

Acting together in migration management

enhancing coordination among central and local level



Best Practices Review

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**Migration, Asylum Refugee Regional Initiative (MARRI) and Central European Initiative
(CEI) Joint Project**

**“ACTING TOGETHER IN MIGRATION MANAGEMENT – ENHANCING COORDINATION
AMONG CENTRAL AND LOCAL LEVEL”**

BEST PRACTICES REVIEW



Photo by: Jelena Janevska/NALAS

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Abbreviations

CEI – Central European Initiative

DG NEAR – Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations

EC – European Commission

EU – European Union

GIZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH

ICMPD – International Centre for Migration Policy Development

IOM – International Organization for Migration

MARRI – Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative

MARRI RC - Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative Regional Centre

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoI – Ministry of Internal Affairs

MoLSP – Ministry of Labor and Social Policy

NALAS – Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe

ORF - Open Regional Fund for South East Europe Modernisation of Municipal Services

SEE – South East Europe

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

WB – Western Balkans

I Background

This review has been developed as part of the Migration, Asylum Refugee Regional Initiative (MARRI) and Central European Initiative (CEI) Joint Project ***“Acting together in Migration Management- Enhancing Coordination among Local and Central Level”***. It also summarizes the experiences shared during the MARRI Regional Centre’s International Conference held on 17th March 2016 in Skopje, Macedonia. The event has been organized under Montenegrin Presidency-in-Office. Over 80 participants - representatives of central and local authorities from 14 European countries and international organizations gathered in order to exchange experiences and best practices in migration crisis management.

Panellists from **Austria, Italy and Croatia** shared their experience with colleagues-representatives from interior ministries, ministries of labour and social affairs and local authorities from: **Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo***.

Special attention has been given to possibilities of acquiring stronger support of international community in the process of the European integration of the Western Balkans, through strengthening of overall capacities in managing the migration crisis in the Region. It has been identified that the affected countries need to better work together and coordinate their efforts to deal with the current migrant crisis. That would help them diminish security concerns that have been raised by the influx of migrants, and at the same time, it would increase the Participants’ capacities to treat the migrants in accordance with international standards and principles.

Generally mass influx of migrants is perceived through the prism of national security and a matter of international protection and assistance that must be granted to all those entitled to it, thus as a matter to be dealt with by the national authorities. In such circumstances, the potential role and contribution of affected local authorities is often overlooked, despite them bearing a large burden in the current migrant crisis.

Communication and coordination between national and local authorities has proven challenging in many instances, causing inadequate use of local available resources and contributing to the feeling of resentment by the general public towards the migrants. Local authorities are, can and need to be involved in the Participants’ responses to the current migrant crisis. In particular, local authorities in affected border areas could play an essential role in dealing with the large number of migrants on their territory. This effort will contribute to regional transfer of knowledge and sharing of experiences in communication and coordination between national and local authorities, as a precondition for an increased contribution of local authorities and efficient use of all available resources.

Following the outcomes of the Conference *“Challenges and impact of refugee crisis for Local Governments in South-East Europe”* organized in Zagreb in October 2015, by the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS), local governments have been identified as first affected by the refugee influx, thus they have to be considered as a key stakeholder and supported by the national government and international community in dealing with the refugee influx issue. Local governments appealed for better coordination at regional level and that the national governments, the European Union, the donors and other relevant actors take urgent measures to address the following immediate and long term priorities. It has been concluded that the overall support to local governments in facing these challenges proved to be inefficient and inadequate and in most cases national governments were slow to provide appropriate guidance and coordination, the communication and data exchange often failed, funding mechanisms were not appropriate or missing, centralized, slow and complicated. At the same time, the inter-municipal cross-border cooperation failed to provide information exchange among the local decision-makers and concrete assistance.

The Conference was co-financed by CEI Cooperation Fund, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia and GIZ - ORF. It was co-organized with NALAS and led to the adoption of **Conclusions** (Annex I) for enhancement of the role of local authorities in the migrant crisis management. As an added value, the Conference also contributed towards European integration of the Western Balkans Region. The transfer of knowledge and experiences in line with the best practices and international standards supports the process of harmonization of laws and improves the prospect for adequate legislation implementation (i.e. Rule of Law) in the field of migration management and law enforcement. It has to be noted that, in general, the issues of legislation harmonization and laws implementation are often cited as priority areas of improvements for all countries in the Region in the Annual European Commission's Country Progress Reports.

The European Agenda on Migration adopted in May 2015 acknowledged the need for better coordination between national governments and local authorities. Following the Agenda local authorities are recognized to be at real frontline and shall provide both the immediate but also long-term response to new arrivals. The European Commission has adopted a comprehensive approach in the Agenda, working not only across policy areas, but also government levels.

Key objectives and expected results of the project

The **overall objective** was to contribute towards improved and coordinated response of affected countries to the current flow of migrants from Asia and Africa seeking shelter in the European Union.

The affected countries need to better work together and coordinate their efforts to deal with the current migrant crisis. That would help them diminish security concerns that have been raised by the influx of migrants, and at the same time, it would increase the countries' capacities to treat the migrants in accordance with international standards and principles.

The **specific objective** was to transfer knowledge and share experiences among the affected countries in ensuring adequate role of local authorities in the current migrant crisis management.

Local authorities are, can and need to be involved in the countries' responses to the current migrant crisis. In particular, local authorities in affected border areas could play an essential role in dealing with the large number of migrants on their territory. This initiative will ensure transfer of knowledge and sharing of experiences among relevant local and national authorities in the affected countries, as part of a wider effort to strengthen the capacities and raise the profile of local authorities in dealing with the migrant crisis. It had a particular focus on identifying the best practices of cooperation and coordination between central and local governments in all areas on the migrants' route through the Western Balkans, as well as practices from EU countries with longer experience of dealing with migrants and refugees.

As an added value, the project will also contribute towards the European integration of the Western Balkans countries: The transfer of knowledge and experiences in line with the best practices and international standards supports the process of harmonization of laws and improves the prospect for adequate legislation implementation (i.e. Rule of Law) in the field of migration management and Law Enforcement. It has to be noted that, in general, the issues of legislation harmonization and laws implementation are often cited as priority areas of improvements for all countries in the region in the annual European Commission's country progress reports.

II. International Conference “Acting together in migration management – enhancing coordination among central and local level” - 17th March 2016, Skopje

Welcome addresses

Ambassador Tamara Mugosa, Director of MARRI Regional Centre

Welcoming the participants Mugosa underlined that MARRI RC is a permanent body of Migration Asylum Refugees Regional Initiative established more than a decade ago in order to support regional approach in the areas of its competence. She stressed that the mission of MARRI is to encourage and coordinate harmonization of regional legal and policy framework, as well as to support capacity building in its Participants (Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo*¹).

Engagement in strengthening regional cooperation is a crucial issue for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. She said that efforts of MARRI are directed to upgrade regional links and particular attention has been given to the fact that all Participants are candidates or potential candidates for the membership in the EU. Thus, Mugosa pointed out, that all activities are designed to accelerate integration process, by support to national institutions to meet EU standards.

In assessing actual circumstances, Mugosa emphasized, that MARRI role has become important more than ever, in the context of unprecedented migration crisis that affects strongly all WB countries and Europe. Being aware of the fact that migration flows are far from over she said that holistic and long term approach was needed in order to tackle its various aspects. Therefore, MARRI keeps continuous dialogue with other regional initiatives and WB governments with the intention to identify crucial challenges in management of this migration crisis.

She emphasized that the Conference shall provide an opportunity to talk about the foreseen role of local self-governments in the national documents and difficulties that local communities face in implementation of national policies – strategies and action plans for migration management, but also in coping with all other issues that derive from everyday' s practice of local authorities that provide services and assistance to migrants and refugees.

She expressed belief for the Conference to be used as occasion on how to improve present state of play in the Western Balkans, by learning about experience in the EU countries and try to produce relevant responses for future activities - both at central and local level in the MARRI Region. Expressing confidence that participants will identify common challenges in all countries that will serve as platform for stronger regional efforts in coping with migration crisis.

In conclusion she expressed hope that the Conference will also bring about additional support of international community in order to improve capacities of central and local governments to fulfil their tasks.

At the end, she used the occasion to express gratitude to the Central European Initiative for co-financing this project, as well as to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia and GIZ – German and Swiss cooperation, founders of Open Regional Fund for South East Europe Modernization of Municipal Services that provided additional support in its implementation. Special gratitude she expressed to NALAS, partners in organization of the Conference for continuous, professional and devoted work aimed at success of this event.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence."



