

WELDI

BUILDING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES
FOR MIGRANTS

WELDI Journal 1
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URBACT



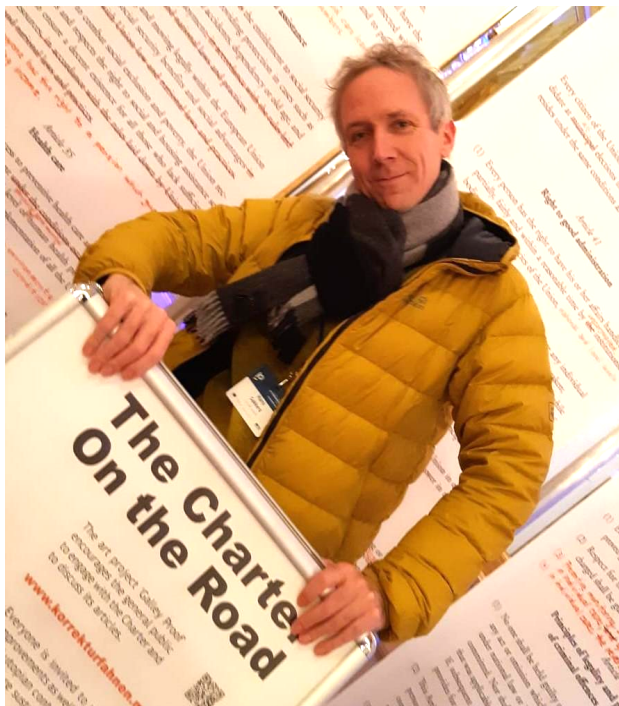
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Editorial: WELDI coordinator Hans Sakkers, city of Utrecht



In their ambition to reduce the number of migrant and refugee arrivals, European institutions and Member States forget to give a human face to the reception and integration of newcomers. However, many local communities and cities have a different perspective on the

reality of migration.

WELDI is a cooperation project of 10 European cities that does not approach the reality of migration from a negative perspective, but from the idea that newcomers are an opportunity if their human rights are respected. In our cities, newcomers are an opportunity: to fill the large number of vacancies on the labour market, to improve infrastructure, also with an eye on the needs of established residents, as an impetus for rejuvenating an ageing population and as part and parcel of a wider positive change of our communities.

With this in mind, WELDI takes the lead in showing how human rights are an inspiration for shaping the way newcomers are welcomed, and how an existing population can benefit from them. With WELDI we want to show that there is a much more positive reality than the one that is reported in the media on a daily basis, and that cities can take the lead in shaping a Europe that is a global leader in offering safe migration routes and that welcomes newcomers into our communities in line with human rights.

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, rather than pretending that

migration can or should be stopped. WELDI's 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.

Looking back at WELDI's activation phase: local projects on how to make human rights tangible

As a starting point for our network, the baseline report sets out the European and local contexts for our work and starts a process of reflection in each member city of the network about how they can make human rights more tangible through their Integrated Action Plans. We saw that in doing this, WELDI partners and their local stakeholders are often not limited to one specific migrant group, such as refugees, but to several groups and that many are keen to create win-win-situations that improve rights and support for migrants and the established population. Here are some trends from the partner's initial ideas for actions.

Better governance

In particular for places who have only recently seen international migrant arrivals and who organised initial reception in an “emergency mode”, for instance of refugees from Ukraine, WELDI is an opportunity to think about how to move to a more strategic approach. Here the URBACT local groups are showing their potential to foster an integrated approach across local government and with civil society that had been missing so far. The project is clearly an opportunity for stakeholders to achieve a common vision, and cities are on a good path to improved coordination in many places.

Better guidance

Ensuring that migrants can effectively access the support that is available to them is another priority for WELDI partners. In addition to providing printed and digital guidance, this also

involves setting up one-stop-shops that ensure people can access several relevant services more efficiently under one-roof and that different service providers can work together more collaboratively and coherently.

