflecting the role of the island with regard to migration, Lampedusa's Integrated Action Plan is focused on the improvement of medical and mental health care for the people landing on the island, but also for the island residents and the 25,000 tourists who visit the island each year. For this purpose, the municipality of Lampedusa engaged in a unique partnership with the Provincial Health Service ASP Palermo, the Red Cross and the National Institute for Health, Migration and Poverty under the Italian Ministry of Health to make gradual

improvements of the health care infrastructure.

### ***Improving health care for pregnant women: the Lampedusa model' of rapid obstetric triage***

Being confronted with an increasing number of pregnant women landing on the island where women commonly have to fly to Sicily for each scan, stepping up obstetric and gynaecological services had become a priority for the new partnership. A rapid obstetric triage system was introduced to identify the need for obstetric emergency interventions directly upon arrival. After decades in which all deliveries for babies had to take place in Sicily, Lampedusa now has a basic emergency labour ward and an incubator, and three babies were born on the island in the last half year. An evaluation of the "Lampedusa model" has shown that it has significantly reduced the need for conducting emergency evacuation by helicopter. This not only lowers the risk of the helicopter not being available for other emergencies, but also reduces costs.

### ***Creating a win-win-situation***

With other new services introduced, including an emergency unit, a cardiology service, and 24h paediatric and radiologic services, health care was upgraded for both locals and migrants landing. This was achieved based on a memorandum of understanding between a range of national, provincial and local actors that form part of Lampedusa's Stakeholder Group and with funding from the EU Asylum and Migration Fund. The different institutions now regularly monitor the situation and identify further needs to improve health care. For the near future, there are plans to open a mental health service, to enable the rapid diagnosis of tuberculosis and to open a traumatology and oncology service.

### ***Overcoming trauma through narration***

Caterina Famularo, a psychologist operating at Lampedusa's Reception hub, explained her approach in providing "first aid" to landed migrants from a mental health perspective.

Many migrants arriving on the island experience trauma because of their migration journey, in relation to abuse experienced in transit countries like Libya, but also to the crossing in overloaded unreliable inflatable boats or in the metal boats that are grimly surnamed “floating graves”. In her work that reminded of a similar approach that an NGO conducts with children from Ukraine in Sosnowiec, Caterina uses narration techniques e.g. through drawings to help newly arrived migrants, and in particular children, to overcome trauma.

What is different to other places, however, is the fact that her work is limited to first aid, as most migrants are shipped to the mainland within 72 hours after arrival. WELDI partners stressed that welcoming is a crucial stage for traumatised newcomers, for rebuilding trust and establishing new links.

### Politicians' views on inclusive local philosophies

Alongside the technical exchanges, a panel with politicians from WELDI members spoke about how inclusive local philosophies can counteract anti-migrant mobilisation.

Paulo Fernandes, President of Fundão explained his philosophy of creating acceptance for a major social transformation of his municipality, which saw its non-Portuguese population change from 300 to 4,000 and nationality groups increase from 11 to 70 in less than a decade.

Supporting newcomers to become autonomous quickly, promoting interculturality and mutual accommodation and creating a sense of fraternity between all population groups are the cornerstones of Fundão's model.

Sosnowiec, the second WELDI partner on the panel, has a similar starting point to that of Fundão a decade ago in that the population is declining rapidly and the economy could do with more workers. With the arrival of Ukrainian

refugees and, more recently, economic migrants from Asian countries, the city's ambition is to reconnect with the multicultural history of the city before the Second World War, when four different nationality groups and religions lived there.

Monika Holewa, the vice-mayor responsible for External Funds and Social Affairs in Sosnowiec, explained how through WELDI, the city is in the process to acknowledge its new diversity: by conducting a survey with foreign residents living in the city to understand their life situation and needs; by planning a One-Stop-Shop to provide better guidance and information to migrants and by using the potential of Sosnowiec's city card as a vehicle for fostering belonging and access to rights and services for the newcomers. Although Sosnowiec works, like most other WELDI partners, in a national context where discussions are mostly critical of migration, the city is starting to get things done.

Paulo Fernandes reminded WELDI partners of two key assets in getting on with the work even when national governments putting spanners in the works. These assets are, on the one hand, local autonomy that is enshrined in most European constitutions and, on the other, intermunicipal cooperation and learning. By drawing on these assets, cities and towns can develop constructive models of living together that reject isolationism and nationalism.