Photo by Jelena Janevska/NALAS

Ambassador Tegovski, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia

Ambassador Tegovski welcomed participants on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia. He has stressed that the Republic of Macedonia attaches utmost attention to the good neighbourly relations and the regional cooperation as key elements for prosperity, economic and social development, security and overall cooperation between the countries of Southeast Europe, but also for their full integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

The proven Macedonian's proactive approach, support and effective engagement to and in all regional organizations and initiatives, including the CEI, MARRI and NALAS as co-organizers of this very Conference, will continue in future, said Tegovski. He pointed out that this Conference is a concrete example of true regional partnership and synergy between different stakeholders.

Recalling on the last year Macedonian's presidency of CEI and MARRI, Tegovski said that a significant number of meetings, conferences and other activities related to important subjects and in particularly to the migration and refugee crises have been organized. One of these events was the International Conference "Migration and Refugee Flows in the Transit Countries: Security Implications", jointly organized by the Institute for Geostrategic Research and Foreign Policy of the MFA of the Republic of Macedonia and the CEI Secretariat and held in Skopje, on 16 December 2015. He used the occasion to quote just a part of conclusions adopted at that Conference: *participants underlined the need to stepping up joint efforts aimed to: a) more pragmatic and proactive approach towards the knowledge based preventive and crisis management activities; b) establishing comprehensive border management (surveillance, policing, border control, intelligence; c)securing timely information exchange and strengthening cooperation between Law Enforcement agencies; d) enhancing contacts and collaboration between central and local authorities, as well as with civil society; e) making available tools for the local population to raise its awareness of the character and rights of the migrants and refugees aimed to preventing fears and stimulating solidarity; f) strengthening regional cooperation."*

Talking about the current migration and refugee crisis, he said that it is the most severe crisis that the world has known since the end of the Second World War. According to the UNHCR, there are over 60 million refugees worldwide, and in his opinion this number and the trends will continue to increase as the reasons will keep on multiplying.

Ambassador Tegovski pointed out the importance of making distinction between the terms refugees, as people affected by wars and other kind of atrocities and migrants, as people who are leaving their countries for economic and other reasons. Both categories are subject of differentiated approach reflected in the processes of their registration, permits to passing or not the borders of the transit countries and application for an asylum mostly in the countries of their final destination.

Furthermore there are transit countries, continued Tegovski, where the management is mainly related to ensuring proper conditions for the people in terms of their humanitarian needs, registration and safe transfer from the entry to the exit point. On the other side are the countries which are the final destinations of the refugees and the migrants.

Addressing the challenges of migration and migrants' vulnerabilities that are responded to at the local level, Tegovski said that municipal authorities need to strengthen their capacities and establish mechanisms to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from the crisis. In his opinion, the migration management policy disseminated from central authorities should consider the needs and capacities of local authorities. Good governance requires partnerships between local and central authorities and all relevant stakeholders, including the civil society and private sector. Moreover, partnerships between local and central authorities can ensure that national policies align with the needs and capacities of local authorities at the heart of implementation. Local leadership and community actors can often play very important role in promoting positive perceptions toward migration and migrants. Of particular relevance in this framework is the issue of migrant smuggling or facilitation of irregular entry, stay or transit which affects the safety and security of migrants and citizens alike. This is an issue which should also be addressed at local level, said Tegovski.

He assessed that the asymmetrical impact of the crisis was itself a big obstacle to a strong and coherent collective response. In that regards, achieving solidarity in facing a common challenge can be difficult, but achieving it despite sharply diverging interests is a much harder task. The states of first arrival were keen to overcome the constraints of the Dublin Regulation. The transit countries were tempted to divert the flow of migrants and refugees to other nations by selectively closing their borders and, if that was not possible, to pass them along to the next country as rapidly as possible and the countries where most of the refugees ended up wished to slow down the inflow and called for EU-wide burden sharing. Tegovski emphasized that the refugee and migrant crisis is exceptionally serious and complex and a unified European approach and response is needed.

Tegovski expressed belief that this Conference could provide concrete proposals and ideas how jointly to address the challenges we all are faced with. One of the suggestions Macedonia would like to share is the idea to organize trainings and workshops for the local authorities in order to increase their institutional capacities, knowledge and practical application as it comes to the different aspects of the crisis, said Tegovski. This idea could be realized both at national, cross-border and wider regional level with aim to approximating the approach and management of the crisis challenges which, it seems, will last for a longer period of time.

In the closing remarks, he stressed the important role of the donor community in addressing the challenges of the crisis, expressing confidence that the assistance and support provided by different international, bilateral and non-governmental stakeholders will continue in future not only in meeting the numerous challenges of the crisis, but also in realizing the new ideas and initiatives in this context.

Mayor Emil Draghici, President of NALAS

In his opening remarks, NALAS President Mayor Emil Draghici stressed that this is the second time for less than six months that NALAS gathers local government associations, mayors, central government officials and regional and European partners to discuss and act on the continuing refugee crisis. He expressed pleasure that this very Conference is organized in cooperation with MARRI. He also pointed out the importance of having representatives of the Ministries of Interior and Ministries of Labor. Referring to first NALAS gathering organized in Zagreb in October 2015, the President reminded that the need for better coordination among local and central governments in managing the crisis was expressed. "Today", continued the President "we are to learn from our recent experience and explore ways to improve coordination mechanisms at national and regional level. Any local community which is directly affected by a crisis should be rapidly supported horizontally and vertically. For that reason the Local Government Associations, Ministries and their networks need to timely design mechanisms and protocols to know how to act in these and similar emergency situations", said Mr. Draghici.

He stressed that the situation today in the Region is very dynamic and the context of dealing with the refugee crisis in South Eastern Europe is changing constantly. The Balkan route becomes even more challenging as the most recent floods are adding complexity for everyone, and the scarce resources that are available to local governments shall also cover these new challenges. Here comes the question: how well the local governments are equipped to deal with humanitarian and natural disasters, do they have the adequate authority, capacity and resources to meet the basic needs of the citizens and to at least not let the situation deteriorate further? It is down to the local leaders to act and provide secure and safe environment in dealing with the immediate effects of these challenges considering short- and long-term perspectives, stressed the President.

"I do hope that the international community will recognize the importance to establish mechanisms for coordination in several levels and directions: between central and local governments, as well as at regional level. It is also very important to act promptly and learn fast from current experience. The circumstances pressure us to discuss and decide on the possibility and prospects to establish a system for crisis management in general, be it floods, refugees, or other emergency situations. Local governments don't have competencies in dealing with crises. For many of them, this is the first time they face challenges of such matter and proportion. In coordinating their effort, if at all, they often lack the support of the central government in methodological, technical and financial terms simply because the central governments themselves are extremely challenged with the constantly changing demand for adequate measures and actions. Very often, the municipalities that are exposed to the refugee flow are small border settlements with already existing daily problems with water supply, solid waste management, sanitation, logistics and chronic shortage of financial means. They often have very small overstretched teams who cover all the municipal activities, and their resources are used to the limits. A regional mechanism for communication and exchange among affected and likely to be affected countries and territorial entities would help to use the scarce resources in the most rational way, and to enhance the options for adequate measures with highest possible impact without compromising on the quality of the delivered services to their citizens. The prospect of providing services like temporary shelters, basic education for children and integration within the affected communities for longer term may be also discussed and considered", said Draghici.

Having said all this, he stressed that there are no easy solutions, and maybe not all of them will be found at our meeting. He has used the occasion to appeal to all participants to remain sensible and sensitive to the human aspect of the current crisis, emphasizing that the local governments and their capacity to deal with the challenges at local level are the key to providing the solutions to manage crises and they should be provided with the means and capacities that will enable them to fulfil the difficult task of dealing with crisis.



Photo by Jelena Janevska/NALAS

Mr. Ugo Poli, CEI Focal Point Migrations

Mr. Poli welcomed joint efforts of MARRI RC and NALAS in organizing the International Conference. Emphasizing that it is one of the 12 events supported by CEI Cooperation Fund, he reminded on the Conclusions of the Meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the CEI Member States, under the Macedonian CEI Presidency, held in Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia on 15 June 2015. He reiterated the conclusion that relates to expressed concern of the participating ministers about recent escalation of the irregular migration and trafficking of human beings, who have agreed that it is necessary that the measures for combating them must be taken urgently.

“Taking into consideration the very special moment the region is going through, the Ministers asked the CEI Member States, which are also EU Member States, to continue to assist the efforts of the CEI countries aspiring to EU membership to fulfil the relevant EU criteria and to promote closer relations with the EU. In this regard, they affirmed the importance of the CEI as a forum for cooperation, encompassing both EU and non-EU Member States and its increased role in bringing the countries closer to the EU: “Regional Cooperation for European Integration” remains the CEI’s main aim and mission. Moreover, they stressed the importance of linking CEI activities to existing and future EU macro-regional strategies as well as initiatives and further supported the role of the CEI as “a Bridge between Macro-regions”.²

The Ministers praised the CEI commitment to play an important role in their implementation and emphasized the need for undertaking additional efforts in ensuring all-inclusiveness of the EU Macro-Regional Strategies. In this context, they welcomed the relevant efforts made by the CEI-Executive Secretariat”.