City ID-cards

Several WELDI partners want to explore the potential of local IDs as a device for facilitating access to rights and local services, and as an expression of a common local identity. Some initiatives draw on extending electronic citizen cards that already exist in many cities for accessing and paying local services. Others are thinking of creating a legally valid document that is accepted by local services, banks or the police. As we know from experience, notably in the United States, a key issue for these IDs is that they need to be universal and should never become de facto (undocumented) migrant IDs.

Reducing stereotypes and fostering interaction

WELDI partners are also thinking about how to counter the spread of disinformation on migrants. Stimulating more interaction between newcomers and established residents is one way to do this. Specific initiatives such as mentoring schemes, dedicated intercultural events and joined infrastructures and services (e.g. in housing, employment) are some of the ways through which WELDI partners want to bring people together.

From the next journal onwards, we will illustrate how the Integrated Action Plans take shape in each city starting from these initial ideas.

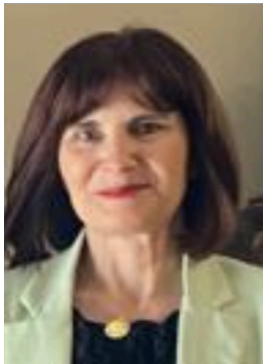
Fostering decent work - the Fundão experience, and beyond

Highlights from the transnational online exchange on 22 February 2024



The importance of a local vision

Opening the meeting, Fundão City Councillor, Alcina Cerdeira, and the Head of the Division for Innovation and Investment, Ricardo Gonçalves, made a persuasive case for the importance of a local vision for development and innovation, and the role for migration within it. When Fundão set out on its mission to counter the municipality's demographic decline, it opted for a genuinely integrated approach, becoming a "welcoming land" not just for new businesses and international ICT specialists, but also for migrants rescued at sea, victims of trafficking



and refugees from Ukraine. To turn this vision into reality, the city tapped into a closely knit network of local actors and their ideas. Through the city's entrepreneurship in engaging in transnational learning and securing EU funding, Fundao is involved in an impressive suite of projects relating to sustainable development,



migration and technology.

The Migration Centre: from hosting cherry pickers to becoming a reception hub

At the heart of Fundão's welcoming and human rights policies is the Migration Centre, an



impressive building that was opened in 2016 in a former catholic seminary on the outskirts of the town, with funding from the national programme of the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The Centre's initial purpose was to provide better living conditions for about 50 workers picking cherries, the most famous product of the local agriculture, which represents 60% of Portugal's total production. According to Councillor Cerdeira, the thought was that "we cannot say that we have the best cherries if workers do not have dignified housing".

But very soon other groups, such as vocational students from abroad, Geneva convention



refugees and people fleeing from Ukraine also found a first dwelling in the Centre. At the end of 2023, 62 refugees, 75 vocational students and about 30 seasonal workers were hosted there,

adding to a total of 260 people who found first accommodation in the Centre since 2016.

The Migration Centre also offers holistic support for refugees through a team of psychologists, social workers and interpreters. The team follows a 3-step pathway, to first focus on basic needs, to then support inclusion through language training, leisure activities and finding a place in school, training or work; and to finally help them to leave the centre and achieve full autonomy. Through the intermediation of the municipality, 38 private accommodations have been found for 123 former residents of the centre.

Combating exploitation at work, teaming up with labour inspectorates

Like most agricultural areas, Fundão's production relies heavily on migrant workers, who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Angelo Valentim from the National Labour Inspectorate illustrated how complex international subcontracting chains, figurehead managers and fictitious company headquarters make



it difficult to trace the actors who are pulling the strings in exploitative systems. He described the recent case of 58 East-Timorese workers who were found living in an old nightclub in Fundão who had been hired to collect almonds. With the help of the Migration Centre, they were hosted and interviewed to build the case against the employer. Angelo stressed the importance of cooperation between labour inspection and local authorities, and mentioned the importance of Fundão's awareness raising activities with business associations and employers to prevent trafficking.