**Monika Holewa, Sosnowiec (3rd from the left) and Paulo Fernandes, Fundão (4th from the left). Photo: Michaela Gil**

## Migrant voices: Ezra Abdallah, Cluj-Napoca



Esraa Abdallah's journey from Jordan to Romania is a story of perseverance, adaptation, and determination. Over the last five and a half years, she has carved out a unique space for herself, both professionally and personally, in a country that was foreign to her but is now her home.

In 2019, Esraa arrived in Romania to receive a scholarship to pursue higher education. Despite graduating with a master's degree in Nursing specialised in intensive care, she found it impossible to practise her profession in Romania, as the country's regulations require citizenship or a specific residence permit to practise medicine, a hurdle faced by many non-Romanian professionals like Esraa.

### A forced career change

Esraa then made a career change and began working as project officer responsible for social

inclusion and intercultural mediation in the NGO PATRIR (Peace, Action, Training, and Research Institute of Romania). This role, although far removed from her academic background, turned out to become an essential stepping stone in her professional life in Romania. Through both contract work and volunteering, she became a vital link between migrants and the broader Romanian society.

### Non-discrimination

One aspect of life in Romania that has given Esraa great satisfaction is the freedom to practise her religion. As a Muslim woman, Esraa wears her hijab with pride and is committed to her faith. In Romania, she has found that she can practise her religion openly, without fear of discrimination. She is able to pray freely and wear her hijab in public spaces without facing overt hostility. This level of religious freedom is something Esraa deeply appreciates. While she occasionally notices curious or lingering looks, Esraa has discovered that most Romanians are understanding when they engage in conversation. These moments of connection often help to bridge cultural differences and foster mutual respect.

Esraa's own positive experiences are contrasted by the discrimination she has witnessed against people from other countries. Esraa is particularly concerned about the racism that affects people from certain regions, especially people from African countries.

One of the most glaring examples of this discrimination is the practice by some Romanian banks of refusing to open accounts for nationals from certain countries. This discriminatory policy poses significant challenges for migrants trying to build a life in Romania. Esraa has done advocacy to eliminate these practices, often accompanying affected migrants to banks.

## **Becoming an Expert by Experience**

Esraa's involvement in these advocacy efforts has been driven by her deep commitment to social justice. She works closely with an advocacy group focused on migration issues, the Cluj International Citizens Council, an organisation launched under the European project MigrantVoicesHeard. This group is regularly consulted by the government—every two or three months, depending on the agenda—to discuss and address migration-related issues. Esraa values this initiative, as it provides a platform for those most affected by migration policies, including herself, to voice their concerns and contribute to policy development.

Esraa's experiences with the Romanian immigration system, combined with her personal journey as a migrant, have made her an invaluable resource for others in similar situations. She often describes herself as an “expert by experience, not by education,” underscoring the deep understanding she has gained from living through the challenges that many migrants face.

Today, Esraa works as an immigration consultant with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Her role is multifaceted—she provides support to migrants, connecting them with the authorities, sharing vital information, and helping them navigate the often-complicated legal and bureaucratic

processes. Her ability to communicate effectively in multiple languages, including Romanian, is a critical asset in her work.

## **The importance of language**

One of Esraa's key insights is the importance of learning Romanian. She firmly believes that speaking the local language is essential for asserting one's rights. For instance, if she encounters a problem, she meticulously researches the relevant laws and regulations to ensure that she is not being mistreated. Unfortunately, many governmental websites in Romania are only available in Romanian, posing a significant barrier for non-Romanian speakers. Esraa's work with the IOM includes translating these websites and key legal documents, particularly those related to residency and citizenship. Her efforts are crucial to making vital information accessible to migrants, but she emphasises that learning the local language remains indispensable, especially outside of major cities like Cluj, where English is less commonly spoken.

*This is an edited version of a portrait published on WELDI's LinkedIn account.*

# One-Stop-Shops - tools to improve access to rights

As part of the WELDI project, URBACT ad-hoc expert Bella Kosmala delivered a workshop on how cities can use the One-Stop-Shop (OSS) approach to improve migrant support services.