Poli also noted that relevant think tanks and NGO’s in the last 10 years were warning on possible increase of the number of migrants and therefore the need for adequate response in

² Meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Central European Initiative Ohrid, 15 June 2015 Communiqué

managing the migration flows. The lack of networking at transnational level as well as sharing information, methodology and knowledge effecting adequate reactions to humanitarian needs of migrants has been recognized. This very Conference, continued Poli, is the excellent opportunity to exchange experience across Europe as well as it is a confirmation of the commitment of all international organization to cooperate closer. The policy dialog is seriously challenged by migration flows, pointing out the role of the authorities in Greece and Italy in welcoming and integrating migrants and refugees.

Local authorities need to demonstrate courage and promote civil values and protect their own communities from the fear of unknown and it that manner encourage hospitality, stressing that “migrants are not the cost, but value to the society”.

He said that the European Commission is committed to adopt and update community funded programs to ensure better response to crisis. He has urged the representatives of Local authorities to use available funds of the EC such as, IPA, twinning programs, HORIZONT 2020, Europe for citizens, in order to upgrade capacities in migration management. On the long term run, the EU offers number of tools directed to enhancement of cooperating and increase of overall capacities.

Poli said that having in mind that the Western Balkan region is considered as a transit route, the countries have demonstrated the capacity to assume European responsibility in the emergency situation.

Once again he stressed the importance of cooperation between NALAS and MARRI in supporting efforts of the Western Balkan countries and strengthening cooperation and political relations between EU Member States and candidate countries.

In conclusion he stressed that mission of CEI Secretariat in supporting the actual process will continue.

Ms. Ulrike Lunacek, Vice President of the European Parliament for the Western Balkans

Ms. Ulrike Lunacek addressed the participants via video message. She stressed the significance of solidarity and cooperation in migration crisis management. Lunacek also pointed out that Europe has not reached the common response yet, underlining the importance of Dublin principles’ full implementation in finding balanced solutions. She praised invested efforts of the countries on the Balkan route, assessing that migration crisis has shown the absurdity of the fact that six Western Balkan countries are still not part of the EU. She stated that the Union support should not be simple delegation of responsibility to the countries of the Region that, according to her opinion, showed extraordinary level of European solidarity in recent months.

Affirming the need of fast and efficient support to local authorities, Lunacek invited the participants of the Conference to focus their discussion on the principles of solidarity, cooperation and mutual respect at local, national, regional and European level.

III Panel I - Challenges in communication, collaboration and coordination between central and local government in migration crisis management

ALBANIA

Ms. Elona Gjebrea Hoxha – Deputy Minister of Interior

Albania has not been part of the migrant route since the start of the migrant crisis affecting the Balkan countries, although there have been predictions on possible route change through Albania and the risk of it is still present. In line with these expectations, Republic of Albania has been among first in the Balkans to develop contingency plan for possible massive influx of migrants and its update has been done in cooperation with international partners, said Ms. Gjebrea Hoxha. Several documents relating to the migrant crisis and its specifics have become part of the National legislation. Amendments to the Law No. 8432 of 1998 on Asylum in the Republic of Albania have been adopted in 2014 which are in line with EU directives. Recently, establishment of National Commissioner for Refugees position has passed Governmental procedures and is part of this Law.

The National Commission of Refugees comprises of eight members: the National Commissioner for Refugees, a representative of the Ministry of Local Government, a representative of the Ministry of Public Order, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, a representative of the Department of National Security, a representative of the Albanian Helsinki Committee, and a representative of the Albanian Bar Association.

The Strategy on reintegration of returned Albanian citizens and the Action plan 2010 – 2015 refers to the institutional framework. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities along with the Ministry of Internal Affairs as well as many other ministries are responsible for migration management. Within the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Migration Counters – bodies responsible for providing reintegration services at local level have been established since 2010 in 22 Local Employment offices and as can be seen from the Migration Profile data these Counters have been active since.

Albania has on disposal National Reception Centre and Detention Centre both with capacity to admit 150 people each.

The present situation in Albania shows that there are no cases of irregular migrants tending to use Albania as route to go to Europe, as stated by Ms. Gjebrea Hoxha. There was another tendency in high rise in 2015, when great number of Albanian citizens was identified as asylum seekers in Europe, especially in Germany. This required fast response by the Albanian Government when they intensified collaboration with the German authorities after which the number of Albanian asylum seekers has decreased drastically. The social services of the EU countries were identified as a push factor, with misleading and false information shared by bus operators in Albania for the possibilities of economic asylum in Germany.

The statement by the Deputy Minister of Interior, Ms. Elona Gjebrea Hoxha, refers to a fact that country's economical sources are limited, as well as the infrastructure is not favourable, since they don't have railway that will link countries and therefore are not attractive as a route for migrants.

Speaking of collaboration between local and central government it was said it is recognized in the official documents, but however the role of the local self-government in migration management is not recognized in the last Migration Profile 2012-2014.

MACEDONIA

Mr. Goran Pavlovski, Border Police, Ministry of Interior

Mr. Pavlovski pointed out that inevitably, the focus has been very close on the migration crisis. However this challenge is not new for the Macedonian authorities as they have been facing this issue for five years already. The crisis has reached its peak however in 2015 with around 700 000 migrants crossing Macedonian territory in total. He distinguished four key periods in the management of the migration crisis:

- June 2015 and the amendments to the Law on Asylum on Temporary Protection allowing migrants to express their intent to seek asylum at any border police station within a window of 72 hours;
- The emergency situation, resulting in mobilization of army presence at the northern and southern border;
- The allowing of entry to Afghan, Syrian and Iraqi citizens into Macedonia, and declaring all other nationalities as economic migrants; and
- Allowing entry to migrants carrying identification documents.

Mr. Pavlovski highlighted that despite the official declaring of the closure of the route, the actual closing will take some time and difficulties. Many challenges still remain and a humanitarian disaster on the route can be also expected. To respond to this, a number of measures are being taken, and the protection of the border as well as the safety and the protection of the lives of the migrants and those facilitating their transit remains a top priority. Efforts are made for effective registration of migrants, which has been extremely difficult in the period where 8.000 to 11.000 migrants a day transited through the country.

According to him, fortunately, coordination and cooperation among institutions is ongoing and in a very positive manner. The MoI and MoLSP have excellent cooperation when dealing with the vulnerable groups, especially unaccompanied children. Cooperation is also very good with the local self-government; Macedonia has been one of the few countries along the route which managed to isolate the migrants transiting from the populated areas. This was done to prevent incidents between local population and the migrants and to improve migrants' and citizens safety while transiting. There have been several cases where 25 migrants in total have lost their lives while travelling on foot along the rails. The need for a joint approach is still a priority. The coordination body is continuing to take measures in this direction. In cooperation with the local self-government the transport of migrants, the temporary caps have been isolated to the outskirts of Gevgelija and enhance police presence contributed to the prevention of incidents between local population and the migrants despite the enormous numbers of migrants. Many local NGO's participated in the crisis management, offering humanitarian aid and helping the registration of migrants. Local services such as healthcare professionals from the municipalities are cooperating with the police on daily basis, and security and safety remain priorities. The management of the Transit Reception Centre is also done in cooperation with teams from the local self-government. In conclusion, he stressed again that the route is far from being closed and that the announcement of its closing will only give impetus to efforts for illegal border crossing. He reminded all on the willingness of Macedonia to receive as many migrants from the South as Serbia is willing to allow in its territory.

Mr. Dejan Ivkovski, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

Mr. Ivkovski emphasized the fact that the cooperation between central and local government is inevitable. He spoke about the recent experiences in implementing the Strategy for Integration and the challenges that the Ministry faced when implementing it on local level. Local communities are xenophobic; they fear the unknown and are reluctant to accept the newcomers. Very often the central government has to impose certain solutions that the local self-governments are reluctant to implement. For example, when looking for the location for the

Asylum seekers centre, four municipalities refused to have it built on their territory so the Ministry had to make the decision eventually and impose it. But imposing decisions results in difficulties in their realization, especially if the local self-government was not on board immediately. When this happens, it takes several meetings to reach compromise.

Mr. Ivkovski shared that before the current migration crisis, institutions and responsible personnel were persuaded that they have the answers to crisis especially after the experiences gained during the refugee influxes from the war in Bosnia, and the Kosovo and Macedonia crises. Apart from dealing with refugees, asylum seekers, and persons in need of international protection, another category emerged – persons in transit. The municipalities on the route were faced with extraordinary situations where the lessons learned in the 90's were not enough to offer solutions and mechanisms to handle this situation. At the end of his address, Mr. Ivkovski expressed his satisfaction with such forum and the approach where central and local governments come together to agree on solutions prior to taking decisions rather than taking many meetings to reach compromise.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Mr. Predrag Jovic, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees

Mr. Jovic said that in September 2015 the Government adopted the Plan on urgent measures in case of mass migration to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He explained that provisions pledged to take a number of measures to address various aspects of the migration crisis.