Engaging with employers and training newcomers

The continuation of the story of the East Timorese people found in Fundão illustrates another cornerstone of the municipality's approach of protecting human rights. Fundão has developed, with help from the national Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, a range of professional training formats together with employer representatives that qualify newcomers to work in the local economy. As the national agency for vocational training was unwilling to help with the labour market integration of the Timorese, the city consulted with employers in the agricultural and forestry sector, and set up training in tree cutting, cheese making and other needed qualifications. As a result of this initiative, workers from several countries found work in Fundão. The city has eventually positioned itself as a matchmaker between agricultural employers and workers, with the intention to outbid exploitative middlemen.

The meeting illustrated that access to decent work is at the heart of WELDI's human rights agenda, as all partners have some of their residents unprotected against exploitation. Two more key topics that could not be addressed in the Fundão meeting are the social economy and the recognition of qualifications are two such topics.

The potential of the social economy

When discrimination, prejudice and red tape caused by a precarious residence status make it difficult for newcomers to find a job, socially minded employment agencies can act as intermediaries doing job matching and placement of newcomers. This type of service has a huge potential not only to bring together jobs and newcomers, it can also prevent workers from ending up in the informal and exploitative segments of the labour market. Profit-oriented recruitment agencies have demonstrated the

need for such services, but their business model is often to extract profit on the back of the workers.

In Utrecht, for instance, asylum seekers can work 6 months after they made their asylum claim, but employers shy away from recruiting them as they have to ask the public employment service for a special permit. Also, some employers are worried about the security of their status. Here, an intermediary structure from the social economy can act as an intermediary and deal with the bureaucracy or even act as a trusted subcontractor towards the employer and help newcomers get into work faster. Social economy intermediaries exist in particular in labour intensive sectors such as agriculture or the restaurant sector. Social economy structures can also offer language and professional training to bridge the skills gap between the migrants profiles and jobs that are in demand. An example for this approach is the [USE-it initiative](#), which helped migrants to resume their medical careers and acquire advanced English language skills to be able to work in a new local hospital in Birmingham.

The recognition of qualifications: a major obstacle for access to decent work

Another key topic for WELDI partners are the national systems for the recognition of foreign qualifications, which are crucial for allowing newcomers to work at their level of qualification. Most WELDI cities report that procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications are intransparent, costly and time-consuming. An additional obstacle are high language requirements. In Osijek, for instance, a nurse from Ukraine has to pay a fee of about 1,000 Euros for having their qualifications examined, which takes between six and nine months. Croatian language skills need to be demonstrated through an official course certificate that only a handful of institutions can issue. This all leads to a situation of jobs without

people and people without jobs in the healthcare sector. It frustrates newcomers who are keen to become autonomous and misses out on the opportunity to demonstrate that migrants contribute to the community. Although some member states and individual initiatives have made special efforts, in particular with the arrival of Ukrainians, the Croatian case is the rule rather than the exception.

This is why an [EC Recommendation from November 2023 on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals](#) demands member states to strengthen the capacity of their bureaucracies working on the

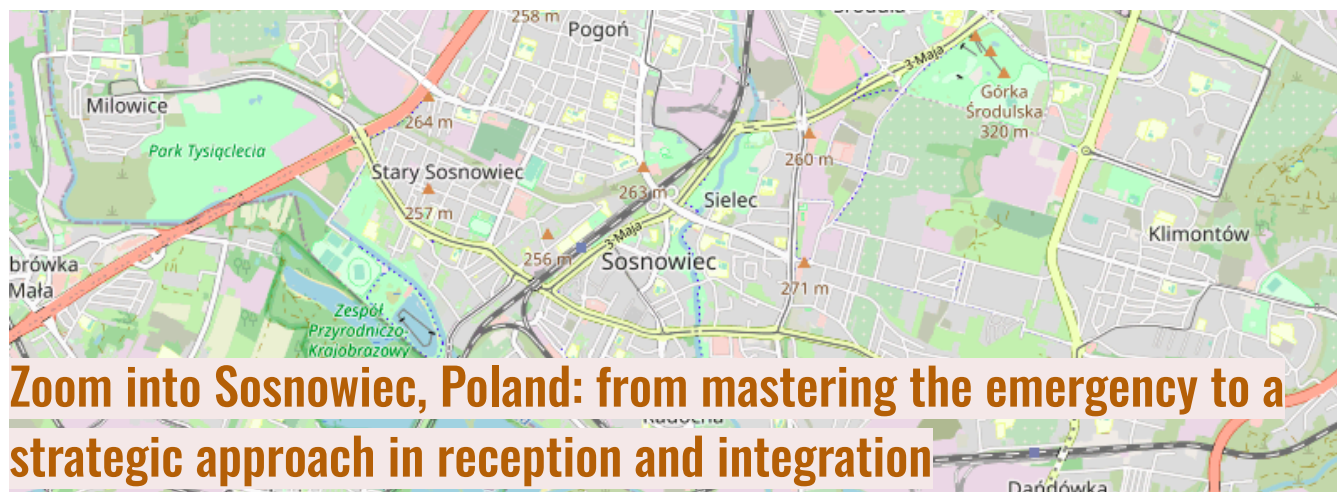
recognition of qualifications, to offer better support and clearer guidance on procedures and not to charge unreasonable costs.