The workshop was the response to WELDI partners' understanding that effective information and service delivery are a key ingredient to protecting human rights for all residents and partners like Sosnowiec, Cluj-Napoca and Liège considering setting up a One-Stop-Shop for migrants, or extending an existing one.

The OSS model aims to make it easier for migrants to access multiple specialist services in one place or through coordinated service points. This approach not only benefits migrants by simplifying their integration journey but also helps local administrations by reducing duplication of efforts and using resources more effectively.

An OSS involves a range of stakeholders, including local NGOs, and may operate at city, regional, or even national levels. It ensures that services are coordinated so that migrants can access what they need in a seamless and integrated way. This model is becoming a cornerstone of many migrant integration strategies across Europe, making it easier for migrants to navigate city services while fostering stronger collaboration between service providers.

The main challenges that WELDI partners face in setting up a One-Stop-Shops are securing funding and political support. Engaging migrants in the design process to ensure the services meet their needs and are sustainable is a key objective for most cities.

Throughout the workshop, a few important points emerged from the participants' reflections:

- Many cities expressed strong commitment to supporting all migrants, including those without proper documentation.
- It's crucial that One-Stop-Shops are centred around the needs of migrants, not just around services. Many cities are exploring ways to involve migrant boards or user groups to ensure their voices are heard.
- Moving away from multiple entry points to a single, coordinated service can make a significant difference in how migrants experience support systems.
- The importance of creating a space where migrants feel safe and welcome was highlighted as a key factor for success.
- The question of who leads these efforts was raised, but it was agreed that leadership doesn't have to mean making the decisions and that collaborative leadership can be just as effective, as long as everyone's roles are clearly defined.
- Finally, there was a shared understanding that not all questions need to be answered before launching a One-Stop-Shop. It's better to start and adapt along the way.

For more information on One-Stop-Shops, take a look at the guidance document with key success factors and top tips from cities with One-Stop-Shops [here](#).

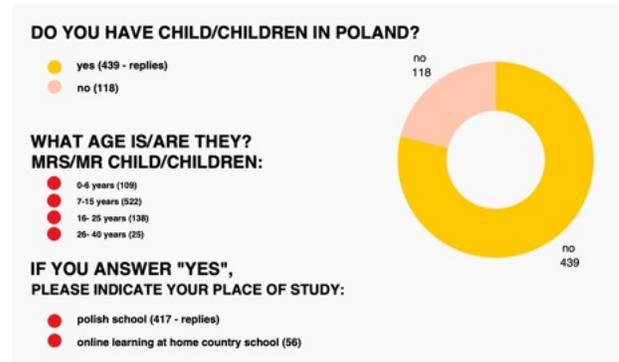
# A survey taking stock of the situation of Ukrainians in Sosnowiec

The presence of bigger numbers of international migrants is a relatively new phenomenon in Sosnowiec and started with the arrival of refugees from Ukraine. In order to inform its action plan for WELDI, the city council collaborated with local schools, cultural institutions, Municipal Welfare Centre and Humanitas University to organise a survey with migrant residents of the city.

570 migrants, most of them from Ukraine, completed the survey that was distributed in Ukrainian and English through interviewers, teachers and social workers.

89% of all respondents were women, which is in line with the demographic profile of Ukrainian refugees. The survey provides an interesting overview into the current situation of this group. The most striking finding is that 90% see their future in Sosnowiec.

- About ⅓ of the respondents live in an independent private rental apartment. The others live to almost equal shares with friends and family, institutional or other types of accommodation.
- About 75% are in work
- 44% state that they work below their qualifications; 29% that their work is in line with their qualification
- For those that work below their qualifications, practical reasons, a lack of language skills and a lack of recognition of diplomas are the main reasons
- 23% state that they have experienced discrimination at work; and 32% in other areas such as public space
- 82% find that they have sufficient access to physical and mental health care
- The survey also shows that the large majority of school-aged Ukrainian children are now attending Polish schools. One reasons for this is that since September 2024, receiving child benefits is now dependent on attendance of a Polish school.



Source: City of Sosnowiec (machine translation)

Whereas the basic needs of the Ukrainians seem mostly covered, the data gathered on social interaction shows still a strong segregation in everyday life. For instance, only 30% of the respondents said that they participate in local cultural, sports or entertainment events. A lack of time, information and language skills are the main detractors.