Implementing effective border and migration controls, assistance to vulnerable people and respect of human rights are addressed as imperatives in cooperation between central and local authorities, said Jovic. He continued by stressing that the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees has been tasked to initiate cooperation and coordination with other respective state bodies and local self-governments at the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to identify locations that will provide adequate temporary reception conditions and allow for proper screening of possible arrivals.

The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees and Ministry of Security, according to the plan have undertaken activities in establishing communication with potential donors, informed Jovic.

He stressed that the Ministry of Security – Sector of Immigration and Sector of Asylum, Bosnia and Herzegovina Border Police, Service for Foreigners Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees – Sector for Emigration and Sector for Refugees, Displaced Persons and Housing Policy are responsible for implementing the defined Plan.



Photo by: Jelena Janevska/NALAS

SERBIA

Mr. Zoran Vaskovic, Ministry of Interior

Mr. Vaskovic stressed that mainly cooperation with local self-governments is done during the integration of migrants in the society and corresponding measures, but in the situation that we are facing we are dealing with a different issue i.e. people who transit. He gave a small overview of the developments in the recent period. He evaluated the crisis in 2015 as a disaster as the countries on the route dealt with as much as 5 to 10.000 migrants a day. In such a situation it was very difficult to provide basic humanitarian aid such as food and water, not to mention registration or identification. He expressed appreciation for the help extended by the local NGO's which contributed a great deal in managing the crisis and are still contributing significantly. The next period which proved important was the cooperation with Croatia, established in October 2015, on the common railway transport for the migrants which enabled civilized transport especially for families with infants and children. He also highlighted the common decision by the Ministers of Interior of Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia and Austria on the common identification document for migrants on the route adopted in February 2016 as part of a joint system for exchanging information. However, the situation and the criteria changed very quickly. This resulted in the events of March 2016 where a number of migrants who were identified of Syrian origin and expressed intent to their countries of origin as soon as there are conditions for it, were returned from Austria to Slovenia and further southwards as a domino effect.

One of the challenges that also need to be addressed is the insufficient informing of the public and the possibility for media speculations. He indicated examples of media reports regarding numbers of migrants stranded in no man's land between Macedonia and Greece or the amounts human traffickers make in Serbia. To avoid speculation and misinformation, it is necessary to inform the public in a correct and timely manner. Both Macedonia and Serbia are facing the problem of stranded migrants e.g. there are 1.350 of stranded migrants who do not fulfil the

requirements for asylum, and 300 in reception centres awaiting to be granted asylum status. The presence of such large number of migrants has been also reported in the media with criticism that the asylum system in the country is not functioning or is not in line with human rights protection principles. The authorities in Serbia in cooperation with IOM, FRONTEX and a number of NGO's are working intensely on assisted voluntary return of those migrants who wish to return to their countries of origin. In conclusion, he urged the representative of the countries not affected by the massive influx such as Albania and Montenegro to learn from the experiences and mistakes in managing the crisis in Macedonia and Serbia.

MONTENEGRO

Mr. Dragan Dasic, Ministry of Interior, Independent Advisor

Dasic stated that by the establishment of the strategic framework, normative and institutional infrastructure, Montenegro in a relatively short period of time, traced the future course of action in terms of overall management of migration flow, and has achieved the realization of the principles of effective migration policy following the principles of respect for human rights and freedoms. Also, Montenegro is conducting its activities in that field on the principles of legality and efficiency, as well as the responsibility of the state for legal immigration and regulation of naturalization as well as integration of migrants, said Dasic.

Combating irregular migration is a significant challenge for the successful management of migration policy, said Dasic, and therefore, one of the priorities in future activities of the competent national authorities requires the need for more intensive cooperation and exchange of information, at national, local, regional and international level. It is important to point out that irregular migration in Montenegro, for now, has a transit character. He continued by stressing that fully fledged membership of the Republic of Croatia to the EU might significantly affect the position of Montenegro, bearing in mind that irregular migrants are usually seeking the shortest path to the EU, and therefore it is realistic to expect that in the coming period there might be an increase in the number of irregular migrants in Montenegro.

Dasic also pointed out the fact that the profile of asylum seekers has changed, so they are no longer considered exclusively as just economic migrants, but they are also taken under the categories of persons who, under the Convention on the Status of Refugees and the Law on Asylum, are considered as refugees.

In general terms, the legal system of Montenegro is partially aligned with the EU acquis, in the areas of negotiating Chapter 24 - Justice, freedom and security. Until it acquires fully fledged membership, Montenegro plans to take number of activities in order to comply with the acquis in the segments where it currently does not conform, with special emphasis on changes and amendments to the Law on Foreigners and the Criminal Code.

However, the mere existence of national regulations and ratified international treaties that guarantee respect for the fundamental rights of the persons under the asylum system is not enough to ensure the adequate implementation of Convention standards in the practice, stressed Dasic. In that sense, Montenegro should, in parallel with the normative activities, undertake measures towards the achievement of an adequate degree of institutional and administrative preparedness for meeting the obligations deriving from the EU membership, especially having in mind that already now it is facing an increase of migration pressure.

Dasic used occasion to announce the Strategy on reintegration of returned Montenegrin citizens 2016 – 2020 shall be adopted in the first quarter of 2016, and it stipulates higher involvement of local self-governments. He also informed that the Action Plan for negotiating Chapter 24, stipulates drafting of the Feasibility study for strengthening the capacities for accommodation, protection and rehabilitation of unaccompanied juvenile migrants and other vulnerable groups, when higher level of synergy between central and local level shall be ensured.



Photo by: Jelena Janevska/NALAS

Ms. Budimirka Djukanovic, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

Djukanovic said that the Government of Montenegro, in November 2015 adopted the Action Plan in case of migrants' influx, which aims to ensure the utmost respect for human rights as well as to satisfy security aspects. The Plan defines, continued Djukanovic, the activities and measures to be undertaken by respective central and local authorities. The Plan stipulates the immediate and long-term actions involving central and local level in order to share responsibility. She informed that local self-governments have been tasked to undergo necessary communal and other infrastructural works. She also pointed out that the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare have been tasked to coordinate and report on implementation of the Plan of action to established Coordination and Operational bodies.

KOSOVO*³

Mr. Mentor Morina, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

The migration crisis has not affected Kosovo*, whatsoever its citizens have been identified as ones joining the migrants from Syria, Libya, Sudan, Pakistan, Iraq, following their routes and requesting asylum in the EU countries. As far the official statistics are concerned, the available data on migration show that Kosovo* has issued Strategy on Migration with Action Plan for the period 2013-2018 with scarce information on the current migration crisis. Ministry of Internal Affairs, in accordance with its legal competences, plays a leading role in implementing and coordinating the administration of migration. The coordination between local and central authorities is recognized in the management of the reintegration process following a Case

³ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence."

Management System (SMR) which is installed in all municipalities and all training sessions for officials who use this system are conducted, as stated in the Migration Profile, although again, not precisely concerning the migration crisis. Central and local institutions will be involved in the progress of regulating legal migration and reducing irregular migration, respectively for achieving strategic objectives and specific objectives. The role of the local self-government in migration management is partly recognized in the last Migration Profile for 2013.

Mr. Morina, from a viewpoint of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare reminded of the existing challenges in coordination and communication among local and central level in the process of reintegration and returning the illegal migrants coming from third countries. He reiterated the adoption of the strategic documents and informed that Kosovo* has appointed National Coordinator, which acts as an individual body, responsible to coordinate, align, monitor and report on the implementation of policies, activities and actions foreseen within the Strategy on Migration, and have funds open for reintegration (social services, accommodation, food etc). Each of the ministries has its role in the migration management and has respective responsibilities.

Communication among central and local level is considered to have bettered as new system is created. The practical experience speaks of this. In 38 local communities on the territory of Kosovo* one official is appointed as responsible for migration management related issues.

Mr. Morina restated the need to learn and integrate the knowledge from the practice of other countries affected by the migration crisis, in case Kosovo* faces the migration flows. As a very important fact remains that all the countries from the region should have a common approach, so that each stays prepared for such emergency situation.

CEI Member States- Italy and Croatia

CROATIA

Mr. Marko Dzimugovic, Ministry of Interior

Mr. Dzimugovic presented the features of the migration crisis as seen by the Croatian authorities, i.e. Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Croatia. The official start of the crisis in Croatia begins on 16 September 2015, after Hungary closed its border to migrants. It was stated that in a period of 24 hours Croatian authorities faced more than 11.000 migrants, which was a number that surpassed their expectations and preparedness. Yet, several days were needed for the authorities to get organized, having the recent experience with the floods in 2014.