In the meantime, local administrations, as examples from Munich and Barcelona illustrate, can also do their share through additional support and guidance. As an evaluation study of Munich's service has demonstrated, such services are not only defending the right to adequate work for all residents. They also generate economic returns for the city and other public authorities in the form of reduced welfare spending and higher tax income (the [evaluation report is available here in German](#)).

WELDI researchers group set up

From the beginning of WELDI it became clear that many partners count with researchers in their ULG. On February 9, a first online meeting was held to which around 25 researchers linked to eight WELDI partners were invited. Researchers that form part of WELDI's ULGs come from interdisciplinary migration research institutes, universities and think tanks.

The meeting identified relevant research and teaching activities that already happen and common interests such as the reception of city ID cards, social economy activities for labour market integration, the reception of Ukrainian refugees and women-centred approaches. The group now has a basecamp space to facilitate the exchange of data and research reports between the members and to allow researchers to jointly think about common initiatives related to WELDI.



With the Russian attack on Ukraine, Sosnowiec, one of the 41 cities and towns forming the Katowice Upper Silesia - Zagłębie metropolitan area, became an arrival destination literally overnight. The city saw an enormous mobilisation of support for the newcomers from Ukraine and found new solutions together with partners from civil society. Now that the crisis has been managed and an estimated 3,000 Ukrainian refugees continue to stay in the city, a new mobilisation is needed to provide support for refugees to take the next steps, and to ensure that all have access to education, decent housing, work and childcare. Ukrainians brought the topic of migration on the agenda, but they are not the only migrants. Since 2023, economic migration, mainly from Asian countries, has been increasing in Sosnowiec. As this process is managed between companies and recruitment agencies, the city lacks information about the situation of the migrants and their main places of work.

So Sosnowiec's engagement in WELDI came at the right time to provide input into a process of defining a long term vision and strategy for city departments and other stakeholders for increasing support for current and future arrivals. This is all the more needed as national government support for Ukrainians is waning - from July onwards, housing support will be restricted to government-run facilities.

Under the goal of working together on a common strategy, Sosnowiec's URBACT local group brings together key city departments such as welfare, housing, education and culture, local universities, the national border guards



and researchers from three local universities. Importantly, the partnership with researchers has allowed the city to conduct a **survey** (in Ukrainian and English) with migrants and refugees living in the city about their life situation and support needs. Building on this survey, the city will develop **digital guidance for migrants** in the city. Eventually, Sosnowiec is thinking about setting up a **One-Stop-Shop for newcomers**, based on the needs identified in the survey. They will also visit an existing one-stop-shop in Bielsko-Biała. Feeding into this project, WELDI partners will hold a workshop on One-Stop-Shops in September, as many see this organisational model as an efficient solution

for providing support to newcomers in an integrated way together with civil society and other levels of government.

In 2024, Sosnowiec also wants to test how international commemorative days such as World Refugee Day and Children’s Week or a “living library” with refugees in the city’s “Mediateka” can contribute to creating more opportunities for encounters between newcomers and locals.

