

WELDI

BUILDING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES
FOR MIGRANTS

Advocacy Paper

URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg



Composed of 10 local authorities¹ from a diversity of geographical positions and sizes, the URBACT Action Planning Network WELDI (2023-25) works on strengthening human rights in local migrant and refugee reception.

In this work, WELDI identified a range of common obstacles for its vision of fair and dignified conditions for newcomers, which led to the following advocacy points:

1. Protecting human rights standards in the context of EU and national politics of discomfort and hostile environments
2. Protecting migrant workers' dignity and supporting their integration together with cities
3. Shaping a fair and realistic discourse on migration
4. Ensuring city's access to EU-integration funding
5. Promoting city-led asylum seeker accommodation
6. Promoting the relocation of asylum seekers and refugees based on local pledges

These points, which are illustrated in more detail in what follows, were validated and discussed with partners during WELDI's final meeting on 12 December 2025 in Utrecht.

This was done together with representatives from Eurocities, the International Alliance of Safe Harbours / From the Sea to the City, the Urban Agenda Partnership for the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees and the French Association of Welcoming Cities and Territories ANVITA.

More information on the WELDI Action Planning Network is available under
<https://urbact.eu/networks/weldi> and on
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/weldi-urbact/>

The URBACT Action Planning Network WELDI, December 2025.

¹ Lead Partner Utrecht, NL, Albacete, ES, Cluj-Napoca, RO, Fundão, PO, Lampedusa, IT, Liège, BE, Osijek, HR, Seine-Saint-Denis, FR, Sosnowiec, PL, Timișoara, RO.

1. Protecting human rights standards in the context of EU and national politics of discomfort and hostile environments

WELDI partners' efforts to protect human rights and to become welcoming cities often clash with national and European policies of discomfort and hostile environments: administrative delays in obtaining residence permits, red tape for hiring migrants and refugees and highly complex and costly procedures for the recognition of qualifications oppose the very idea of "welcoming cities". Such policies symbolically undermine human rights and feed a self-fulfilling prophecy that migration is doomed to fail. Current attempts to criminalise support for undocumented migrants reinforce this problem further as they directly challenge human rights.

Several WELDI partners experienced the consequences of divergent views of migration when interested national government representatives were not authorised to participate in WELDI stakeholder groups.

Against this backdrop, local authorities and their civil society partners in WELDI and beyond are often left with the sole responsibility of protecting human rights. They

- provide digital and personal guidance to newcomers to help them navigate institutions, including national services;
- facilitate interpretation to make services more accessible;
- develop city cards to facilitate access to rights and promote a right to the city for all residents;
- overcome bureaucratic obstacles to support migrants in finding work and access training;
- create spaces of interaction and hospitality.

WELDI partners urge national governments and the EU to honor the principles of multi-level coordination, inter-administrative loyalty and subsidiarity also in the field of migration; to engage in a constructive problem-solving approach oriented in the respect of human rights standards rather than in the top-down enforcement of a certain ideological view of migration.

2. Protecting migrant workers' dignity and supporting their integration together with cities

Anecdotal evidence from WELDI partners however suggests that cities are not involved in the discussions about the transposition of the recast Single Permit Directive into national law, which is due for May 2026. This should be revised through a systematic involvement in any monitoring of the recast Single Permit Directive at national and EU level.

Despite widespread political rhetoric focused on curtailing migration, labour shortages persist across all segments of European labour markets. This reality is reflected in the fact that economic migration is currently the primary ground for first residence permits issued in the EU, accounting for 1.2 million permits, or 33% of all new permits in 2024.

WELDI partners are committed to contributing constructively to the management of economic migration. However, they are concerned that cities are largely excluded from the design and governance of economic migration schemes, particularly those based on bilateral agreements and implemented through labour recruitment agencies. Experience from WELDI partners in Croatia, Poland and Romania indicates that such programmes frequently expose migrant workers to exploitation, segregation and substandard living conditions, echoing guest-worker models of the previous century.

WELDI's work shows that cities must be involved both in the planning and implementation of economic migration schemes in order to effectively reach and protect migrant workers and to support their integration into local communities.

Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence from WELDI partners suggests that cities are currently not involved in discussions on the transposition of the recast Single Permit Directive into national law, despite its implementation deadline of May 2026. This gap should be addressed through the systematic involvement of cities in the monitoring and implementation of the recast Single Permit Directive, at both national and EU levels.