On 17 September 2015, Government Crisis Committee was formed led by the Minister of Interior of Croatia, while members and deputies come from other ministries and the National Protection and Rescue Directorate. Until this Committee was functional, the local authorities managed the situation, providing health services, social security, including the services of the local police and the local Red Cross.

The Red Cross was a major coordinator for humanitarian assistance. They coordinated the work of all NGO's and International Organizations. The Ministry of Interior was the main coordinator of all activities regarding the migration crisis. The local community was said to be very much involved, providing logistics and assisting the central authorities in the management of the crisis. The assistance of the Army of the Republic of Croatia was emphasized as crucial in providing logistical support and building a camp within 24 hours, giving decent conditions for the migrants. Having the abundance of work, all the logistics, human efforts and capacities involved, security remained priority and there was no security incident identified throughout this period.

Relieving circumstance was that Croatia was a transit country. According to Mr. Dzimugovic, asylum has been offered to migrants, but not accepted, as their final destination was Western Europe, mainly Germany.

This crisis was at the very least, an opportunity to see that local and central government can communicate and cooperate very well. This was also an opportunity to sign certain agreements as flexibility was needed. The route was closed on 7 March 2016.

It is not only Croatian authorities' perception, but of all countries on the route facing the migrant crisis, that these kinds of situations and experiences are paradise for smugglers, but hopes remain that political decisions will be made and that those will be managed in the most humanitarian way.

ITALY

Mr. Filippo Candela, Deputy Chief of Mission of Italy to the Republic of Macedonia

Candela stated that on immigration the State maintains its exclusive legislative competences on the legal status of migrants and immigration, but an important role in the governance of immigration is also played at local level, mainly as concerns the reception and the access to services by migrants. Also relevant is the activity of non-profit organisations operating in the third sector.

At national level, continued Candela, the public administrations is committed to the integration of migrants and in that term the crucial role is played by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of the Interior. Representatives of those ministries participate in the activities of the EU as National Contact Point on Integration. In this framework he stressed that the integration is clearly a multidimensional and inter-institutional process that involves various levels of government. For this reason integration policies in favour of migrants have to encompass the principles of inter-institutional cooperation among Institutions at a national and local level.

Candela pointed out that in this context, a Coordination Table was established at the Ministry of Interior among the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Regions, Municipalities, UNHCR and the System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR), in a bid to enhance the effectiveness of the measures and actions dedicated to the integration of refugees and to adopting every two years an Integration Plan for beneficiaries of international protection.

Talking about the role of the local and regional level in the National reception system, he said that in 2014 the Government, Regions and Local Authorities reached an Agreement on how to deal with the emergency situation due to consistent arrivals by sea of migrants and asylum seekers. He also stressed that legislative Decree was fully operative from the 30th September of 2015, and it is in compliance with the Agreement which introduced two levels of reception.

Speaking about multi-level governance and integration policies of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, he said that it intends to increase its commitment toward the integration of refugees and asylum seekers by fostering cooperation with regional institutions to implement specific programmatic decisions and measures at a local level.

Since integration policies need to take into consideration the characteristics of migration at regional level, he announced that for the programming period 2016-2020 the Ministry recognized the importance of strengthening cooperation with regional authorities in order to achieve inter-institutional "governance". **Assessing importance of the International Conference in terms of sharing experience, Candela used opportunity to present five priorities** of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies that will be implemented within the framework of the New Operational Programme 2015 – 2020:

- Increasing the participation of legal migrants to active labour market and social inclusion policies
- Contrasting poverty and social exclusion of long term non-EU residents and their dependants
- Promoting social integration and job placement programs in favour of vulnerable target groups, with a particular focus on those seeking asylum and refugees as well as on children
- Promoting programs addressed to young people from a migrant background through measures aimed to contrast early school leaving and to strengthen links between education and employment.
- Supporting the entrepreneurial expertise of non-EU nationals through the empowerment of their skills

Speaking about Joint Action Plans on Integration, Candela explained that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies has strengthened the cooperation with Regions in order to have shared integration strategies and a common planning of interventions in line with the five priorities listed above. The aim of the Joint Actions Plans, he continued is to implement effective integration measures capable of taking into consideration local characteristics of migration and regional labour markets by coordinating policies and financial instruments at national and regional level.

ITALY

Mr. Ugo Poli, CEI Focal Point for Migrations

Poli illustrated the National Asylum Seekers and Refugees Protection System (SPRAR) adopted by the Italian Ministry of Interior.

Presenting the legal Framework, he pointed out that the right to asylum in Italy has been defined in the article 10.4 of the Constitution, granting protection to *“the foreigner who is denied in his country the effective exercise of the democratic rights guaranteed by the Constitution”*. Poli said that there was no Italian organic legal system, but regulations are based on relevant EU provisions.

Elaborating the structure, he said that in 2001 the Italian National Plan for Refugees Reception (PNA) was established, which was a pilot project launched by UNHCR and ANCI (Italian association of municipalities) within 63 Italian cities. The National Plan turned into art.32 of law N. 189/2002 and was developed into the first SPRAR. By the same Law, the Ministry of Interior also created the Central Service as the coordinating organization of the system (managed by ANCI).

In regards to the request for international protection he explained the procedure that is followed in Italy, pointing out that the first step was to submit the request to the Border Police, at the time of arrival in Italy and to the Police Department-Police Immigration Office if the applicant is already in Italy. At later stage the application is formalized by the Police Department with the “Standard form for the recognition of refugee status, according to the Geneva Convention”. If the applicant has no means of subsistence and is not lodged in a government hosting centre, he/she may request the Police Department to contact the Prefecture in for hosting in one of the centres, explained Poli.

Poli continued by presenting the Central Service that coordinates the SPRAR system that in particular deals with: collecting information and managing the databank on local services provided throughout the country for asylum seekers and refugees; assisting local authorities in organizing “integrated reception” services; promoting local networks and projects to strengthen

the system; monitoring procedures on reception, activation and transfer of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy; ensuring a wide distribution of information about the “protection system”; providing support and consultancy to local authorities with technical, legal, psychosocial assistance; producing studies, research, reports, guides and other material of operative nature.

In presenting SPRAR, he explained that it consists of a network of local authorities, consortia and Provinces and is responsible to set up and run the reception projects for people forced to migrate. SPRAR provides services for international asylum seekers, refugees and those granted humanitarian and subsidiary protection. The main objective is to take responsibility for those individuals accepted into the system and to provide them with personalized programs to help them reacquire self-autonomy, and take part in and integrate into Italian society in terms of finding employment, housing, having access to local services, social life and child education.

Poli used occasion to present the strong points of SPRAR:

1. The involvement of the local authorities, to make them accountable by highlighting the voluntary choice of joining the system.
2. Integrated reception model. The SPRAR System reception is not just a model of “hospitality”, it involves the orientation to creating autonomous post-reception processes.
3. Language integration. It is vital even if temporary, forming part of this stage of the migration process. It enables them to express their thoughts “here and now”.
4. Health, psychological and legal protection. SPRAR provides those factors of well-being that the trauma of forced migration have interrupted. The aims are to provide risk reduction and support to the rebuilding of a personal basis involving rights and duties.
5. The use of specialized mediation, to accompany the people in orientation and fully aware utilization of services.
6. The reception contract. The beneficiaries are informed about the time involved, the stages and the services to which they can gain access.
7. Reception centres and professional skills. Including social workers, educators, psychologists, group and community leaders, healthcare personnel and mediators that were provided with training.



Photo by Jelena Janevska/NALAS

IV Panel II - Ways to improve communication, collaboration and cooperation between central and local self-government in migration crisis management

Mr. Ivan Frangov, Mayor of Gevgelija, Macedonia

Mr. Frangov expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of the event and address the participants. Gevgelija has been in the middle of unwanted attention due to its unique position and facing especially in the period when 8 to 9.000 new 'citizens' arrived daily in addition to the 16.000 living there. At the beginning, the numbers of migrants transiting were very small. The local population offered basic humanitarian assistance: food, water, clothes and showed hospitality. The situation became worse before the declaring of emergency and large groups of people as much as 1.500 were transiting through the city. The estimate is that since the beginning of the massive influxes to mid-January, around 600.000 migrants transited through the municipality. This caused unease and panic in the community, and the local authorities urged the central government to take immediate actions. The amendments to the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection contributed to the worsening of the situation especially the requirements for registration and expression of intent to seek asylum. The first efforts to register the migrants were done at the railway station in the middle of the city of Gevgelija and the initial numbers were 200-300 a day. Each day the numbers grew twice bigger, at a certain point reaching the ceiling of 5-6 000 a day. Mr. Frangov explained that as the needs of the citizens were neglected and daily life was disturbed, he found location outside the city limits and asked for declaring emergency state. The government responded and the first mutual efforts were aimed at organizing transport, managing waste and providing electricity at the designated registration point. Also, the role of the international and relief organizations (UNHCR, The Red Cross, IOM, and UNDP) has proven essential. All the costs at the beginning were born by the municipality; at a later stage the Red Cross covered a significant part of the costs. All the construction work to adapt the location was done in close coordination and

communication with the competent ministries (MoI and MoLSP) by the hour. The mayor expressed regrets that instead, media reported on police brutality and inhumane treatment of migrants by both police and the army. He emphasized that the migration crisis is a common problem and it should be solved through common efforts of the countries along the route and the EU. Another two important issues were solved in close cooperation with the MoI and the MoLSP: the transportation of migrants to the northern border and the chaos caused by the private transport companies who massively came to Gevgelija seeking to expand their business to the migrants, and the waste collection. The mayor expressed gratitude to the UNDP and GIZ for their support in purchasing appropriate equipment and transportation means for waste collection. In his closing remarks, he expressed hopes that life will go back to normal soon, both for the local community and the migrants.