Source: City of Sosnowiec (machine translation)

As stressed in a [newspaper article](#), a lack of Polish courses, in particular at a higher level, seem to be one of the bottlenecks that hinder Ukrainians from taking the next step.

Linking the survey with one of the actions Sosnowiec is considering, the migrants were asked if they saw a need for a migrant service centre to be established in the city. 63% answered yes, and mentioned legal advice and

Polish language classes as the most important service.

The survey also uncovered a huge potential of the Sosnowiec's citizen card to be spread out across the refugee population to facilitate their access to local activities and services.

WELDI is interested in hearing more from cities conducting needs assessments with migrant communities. Share your experiences with us!



# Human Rights framework meets URBACT - a Masterclass on the Human Rights-Based Approach in local reception and integration policies

In September, WELDI partners attended a Masterclass by Human Rights expert Estel·la Pereja on the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) in the area of migrant reception and integration. Developed by the United Nations, the HRBA is a key methodology for the WELDI network's objective to protect human rights through local action.



The HRBA sees public authorities as duty bearers that have to ensure that human rights are protected for their whole population. While this duty also applies to states or regional authorities, there has been a specific attention to the role of local actors under the label of “localising human rights”, a concept that stresses their importance in translating rights into concrete policies, and thereby re-invigorating human rights through local practice.

The HRBA aims to achieve social transformation by collectively addressing the structural causes of problems and turning them into rights that need to be protected. Cities as “duty bearers” act together with the relevant stakeholders that are seen as “responsibility bearers” for the protection of Human Rights in their area of work. At the heart of the HRBA are the “rights

holders”, who are seen as protagonists that should be empowered to defend their rights. Through a continuous dialogue,, rights holders, duty bearers and responsibility bearers can broaden the scope of strategies required to address human rights violations and voice their distinct opinions, views and interests and reach a consensus about the direction of policies.

## WELDI partners are already doing it: experiences of Saint Denis and Timișoara

All WELDI's partners already have some good practices in place that translate international Human Rights standards into local actions, as two examples presented in the Masterclass illustrated.

The mobile maternal and child protection service in Seine-Saint-Denis promotes access to the right to health care for pregnant women and children under 6 who live in informal settlements and camps. The outreach service was developed in partnership with organised civil society stakeholders to address the high infant mortality rate and vulnerability detected in the informal settlements.

The Timișoara House of Youth - UKRKid-Hub is a grass-roots initiative of the Ukrainian refugees community that has the support of the Timișoara local authorities and UNICEF. It promotes the right to education of Ukrainian children and youth by offering space and staff for both online and face-to-face learning in Ukrainian language. At the same time, the House of Youth offers cultural activities to the whole Timișoara youth, including the Ukrainian refugees, so that young people from different backgrounds can meet, be creative together and learn from each other. This illustrates well how

protecting fundamental rights of specific groups can benefit the whole society.

### Identifying challenges and strategies to overcome them

WELDI partners shared a series of challenges when improving reception and inclusion policies from a human rights perspective. Within municipal administration, the HRBA is sometimes seen as an additional layer to existing sectoral policies, whose benefit against the time and money invested is contested by some. There is also a lack of knowledge, when actors see Human Rights as “something that is for the United Nations, not for local government”, or are simply unsure about its precise meaning. It does not help either that some national governments are increasingly questioning the Human Rights framework in its entirety or are undermining it in their practice, e.g. with regard to people without papers.

When it comes to strategies for overcoming

such challenges, WELDI-partners underlined that first and foremost Human Rights are international and national law, and therefore an obligation and not a matter of goodwill. A second, more pragmatic argument can be that the well-being of the whole community depends on everybody having their rights respected; and that excluding some members of the community from their fundamental rights affects all by undermining common goods such as social cohesion or public health. Some partners highlighted the importance of overcoming categories such as “refugee” or “migrant” and stressing the common objective of building a city for all, without losing sight of the specific obstacles that some groups face to become a part of this community and to feel safe, protected and welcomed.

Guidance on how to apply the HRBA will be published on WELDI’s URBACT pages soon.