3. Shaping a fair and realistic discourse on migration

WELDI partners and their civil society partners contribute to a migration discourse that is fair, evidence-based and rooted in human dignity, and that recognises migration as a structural and enduring feature of European societies.

To counter the unregulated and systematic spread of anti-migrant propaganda and disinformation – which seriously undermines local social cohesion – WELDI partners have produced vidcasts in cooperation with local media, highlighting the lived realities of migration and giving visibility to the people behind the statistics.

However, local authorities cannot address disinformation alone. They require stronger political commitment and concrete support from the European Union and national governments to effectively counter disinformation and hate narratives.

In this context, WELDI partners welcome the efforts of the [Urban Agenda Partnership on the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees](#) to address these challenges and will actively participate in the Partnership's activities.

WELDI partners are also keen to engage in other political and institutional initiatives aimed at combating hate speech and propaganda, in order to promote a public discourse on migration that is grounded in facts, lived experience and social cohesion.

4. Ensuring city's access to EU-integration funding

The exchanges with WELDI partners have shown that many local authorities have little or no access to public funding for migrant reception and integration.

Several national government authorities manage the national programmes of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund in a highly centralistic and directive logic. Others, including Spain, Romania, Bulgaria, Romania categorically or de facto exclude cities as beneficiaries in national AMIF programmes, in violation of the current AMIF regulation.

While there are positive exceptions relevant for WELDI partners, such as the Netherlands and Portugal, the "partnership principle" that is legally anchored in the AMIF regulation, demanding the involvement of local authorities to ensure transparency, accountability and policies that reflect real needs, has been widely ignored.

The experience of WELDI partners calls for a real enforcement of the partnership principle in next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034) to guarantee that funds can effectively foster local innovation and meet real needs of migrants and asylum seekers. Ways to ensure this could include making the involvement of local authorities in the planning mandatory and verifiable and setting mandatory funding quotas for local authorities and migrant or community-led organisations in the implementation.

5. Promoting city-led asylum seeker accommodation

The dominant model of asylum seeker accommodation across the EU is centrally managed with little or no consultation with local authorities. The consequences of this model are often large-scale and segregated facilities that are imposed on local authorities. Such accommodation models actively prevent integration and interaction and run counter local philosophies of integration.

Existing experiences of locally-coordinated accommodation have demonstrated their benefits by adapting accommodation to local circumstances, fostering interaction, and creating win-win-situations with the local population.

- The Plan Einstein model developed by WELDI partner Utrecht has successfully demonstrated how mixing housing for asylum seekers and other population groups and providing services for both groups can foster interaction.
- The Migration Centre managed by WELDI partner Fundão offers adequate temporary housing for a variety of migrant groups, including refugees, under dignified conditions.
- The SPRAR system in Italy (based on city pledges, terminated in 2018) resulted in more interaction and better integration support
- The more decentralised reception of Ukrainian refugees - including through citizen-hosting- has demonstrated to improve social, psychological and navigational integration of refugees.
- Based on their positive experience in managing accommodation of temporary protection, 50 Dutch municipalities have formed a coalition to claim similar local competences for the accommodation of asylum seekers.

In spite of their promises, locally coordinated accommodation models' potential of better integration outcomes and adaptability seems to be relinquished for the sake of central-state control.

WELDI partners therefore call for promoting locally steered asylum seeker accommodation under EU and national financing and for collecting more evidence on the costs and benefits of such models.

6. Promoting the relocation of asylum seekers and refugees based on local pledges

The European Pact on Migration on Asylum has left the question of the relocation up to the good will of member states and is likely not going to offer a solution for overcrowded arrival destinations.

In this situation, we urge EU institutions to promote stronger municipal involvement in the Pact's solidarity mechanism through voluntary pledges to host refugees to address the pressure on places of arrival or transit.

Relocation to cities and towns willing to host refugees based on pledges and matching is a solution that has been demonstrated to work, e.g.

- in resettlement from outside the EU ("community sponsorships")
- within WELDI, where Fundão is engaged in humanitarian relocation in cooperation with the Portuguese government.
- Data-driven matching programmes such as [Re:Match and Match'In](#) in Germany also illustrate how planning and coordination of local pledges could be implemented concretely to lead to better integration outcomes.

Along with the [International Alliance of Safe Harbours - From the Sea to the City](#), WELDI partners urge the European Commission to encourage Member States to authorise and promote municipality-led relocation initiatives within the solidarity mechanism; and to use the financial contributions from the solidarity pool to support such municipalities.