Mr. Mihalj Bimbo, Mayor of Kanjiza, Serbia

Mr. Bimbo began his address with a brief overview of the situation as of April 2015. Due to its location and proximity to the border, the municipality has found itself on the route. The first wave of migrants was from Kosovo*⁴ in numbers from 100 at the beginning to more than 1.000 a day. During the mass influx more than 150.000 migrants transited through this small community of 24.000 inhabitants. After the closing of the Hungarian border on September 15, 2015, the route was redirected towards Croatia and the needs of the municipality were no longer a priority. The mayor highlighted that at the beginning of the migration crisis the municipality was among the first which had to prepare although it was impossible to prepare for a crisis of such scale. For a small community, the possibilities for responding were limited due to financial, but also technical reasons. The main priorities in responding to the crisis were the safety of migrants and the local population, as well as preservation of the green surfaces and ensuring humane and dignified treatment of migrants during their transit.

During the summer period the migrants were staying at the main square which additionally caused the destroying of the green surfaces and a problem with waste management. The situation was turning into a real humanitarian disaster. Therefore, a location was identified on the outskirts of the town which was at the beginning set up as a temporary transit reception centre with municipal funds. All necessary measures were taken for the functioning of the centre: electrical network, sanitary containers, Wi-Fi, lights on all access roads, a temporary bus and taxi station, security personnel and a small grocery shop. Interpreters were available daily and two times a week a medical volunteer team from the Red Cross was also available. This soon proved insufficient due to the constant increase of migrants arriving; the initial capacity of the centre was 800 people and the numbers grew daily. The municipality had to deal with waste management, damage to the agricultural surfaces and decrease of the number of tourists visiting Kanjiza.

At the end, the mayor gave summary of the financial aid received from different levels to respond to the massive influx: 13,7 million dinars from the provincial authorities, 5,4 million dinars from the Commissariat for refugees and migrants and 1 million dinars from the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government. He also expressed gratitude for the efforts of the international and humanitarian organization which supported the efforts. He then gave the word to the president of the city council Mr. Robert Lacko, to focus on possible solutions and improvement of the crisis management.

Mr. Lacko emphasized that the channels of communication between operatives need to be improved and gave the example of the changing of the route and the preparedness of the Croatian authorities, who sensed that the route may change, but did not receive immediate information and needed 3-4 days to manage the massive influx. He also suggested forming of

⁴This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence."

joint working groups and organizing joint trainings to exchange experiences and to learn from operatives, especially those who have already been involved in crisis management. The trainings would act as a tool for prevention and enhance response mechanisms, as well as establish channels of communication between municipalities, similar to those the municipalities already have with central authorities. He also believes the training needs to be extended to municipalities who may occur on the route if the route changes. He reminded all that close contact with the citizens should also be maintained and invited the municipalities to hold the first joint training in Kanjiza.

Ms. Aleksandra Vukmirovic, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities in Serbia

Ms. Vukmirovic began with comparing the migration crisis with another emergency situation: the floods in Serbia in 2014 emphasizing that the floods were more sudden and unpredictable, hence more difficult to handle. During the floods, the Conference organized a number of measures aimed at managing the disaster. 2-hour shifts were organized at the Conference; a focal point was designated to ensure information flows between municipalities and their forwarding to the national authorities and international organizations. Ms. Vukmirovic emphasized that the Conference was among the first to prepare analytical reports and develop project proposals to help the municipalities manage the emergency. This year, there were floods too but now the municipalities were prepared appropriately, the Conference was present in the field monitoring the situation and collecting data.

In relation to the migration crisis, she evaluated that this is not a new phenomenon; it just intensified in the course of last year. Serbian towns and municipalities have already the experience of handling large number of refugees from former Yugoslavia, predominantly internally displaced persons from Kosovo. The estimates show that more than 500.000 people were provided with refuge over a longer period of time. Another plus is the existence of a system in place supported by the adopting of the Law on migration in 2012, the establishment of the Commissariat for migration and refugees on national level, asylum mechanisms. Whether they function in practice or need to be improved is yet to be determined.

Ms. Vukmirovic shared how the Conference learned from past experiences: an internal working structure was established as well as a working group which started aiding the municipalities at the beginning of September 2015. The working group began with data collection and drafted a 30-pages document as a comprehensive legal framework in the area of refugees, asylum seekers and refugees. The Conference also made an inventory of the municipalities' needs and of all the measures taken on national level, as well as planning of activities that could be implemented in future. They also conducted financial monitoring similar to the practices of the international organizations and NGO's. She expressed satisfaction with the immediate reaction of the international organizations and NGO's who were among the first in the field along with the citizens who managed to self-organize and offer aid, especially in Belgrade in providing the migrants with food and water and other essentials.

On international level, the Conference is involved in the work of many international partners such as NALAS and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions. This platform was used to urge the unaffected municipalities to help the affected municipalities in various initiatives such e.g. waste management, as well as urge all relevant international partners in Europe and foreign donors to aid in the management of the crisis. Ms. Vukmirovic referred to an analyses conducted by the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Affairs and UNDP predicting that 21 municipalities could find themselves along the route, not just the ones in the border areas. She emphasized the cooperation with all national institutions, especially the Ministry of Local Self-Government and the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Affairs and that the Conference is investing efforts in building the capacities of the municipalities. In connection to this, a project has been launched for conducting a series of electronic trainings in the area of migration and

asylum not just for the staff in the local authorities, but in institutions on national level. This project is just the stepping stone in the activities that are planned for the future.

Ms. Vukmirovic expressed her satisfaction with what she evaluated as one of the most important document: The Response Plan in Case of Mass Influx of Migrants. This document elaborates the competences of the institutions in the management of migration crisis, their inter-relations, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the local self-government. It also foresees the establishment of the local migration councils and training of staff. The first training has already been implemented at the end of August.

In terms of what the municipalities identified as lacks, Ms. Vukmirovic referred to the insufficient coordination and communication between the national and local authorities, the need to improve the exchange of data, better cooperation when determining the locations and priorities. The municipalities felt more like observers rather than active participants in all these processes and they need to be improved. It is also necessary to improve mechanism for coordinating and planning activities on national level with the participation of the affected municipalities and the ones that may be affected, as well as members of national associations. There is a need for regular meetings and mutual presence in the field. Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of setting up the crisis management in a systematic way with including the local self-government and their needs in the action plans, and in the programming and planning of funds, in implementation of international projects or cooperation on bilateral donor projects. She reminded that the municipalities are financially unstable, and that the floods left empty budgets. The migration crisis additionally burdened the financial situation and the municipalities spend their budgets on the communal services and a large share has not been yet fully refunded by the national authorities. At the end, Ms. Vukmirovic spoke about the need for continuous education and regional cooperation. According to her, a regional mechanism should be established to connect national and local authorities. Municipalities should also not forget about the principle of solidarity and engage in joint planning and ensuring project funds from the programs available from the EU. A network of European f Solidarity should be established to help intensify the cooperation between municipalities especially in the cross-border areas as well as ensure transfer of knowledge. Such platforms should also be used to exchange good practices for combating extremism and radicalization and communicate them to the citizens. In conclusion, she gave the example off the Council of Europe's Congress of local and regional authorities and their Declaration for refugees adopted in October 2015.



Photo by Jelena Janevska/NALAS

Mr. Mladen Ivanovic, Legal Advisor, Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Croatia

Mr. Ivanovic restated the aforementioned fact that Croatia was surprised by the migration flow, as much as it was the case with European Union. However, after the closure of the border by Hungary, Croatia was the only logical route for migrants. The aspect of local authority related to this crisis was given mostly throughout the municipality of Tovarnik (2.800 inhabitants), geographically placed on the border with Serbia, which had the first wave of migrants facing with 30.000 migrants in less than three days.

As said, Croatian central government played exquisite role, having in mind that over 650.000 migrants crossed the territory of the country and 99% of the citizens did not even see these migrants or felt any consequences whatsoever.

