



ASK THE EXPERT
POLICY BRIEF

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Comprehensive approach to integration at the local level

INTEGRATION





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Ask the Expert Policy Brief

Comprehensive approach to integration at the local level

By Zeynep Kaşlı

A comprehensive approach to integration entails the active involvement of many actors on interrelated dimensions of integration, namely the legal-political, the socio-economic, and the cultural-religious. As summarized in our [first brief](#), latest research on immigrant integration at the local level shows that sustainability of integration process is contingent upon many structural factors. These factors include availability of support related to migration process, involvement of third sector organizations, political composition of the local governments, electoral power of immigrants, resourceful local authorities willing to support place-based community building and interaction sites.

This brief is a summary of our interview and written exchange with two key experts in integration and local governance in Europe: [Professor Ricard Zapata Barrero](#), the director of [GRITIM-UPF](#) (Interdisciplinary Research Group on Immigration) expert on intercultural policies and multilevel governance of migration and diversity; and [Assoc. Prof. Tiziana Caponio](#), Marie Curie Research Fellow at [Migration Policy Center](#) and Associate Professor at the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society (CPS) of the University of Turin, currently working on city networks as well as local integration and multilevel governance.

In the light of recent developments in this field and their own research, we asked Ricard Zapara Barrero and Tiziana Caponio to comment specifically on the key elements of a long-term comprehensive approach, the role of the EU and advocacy groups in fostering comprehensive integration, and on what issues need further research and feedback from different stakeholders.



What are the key elements and components of a long-term comprehensive approach that are 'fundable' from EU programmes?

Zapata Barrero and Caponio agree that comprehensive approach entails attention to multiple dimensions of integration and especially everyday interactions at the local level. Both are doubtful about the success of top-down universalistic solutions. Zapata Barrero points at the difficulty of addressing combined effects of different sources of inequalities, related to gender, ethnicity, religion and class. Caponio further underlines the difficulty of top-down 'operationalisation' of social interactions and everyday relations in a way that would meet the needs and conditions of the local communities.

In terms of fundable programmes, they stress that a long-term comprehensive approach to integration requires integrating citizens as well as newcomers, and, hence identifying and focusing on the needs according to the general profile of the local population, around issues related to gender and youth. For Zapata Barrero, it implies that funding instruments must include all civil society organizations, such as labour unions and sport associations or other civic organizations, and not only migrant specific organizations. Such mainstreamed programmes necessitates successful management of public space by direct local interventions and involvement of citizens, civil society organizations as well as state actors and they become sustainable especially through interpersonal relations and interactions. As such, they include multiple territorial dimensions starting from face-to-face going up to the

level of neighbourhoods and districts. To facilitate **interaction and contact at the local level**, Caponio also stresses the necessity to prioritize the following aspects; better quality childcare and education with support to schools of all levels, providing higher quality health services, support for neighbourhood communities and organizations, as well as catering to the needs of all individuals rather than abstractly defined groups.

What can the EU do, with its limited set of options in the integration area (funding programmes, promotion of policy principles) to foster such a comprehensive approach?

Both experts think that the EU has quite some options despite the fact that it has no direct competence on the issue, although they differ slightly in their suggestions for the roles local and national governments may play within this framework. Zapata Barrero suggests that the EU could foster a comprehensive approach in two ways: empowering the cities in relation to their states and providing EU-level criteria on integration. The first one entails, beyond mere recognition, providing tools and expanding their decision-making and financial capacities to allow cities to fulfil their roles. On the second point, he underlines that if there are EU-level minimum criteria set and communicated directly to the cities, through new agencies and existing channels like Eurocities or Committee of Regions, cities will be able to bypass their national governments to reach to the funding available at the EU level. Setting criteria of supporting intercultural policies could be a first step to allow cities to submit their individual or joint projects directly



to the EU authorities and encourage coordinated efforts for experimenting similar policies.

Caponio underlines the potential benefits of the EU's involvement in supporting projects and programmes that would target local communities in both urban and rural areas. She further stresses the EU's key role in enforcing the partnership principle in local level policymaking and organization of service provision. Yet Caponio also suggests that this can be possible through the management of funding and monitoring at the national level with proof of active engagement of local authorities and civil society organizations, including NGOs, civil society organizations and immigrant groups, in forming extended governance partnerships.

How can advocacy groups spell out the idea of a comprehensive approach to promote it on various levels as a policy agenda?

Both experts agree that advocacy groups are key actors involved in the formation and implementation of a comprehensive approach. For Zapata Barrero, beyond direct support to established civil society organizations and institutions, it is also essential to promote links between theory and practice among stakeholders working in this field. This requires a more functionalist approach to connect different actors occupied with ideas, decisions and implementation. Identifying all the agents or groups involved and active at different levels is the necessary first step for determining how to frame ideas and goals related to comprehensive approach.

Zapata Barrero further evokes that the EU level actions is not the only way to promote the comprehensive approach at the local level. While the EU is expected to promote transnational relations across cities, it is also the responsibility of the cities to promote interaction between citizens, civil society organizations and neighbourhood communities at the local level including interactions at the neighbourhood and district levels. For the local level in particular, Caponio argues, advocacy groups, effectively based in local communities and neighbourhoods, should not find it too difficult to spell out a comprehensive approach, as it would contribute to the valorisation of the local societies that they are embedded in.



What are the major issues on this topic that need further research for more sustainable and effective policies in this field? What issues require further feedback from national or local stakeholders, namely policy actors, NGOs and practitioners?

- There is not a shared view on what comprehensive integration policies must look like. How are the intersections of different dimensions and different forms of inequalities incorporated into a comprehensive approach?
- How is a comprehensive approach perceived in different countries and cities sharing a common principle of integration?
- Comparable common database on urban populations is necessary and this can be promoted at the EU level. What type of data would be useful for local and national stakeholders?
- We need such a detailed mapping of the positions and the tasks of the stakeholders involved in integration processes stand. What roles do each local and national stakeholder fulfil in their day-to-day actions in order to enable citizens and newcomers to establish significant social relations?
- Placing what they are individually doing within a larger whole will help all the actors involved see what they can do together and in relation to one another, hence be more interested in cooperating and broadening their scope of action. This is a matter of horizontal communication. Platforms such as ReSOMA are important to build such horizontal communication channels as much as vertical ones.

In sum, the points that are repeatedly highlighted by the experts are the necessity to encourage partnership across local actors of governance and civil society organizations for a comprehensive approach and, to achieve that, to diversify policy interventions that would facilitate local interactions in different scales, from neighbourhood and community-based organizations to the district level. The EU instruments, shaped by shared EU-level principles of integration that recognizes and empowers these actors of local governance, may play a key role for local actors to be active agents of horizontal and vertical partnerships starting with funding and programme application processes and all along the implementation. Identifying the specific role each stakeholder plays and strict monitoring are important steps for effective implementation of EU programmes informed by such a comprehensive approach.

ReSOMA

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ReSOMA - Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum

is a project funded under the Horizon 2020 Programme that aims at creating a platform for regular collaboration and exchange between Europe's well-developed networks of migration researchers, stakeholders and practitioners to foster evidence-based policymaking. Being a Coordination and Support Action (CSA), ReSOMA is meant to communicate directly with policy makers by providing ready-to-use evidence on policy, policy perceptions and policy options on migration, asylum and integration gathered among researchers, stakeholders and practitioners.

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