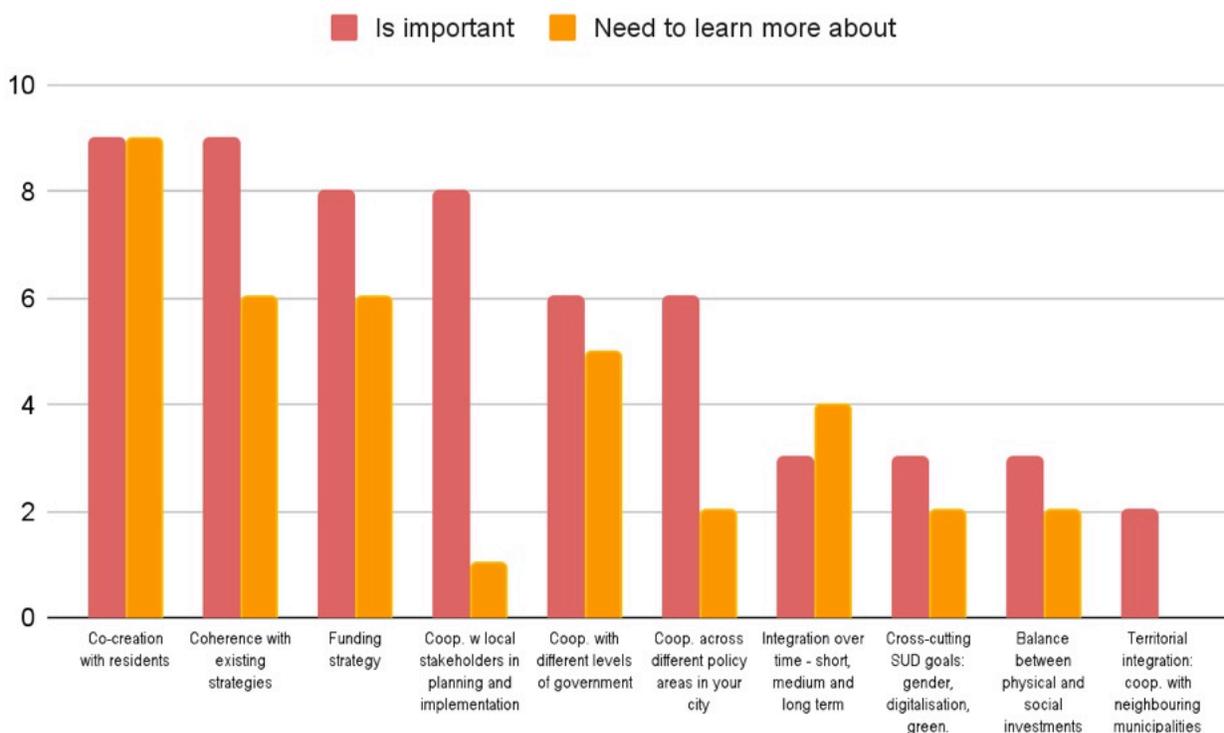
## Integrated Action Planning from a Human Rights Perspective

What does the HRBA mean concretely for the Integrated Action Plans of WELDI partners? The HRBA is perfectly compatible with URBACT’s integrated approach and results framework for action-planning - it just puts Human Rights at the centre stage. The human rights perspective advocates for an transversal approach acting across sectors and levels of government - an integrated approach, in URBACT language. Applying it means that we should **identify challenges through the lens of the human rights violations and the rights holders affected** and define a better protection of specific rights as objectives that guide the action planning process. The HRBA puts the rights holders into the foreground and demands their empowerment to claim their rights, instead of seeing them as clients, service users or beneficiaries, so **co-creation with rights holders and with the responsibility bearers that can affect migrants rights** (think: employers, housing providers, media etc.) is key. The HRBA can be interpreted as a reminder to do a thorough analysis of the responsibility and to make efforts to engage them in the URBACT Local Groups. Finally, **indicators** for measuring the impact should take up the human rights perspective and measure whether they have led to a better protection (e.g. are migrants better informed about their rights, and able to claim them? Has access to certain rights improved as a result of an action? Is the number of human rights abuses, e.g. exploitative work conditions, declining?)

## Observations on the integrated approach in the WELDI's network

This September WELDI partners discussed how URBACT's Integrated Approach is reflected in their Action Plans that are currently being prepared. Using a slightly adapted version of dimensions of Integration that were identified

for the recent URBACT analysis of past Integrated Actions Plans, we asked partners to reflect which were the most important dimensions for their Action Plan, and which are the dimensions they need to learn more about.