The role of the Local authorities in this crisis was focused to dealing with tangible issues like waste management, infrastructure, etc. Having in mind the financial burden of such condition, the envisaged annual budget of the municipality of Tovarnik was exceeded in only few days (1 million EUR annual budget while the daily costs for dealing with the crisis were 150.000 EUR). Therefore, the central government had to immediately take action in order to control the situation. Being an EU country, Croatia has access to many funds, hence, fast and efficient reaction by the central government was in place, since the local government was not in position to allocate many resources.

Once more, the good cooperation between local and central government was praised and welcomed. However, speaking from the aspect of the Association of Municipalities itself, and the financial possibilities at disposal, as well as lack of capacities, not much of a help was provided to the local authority. Mr. Ivanovic pointed out the weaknesses and the limitations of the small local communities in Croatia in regard to the financial means at disposal for emergency situations. Out of 4.5 million inhabitants in Croatia, there are 555 local units, where more than

50% of the municipalities have less than 3.000 inhabitants. Thereof, no logical plan for allocation emergency funds for such small units exists, as greater area need to be covered.

The coordination channel during the migrant crisis was also the National institution dealing with natural disasters management formed during accession period of Republic of Croatia into EU. Funds were also allocated for all the damage made.

Mr. Ivanovic reminded that this is a process out of which every single one must learn. Good cooperation and exchange of experience is recognized to be of high priority.



Photo by: Jelena Janevska/NALAS

Mr. Bernard Muller, Austrian Association of cities and towns

Coming from a country that is on the migrants' route and moreover a destination country for many of them, Mr. Muller gave an overview of the situation starting with background information on the statistics of migration flows in Austria in the past.

Starting with the figures for 2015, he informed that more than 90.000 refugees filed applications for asylum in Austria. This was a surprising fact to the official responsible administration as they were calculating with numbers of 50-70.000 refugees. For comparison to 2014, Austria registered 28.027 asylum seekers. Anyhow, Austria's background with refugees in the history speaks of much higher numbers in comparison to what this migration crisis has brought.

As regards the practical involvement and dealing with the migrants, Mr. Muller explained that in 2015 nearly 60% of the municipalities in Austria did not receive migrants. Vienna and other major cities in Austria had to carry the main burden. The support towards asylum seekers was given in three ways: 1. Full supply – provided accommodation and three meals per day. 2. Self supply – provided accommodation, but no supply, no food provided, with allowance amounting 6.5 EUR per day. 3. – Asylum seekers acquire private accommodation, and the municipalities organize their accommodation.

The facts state that a lot of mayors and local authorities tried to avoid receiving refugees. In Austria the local level is the most important level for managing migration and asylum. Without the local level the central government will not be able to manage the processes of migration and asylum. Municipalities are important for managing the crisis not only for finding accommodation, but many other aspects in receiving the migrants.

For the first time Austria has witnessed that the Austrian Parliament passes new law with cut-through clause to organize suitable and fair distribution of asylum seekers and refugees in the country with participation of central and local level. The support from local to central level is necessary in dealing with migration crisis. Austria has also a middle level, which comprises its provinces, nine (9) in total, while there are 2.000 municipalities. However, according to Mr. Muller, this is not the right level to address the migration crisis as the provinces don't have a clear view of the situation in subject in Austria. Therefore, it is recommended that in future, in order to solve such situation, the role of the provinces is not needed, but the central and local level.

Stating Mr. Muller, Austria is not overcrowded with migrants and the situation is well managed. Challenge still remains as for many asylum seekers Austria is a final destination, so there is a tough focus for the country and on the other hand they also have to have in mind protection of Geneva Human Rights, but as well not to forget how to solve these problems.

V Support of international donor community targeting institutional capacities for crisis management

Carlos Mascarell, Council of European Municipalities and Regions

Ms. Mascarell explained that the Council functions as a Brussels-based umbrella organization of local and regional governments and as such has very good cooperation with NALAS and other networks in Europe on the issue of the migration crisis. In his address, he tried to give some solutions and reflections on this issue from European perspective. In the same time, the Council is having a two-day meeting for finding a common European solution for the crisis and news reported that Bulgaria might block this agreement fearing that if the route is closed and no proper acceptable solution is sought, migrants will flow to the Bulgarian border. In Mr. Mascarell's words, this confirms that there is the need for an open dialogue at local and national level, and that local and regional governments should also play a political role towards national governments as well. They should participate in the processes of planning and assessment of the possible routes and the related problems. If there is no joint solution on national level on the distribution of migrants in the receiving countries, this will cause a negative response in the municipalities themselves.

Mr. Mascarell believes that it is not only necessary to discuss how to have dialogue between the two levels, but also local and regional authorities through their networks should press national governments to find an internationally acceptable solution. This would be the only way to assess how the mass influx will have an impact on a certain regional level. He made a second point that such meeting should also direct the focus on their outputs by topics. Many good examples were shared during the conference, but his opinion is that the outputs and the action plans that will follow need to be elaborated by topics e.g. one could be the issue of unaccompanied minor where best practices would be identified and benchmarks for best solutions would be elaborated. He reminded the participants to keep in mind the issue of transferability too, often it is taken for granted that what is applicable in one country can easily be applied for another, but this is often not the case due to a number of reasons.

Another issue he indicated is the migrant quotas, and he referred to the example of Austria: in the western part due to a good dialogue between central and local governments there is an agreement how to distribute migrants in the municipalities with the support of the local population. However, this is not the case in the other part of the country, hence this has to be addressed as a political problem. The solution for this problem would be to urge mayors to assume responsibility for accepting migrants in their municipalities; that is only way to achieve quotas on national level. Migrant quotas need to be decided on national level, national associations need to seek agreement between different municipalities based on various criteria: unemployment rates, migrants/refugees already present in the community, population structure etc. In closure, he urged for the inclusion of Greece in such meetings and received the explanation that Greece was included and represented in the Conference as an observer through the police attaché of the Greek Liaisons Office due to the fact that Greece is neither CEI member nor MARRI participant.

Mr. Christophe di Marco, Sector Fund Manager, ORF - Open Regional Fund for South East Europe Modernisation of Municipal Services

Mr. di Marco gave a short introduction of the GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH) stating it is an implementing agency on behalf of the German Government and ORF (Open Regional Fund) which serves as an instrument established 2007-2008. It includes six countries in the region and deals with modernization of municipal services through regional aspect. It is a unique scheme having regional cooperation as core element in the project. ORF is funded by the Swiss cooperation and German cooperation in total amount of c.a.

10 million EUR for the period 2013-2016. It is a multi donor platform with two donors so far. They deal with projects focused at modernization of municipalities, sanitation, public utilities, solid waste management, water supply utilities, etc. and have more than 25 projects in the last period, each of the projects implemented in several countries, gaining specific know-how in the region. The approach fosters multilevel governance, working closely with ministries, national agencies and municipalities.

In line with the migration crisis GIZ – ORF had their first action in October 2015, organizing conference with NALAS, aimed at gathering mayors of affected municipalities in order to have a first feedback to see what could be done together to find solution and response to the crisis. In parallel, GIZ took different initiative to respond rapidly to the situation. The first one was setting up mobile teams to tackle the problems on the sight and the second was infrastructure urgent measures, providing shelter, etc. Mid-term approach was assessed and contact with DG NEAR was initiated. This initiative was based on existing trust fund established by EU with aim to address the crisis in different regions, firstly the regions of countries of origin, but as well as transit countries. GIZ was asked to develop concept paper for a project, after which the concept was presented in Brussels, and the EU delegation in Skopje. 7 March 2016 the negotiations stopped. Since the Balkan route is closed the negotiations will not go further.

As said by Mr. di Marco, all crises characterize with certain specifics. When compared the flood crisis and refugee crisis there is not same situation in terms of impact, but there are common challenges in regional terms. Firstly, countries from the region were affected and secondly, local authorities are at front. Common challenge is very often the delivery of utility services, sanitation, solid waste management, transportation, water supplies. In the management of the crisis there are also similar challenges. All of the Governments are at challenge. Good examples of coordination on national level, mentioning the case with Croatia in dealing with the crisis, should be shared among other countries.

The cooperation and coordination between impacted communities could be improved in regional perspective, meaning multilevel governance approach since such approaches are not enough promoted.

These challenges are important to be addressed in systematic way.

1. Effective crisis management could be improved by better cooperation and coordination in all governance levels;
2. Regional cooperation is important in order to have efficient responses to the crisis in sharing best practices and experience of the countries involved.