The potential of city cards and local IDs to strengthen access to rights

Like other WELDI members, Sosnowiec is interested in drawing on the potential of local citizen cards to strengthen the local identity and access to rights of newcomers. In the case of Sosnowiec, the city card offers reductions and facilitates payment in local services and with private companies and will be extended to further areas in the future. It is used by about

20,000 of the city’s residents, but not by migrants.

So Sosnowiec will promote the use of the card among newcomers as one instrument to strengthen the sense of belonging and access to rights for newcomers.

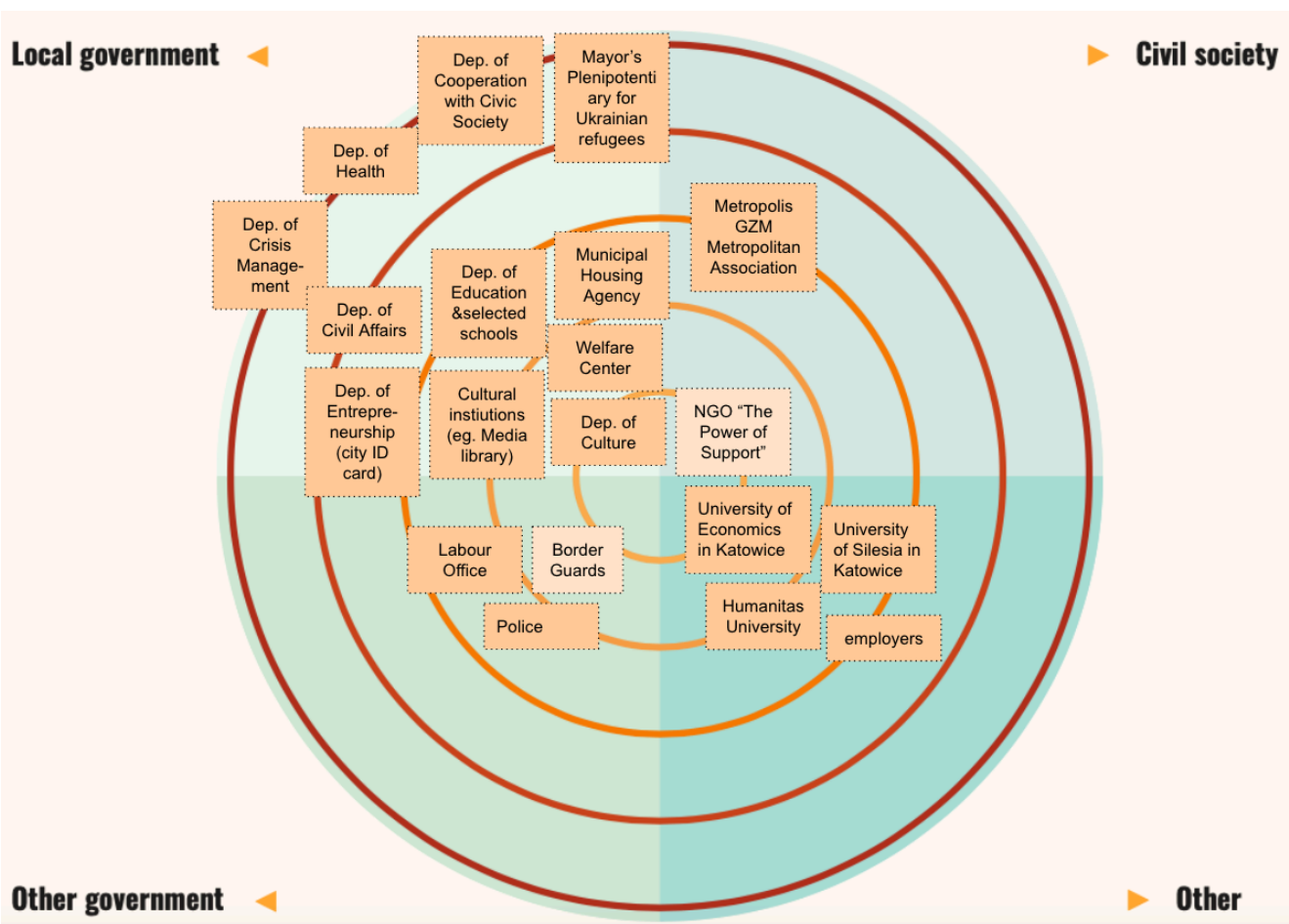
In December 2024 WELDI will hold a workshop on

local ID cards to explore further how local citizens and ID cards can promote human rights.