The result shows that co-creation with migrants and other residents is both the most important dimension of integration, and the most important learning need for WELDI partners. This is an interesting finding, as this particular dimension of integration is not explicitly addressed by the URBACT subdimensions of an integrated approach. While it is an official value of URBACT and implicitly included in the “cooperation with local stakeholders”, there is a risk that the co-creation with ordinary residents often falls under the table, and co-creation is reduced to the group of professionals and practitioners with technical expertise. So strengthening methodological support for the

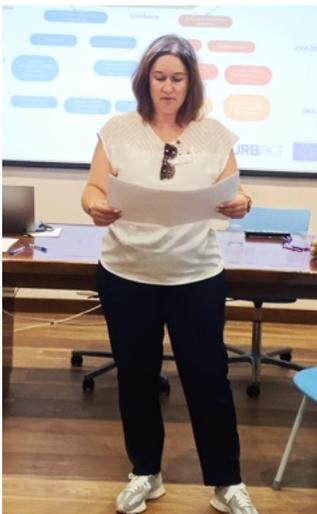
work with citizens and non-citizen residents is something that WELDI partners would like to see strengthened in URBACT.

A second important result of the survey is the “cooperation with different levels of government”, which is also latent in the category “funding” and “coherence with existing strategies”. This is perhaps a specific challenge for WELDI, as with few exceptions, WELDI partners deal with national governments that often have very different political agendas on migration issues and are reluctant to support local authorities: concretely this can mean that local requests for sharing migration data between administrations are not met by their

national counterparts, or that EU migration funds do not reach the local level, in spite of the EU regulation demanding the involvement of local government and civil society. So “vertical cooperation” is more of a political challenge for WELDI partners that is difficult to tackle in our network.

A more general observation on the discussions of IAPs in WELDI is that from our network’s perspective, integration does not automatically result from a multiplication of actions. Rather, many of the actions that WELDI partners are planning are in themselves highly integrated:

setting up a One-Stop-Shop for migrants is about better cooperation between a multitude of actors and better referral to services from different sectors and levels of government; developing a local ID card implies involving the local population department, the police, the national government and potentially affects areas such as access to human rights, access to public and private services, safe crime reporting and social cohesion for all. This means that some WELDI partners are planning few actions, but which are promising to have a strong integrating potential.



**WELDI Partners presenting the Intervention Logic of their IAPs**

## Partner Updates

### Osijek - “Land without Borders” festival

As part of the “Land without Borders festival” Olha Ilinska and Alyona Grab, newcomers from Ukraine, organised a henna painting workshop in which children experimented with this skin-drawing technique. The workshop that lasted several days was supported by the WELDI project and URBACT.



Photo: Marko Žuljević. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/Kn1FbLUWV8dbU6xy/>

### Visibility for Fundao’s integration model

Fundao’s migrant integration model continues to receive recognition. It was featured on Portuguese [national television TVi](#) and just got awarded with an [URBACT good practice label](#).



The town has also launched a [mini-series of video-portraits](#) of newcomers.

### Liège - hosting refugees

On 21 October, members of the Liège-based research group CEDEM presented their new publication on citizen initiatives for hosting refugees, and the different role of the Belgian state towards these initiatives in 2015/16 and 2022.



## About WELDI

The URBACT network WELDI (2023-25) tackles the question of how local authorities can promote human rights when receiving and offering integration support to newcomers. WELDI starts from the acceptance of the reality of migration and focuses on how to ensure a well-organised and dignified reception and integration that can benefit the whole local population. WELDI starts from the potential of cities as places of dignified reception and integration of newcomers and wants to demonstrate local leadership in reception and integration and to trigger bottom-up change towards models that are in line with the fundamental rights that lay the basis for the European Union.

## Upcoming WELDI-exchanges

**December 2, 2024, 10-13.00: City IDs as tool for promoting access to rights and a local sense of belonging - online workshop hosted by the city of Liège**

**February (precise date tbc): TEX Timișoara: From emergency response to a strategic approach**

**February / March 2025 (provisional): Online training communicating about migration and tackling rumours and hate speech**