According to Mr. Di Marco, better crisis management should be based on three objectives: 1. Capacity development at all levels of governance, which should be able to strengthen the capacities of national authorities (capacity to coordinate, capacity to plan, capacities to discuss with all other stakeholders). Capacity development means institutional capacity, in order something to be done and improved in the legal and regulatory frameworks, to insert provision for force major etc. These kinds of questions should be addressed on a systematic way and the good examples should be disseminated. Capacity building at the local level means to provide the decision makers at the local level, municipal officers and the managers of the public utility companies with skills, tools and instruments to deal with the crisis, and foster support by the stakeholders and decision makers at the local level.

2. Multi governance approach – which means exchange trough involvement of local government in national plans, definition of national processes, adaptation of laws and bylaws. The idea is to have involvement of local authorities in the national decision process and to build experiences from bottom-up approaches.

In order to have systemic approach the capacity should be built at local level, at regional level, but as well strengthening national associations of municipalities in order to tackle the progress.

This means that national associations are key stakeholders in the system and should have the capacity to address and to discuss with all other stakeholders.

3. Regional cooperation is the essence of the ORF. It is important to make possible the dissemination of best practices and experiences, which is not an easy task, but the ORF has the know-how. It means exchange of experiences on policy design, what could be learnt from the peers in the region, and organizing policy dialogue. The same experience should be applied to national associations in terms of strengthening the capacity of the regional networks like MARRI and NALAS in order to make them able to act effectively, as well as strengthening the institutional and individual capacities. In order to do so ORF needs to bring together complex set of stakeholders, regional networks, national authorities, different ministries, agencies, local governance and their organizations, but as well NGO's.

Mr. di Marco stated that GIZ is ready to launch a discussion with the decision makers in the region at each level, and the regional level as well, to see how a regional platform could be established enhancing the crisis management in South East Europe and to increase the resilience of the local community in the region

International organizations

Mr. Ivan Zverzhanovski, UNDP Regional Advisor on Migration and Resilience

Since it is not humanitarian organization the role of the UNDP in actual migration crisis was mainly directed to municipal level, while other UN organizations (UNHCR, IOM, and UNICIF) were directly involved, said Zverzhanovski. He has listed the assistance provided to affected municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia. UNDP also provided assistance to the municipalities in the process of integrating refugees. In the upcoming period, he announced that UNDP will continue providing support to municipalities at the Balkan route in terms of building capacities, particularly in the waste management and water supply, as well as strengthening community cohesion. Zverzhanovski announced that the government of Japan has offered financial assistance in running the project for waste management and water supply for affected municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia.

Ms. Melita Gruevska Graham, ICMPD National Representative

Gruevska Graham pointed out that ICMPD works with the Western Balkan countries from its establishment and that most of them are its member states. Talking about mix migration flows, she stressed that "at many international gatherings it was mentioned that we are surprised with number of refugees, but if we consider that the conflict in Syria started in 2011, I do believe that there was sufficient time that the flow could have been anticipated and that authorities should have been prepared better". She also said that at this moment all actors should join the efforts in order to have quick reaction and be prepared to act appropriately.

Following the presentations of the national authorities she stated that a certain level of optimism could be sensed in regards to WB route, but still borders cannot be totally protected or closed before the huge number of refugees.

ICMPD was not involved in providing emergency humanitarian assistance, but it has the mandate to assist in policy development. It is in the process of implementing operational projects for the WB region, said Gruevska Graham. She said that it could be observed that authorities have undertaken certain number of short term measures referring to ensuring safe passage throughout the territory of the Republic of Macedonia by the amendments to the Law on asylum, but assessed that it was not enough to handle such a crisis. She suggested that interested parties need to define the set of short term measures that would lead to the long term solutions. Restricted migration policy can only open the door to organized criminal activities and that is national authorities need to focus on that security challenge in the future, stated Gruevska Graham. She continued by saying that there are number of vulnerable groups

passing through our territories and national governments should keep in mind the commitment made by signing and ratifying Geneva Convention and Palermo Protocol as well as other international instruments.

Talking about importance of cooperation between local and central level, Gruevska Graham said that following the presentations it could be also understood that the cooperation was initiated by the local level rather than from the central level. She pointed out that policies that are strategies planned should come in advance from the central to local level.

Ms. Tatjana Bundaleska, UNCHR Representative

Bundaleska said that UNCHR has conducted mainly humanitarian assistance for those in need underling number of undertaken activities from May to December 2015. She stressed that UNCHR is continuously working with national authorities of the Republic of Macedonia towards building fully fledged asylum system, in other words setting up mechanisms that will address challenges and needs that arise from current migration and refugee crisis. In parallel with the humanitarian assistance, she said that UNCHR dealt with programs on risks derived from irregular movements or smuggling that occurred at the WB route. She emphasized the risk of smuggling being transferred to trafficking in human beings, particularly when facing the situations of immense number of registered minors travelling alone or those that were separated from the families. She expressed consent with other speakers in regards to the closure of the WB route, since there is still significant number of refugees waiting at the entry via that route. In closing remarks she reminded participants that the core mandate of the UNCHR was to provide access to asylum system in the country.

EU Delegation in Skopje

Mr. Manfredas Limantas, gave brief presentation on the EU assistance in addressing the migration crisis in the Republic of Macedonia. Assistance was managed by the ECO office and IPA funds provided to the Government of Macedonia and local NGO's. He said that in terms of immediate humanitarian help, ECO has provided substantial assistance to various entities for ensuring safe passage throughout the route, stressing that the project of 5.3 million euro was implemented by UNICEF, UNCHR and local Red Cross. He reminded that in previous years the Government of Macedonia was provided with 15 million euro for border and asylum management. In December 2015 the EU has also launched the Regional Project IPA II "Protection of Sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey" in the amount of 8 million euro. The Project will cover three key areas: a) identification of migrants, b) information sharing and c) safe return ensuring protection of vulnerable groups. That very project will be implemented by FRONTEX, IOM and UNHCR. He also said that the EU provided assistance to the Ministry of Interior of Macedonia in the amount of 9 million euro for enhancing the capacities in border and migration management, surveillance system, registration of third country nationals, combating human trafficking and cross border crime. In March 2016 EU provided 600.000 euro to Crisis Management Centre for purchasing vehicles for transport of migrants. Assistance was provided to local self governments of Gevgelija and Kumanovo in the fields of waste management, water supply and medical assistance to local hospitals. He announced that the EC has another project in pipeline, which will be directed to purchasing terrain vehicles for Border Police and Crisis Management Centre.

He has also agreed with other speakers that long term assistance is needed in order to ensure stability. In that regard he announced that the EC is actually programming the new project that will amount 12 million euro and will cover activities directed towards establishment of solid border management, asylum and migration management, but will also include enhancement of cooperation between local and central authorities and involving NGO's as well as to promote interagency cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

Europe and especially the SEE region, despite of recent ad-hoc border closures, is facing a massive and unprecedented influx of refugees/migrants, challenging the capacities of national and local institutions of the countries affected to assure stability, peace and well-being of both, the local populations and the refugees/migrants.

Past experiences have shown that the regional context of the situation witnessed, is rather uncertain and unpredictable, which makes appropriate coordination and decision-making between national and local institutions, but also between the EU and transit countries even more urgent. The situation is volatile, this implies that transit routes, affected communities and countries, the number of refugees/migrants itself and the anticipated time frame of the crisis can change all of a sudden. The fact that the refugee/migrant crisis is of regional proportions further stresses the need for a regional crisis management.

Here local, regional, national and international institutions/organizations from the government and civil society level are requested to join forces and cooperate within the scope of their competences and responsibilities to foster stability, peace and well-being.

Specifically the Conference recommends the following:

- It is essential to strengthen the capacities of Central and Local Governments in migration management and establish mechanisms to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from the crises;
- National migration management policies must consider the needs and capacities of local authorities;
- It is essential to share information, best practices, knowledge and resources at all levels of governance at national level;
- Local and regional strategies for dealing with the refugee and migration crisis should be developed and aligned with the national strategies;
- It is necessary to jointly plan the funds for dealing with the refugee and migration crisis, both from national resources, as well as the EU funds , in general aid;
- Solidarity must be shown to the more affected municipalities and regions;
- Local and national governments from different SEE and EU countries should come together and cooperate in order to intensify cross border cooperation in implementing projects in order to improve the situation.
- In regards to the challenges in communication, collaboration and cooperation between central and local governments in migrant crisis management, it is necessary to introduce the concept of quality information;
- Enhancing existing and establishing new regional coordination mechanisms, including both central and local authorities by networking, consultations in defining government policies, continuous needs assessments of local authorities, etc.
- Readiness of international organizations to continue supporting the efforts of regional structures and national authorities in the process of enhancing capacities of the Central and Local level in migration management.
- Necessity to have structured support of donor community.

The participants invited MARRI and NALAS to join their institutional know-how, experience and capacities to explore a feasible proposal for an innovative and collaborative regional mechanism approach among central and local level. The network concept could be an adequate work platform to pool capacities and resources of key stakeholders in refugee/migrant management.

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