Jedna karta wiele możliwości

Nowoczesna aplikacja dla mieszkańców Sosnowca



WELDI's advocacy

In the first phase of WELDI, our joint research for the baseline study found that some of the human rights challenges for migrants are clearly the result of national and supranational policies and laws. This led quite naturally to a first list of advocacy themes that are intertwined with the WELDI partner's objectives. Following on from this, an advocacy group, consisting of Fundao,

Lampedusa, Seine-Saint-Denis, Utrecht and the Lead Expert, was set up to develop a more detailed advocacy plan, defining advocacy themes, messages, tools and target audiences. This living document will accompany WELDI over its lifetime and will also document the efforts of WELDI partners to make our messages heard. It includes the following topics:

Increasing the role of cities in the relocation of asylum seekers, and creating more legal pathways to decongest places of arrival.

Member states have failed to agree on a procedure to redistribute asylum seekers arriving at the EU's borders. The recently adopted EU Pact on migration on asylum foresees the possibility for member states to buy themselves out of relocation and even this procedure seems to be contested by some. In this situation, we want to explore whether relocation based on city-pledges is an option to go forward. This practice already exists in some cities, including in Fundao, but it needs to be agreed with member states who are for now the actors who voluntarily agree on relocation.

Giving cities the lead in organising the accommodation of asylum seekers.

Asylum seeker accommodation is mostly centrally steered with little or no consultation with local authorities. The consequence of this model are often large-scale and segregated facilities that are in contradiction with most local philosophies of integration and that contribute to perpetuating anti-migrant narratives. Cases of locally organised asylum seeker reception, such as Utrecht's Plan Einstein, Italy's former SPRAR system or the reception of refugees from Ukraine e.g. in Romania, have demonstrated that this model is much better in organising reception and arrival together with the established population and in fostering interaction.

Improving procedures and support for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Too complex, slow and costly procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications represent a major obstacle for newcomers to access decent work and become autonomous (see the discussion in the main article on decent work).

Ensuring the systematic access of local authorities' to EU-funding for reception and integration.

In spite of the key role that local authorities play in migrant reception and integration, local authorities are practically cut off from EU funding in a range of EU member states (e.g. Spain and Romania). WELDI partners would like to understand why this is the case, and how a better compliance with EU funding regulations (e.g. in the Asylum, Migration and Integration fund) can be achieved.

Partner Updates

Liège: Tissons des liens

“Tissons des liens, pas de menottes” (“Let’s weave relations, not handcuffs”) is the title of a structure that artist Bénédicte Moyersoén made together with a multitude of citizens out of 112,000 recycled cable binders in Liège. On 5 April the structure was suspended over the city’s central Saint-Lambert square to remind that a similar number of people live in Belgium without residency papers.



Fundão joins UNESCO Global Network of Learning cities

The municipality’s vision for its participation in this network is to champion lifelong learning by blending traditional crafts and ICT, foster intergenerational learning and a community of “well-rounded, globally conscious citizens”.



Utrecht: 10, 100, 1000 Human Rights Cities and Territories

Utrecht presented the campaign “[10, 100, 1000 Human Rights Cities and Territories](#)” at the annual UCLG Campus, taking place in February 2024 in Barcelona. 150 cities have so far signed up to the campaign that seeks an explicit commitment from local authorities to Human Rights and to make this commitment visible among cities and in the international community.

Upcoming WELDI-exchanges

June 2024 (date tbc): Online meeting on digital guidance, hosted by Cluj-Napoca

June 2024 (date tbc): Masterclass on a human rights based approach at local level

September 2024 (date tbc): Workshop on one-stop-shops for migrants

October 2-3 2024 Transnational Exchange Lampedusa