NEWLY ARRIVED IN A COMMON HOME

Together for a common home. How diaspora stakeholders can support the integration of newly arrived migrants at local level

Policy brief

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Executive summary

Diaspora communities and other migrant networks have always played a major role in human mobility by making a wide range of resources available. They often help connect newly arrived migrants with existing services or provide services on their own as highlighted during the big migration flows of 2015 and 2016 or, more recently, the Ukrainian crisis, when they could mobilise and flexibly adopt different integration strategies in an evolving context, catering to different migrant groups across gender, age and legal status.

Engaging with diasporas stakeholders in integration policies and services, however, is not an easy task due to lack of definition of who they are and the presence of different forms and degrees of involvement that facilitate or hamper trust-building and, ultimately, strategic collaboration. From their part, diaspora stakeholders struggle accessing and, more generally, establishing a durable dialogue with the key actors that are responsible for designing and implementing policies and services that impact newly arrived migrants.

Against this background and based on results of the NEAR project (Newly Arrived in a Common Home), this policy brief aims to support the integration work of policymakers and civil society stakeholders by providing key knowledge on diaspora stakeholders and looking at different strategies to unleash their potential as integration actors for newly arrived migrants. It puts forward six recommendations that can facilitate different aspects of policymaking and service provision, including identification and outreach, capacity building, coordination and networking.

- **Adopting a strategic definition of diaspora stakeholders** that not only includes migrant-led organisations but also looks at alternative profiles that are key in terms of network capillarity and reputation, as relations within diaspora communities often tend to be highly informal. To get the broadest collaboration, policymakers and stakeholders should keep information as well as networking and training opportunities as open as possible in order for anyone interested to get on board. At the same time, they should value the great diversity in how individuals and organisations feel and express their diaspora identity and the rationales behind their support to newly arrived migrants. They should also consider key aspects like gender and representation within and between diaspora groups.
- **Centralising local integration services** to reduce the risk that scattered information ends up being outdated, incomplete or incorrect. This can be done in a twofold way. On the one hand, policymakers and stakeholders could build the capacity of diaspora stakeholders to independently and critically find, access and disseminate the relevant information for their network based on the assessed needs. On the other hand, they could centralise services by design and condense all information into one-stop shops dedicated exclusively to or including migrants. This can be facilitated by investing in comprehensive websites and by including people with a migrant background into the staff.

- **Valuing the contribution of diaspora stakeholders as actors of integration** by treating them as peers in policies and practices. Policymakers and stakeholders should involve diaspora communities in an on-going way by creating opportunities, including online, where services and actors at stake are clearly presented and recent policy development are broken down. Involvement should not exclusively aim at enhancing access to services but should also allow to co-design and evaluate them. At the same time, diaspora stakeholders should be professionalised through funding, venues, employment and training.
- **Transferring the right knowledge** on aspects of integration that migrants generally prioritise to be as independent as possible and where information gaps are particularly important and should be addressed. This include not only knowledge on work, housing, health and education, but also development of key skills like self-esteem and confidence that do affect whether and how diaspora stakeholders think of themselves as true actors of change within their communities. More broadly, policymakers and stakeholders should work on building trust among diaspora communities by working transparently and continuously with them instead of involving them only when needed.
- **Enhancing social capital through networking** to help diaspora stakeholders create a safety net on which newly arrived migrants can land once they enter the local community. Having service providers present their activities as part of trainings can be a great opportunity to "give integration a face" and start connecting diaspora stakeholders with the institutions active on the territory. Working on social capital ultimately helps diaspora stakeholders offer comprehensive support without anyone falling through the cracks of local services. At the same time, it helps public and other service providers deliver quick, flexible and capillary services to the migrant population by reaching specific groups based on different needs and external contingencies.
- **Using innovative tools to promote formal and unconventional local services and actors** that can help newly arrived migrants build their life upon arrival. Working through maps can be useful for policymakers and stakeholders to promote key services within migrant populations while connecting the dots between different actors and activities characteristic of the same territory under a cohesive network. As proven by the NEAR project, these integration maps should be co-designed together with diaspora stakeholders as "unconventional maps" offering information and personal hints for newly arrived migrants on the most relevant places and helping them settle in the new city to quickly feel "at home".

Introduction

Migrant networks have always played a major role in the mobility of million people forced or planning to live in another country. These networks respond to different short- and long-term needs ranging from pre-departure preparation to post-arrival reception and information on the steps to take towards the envisioned objectives. Diaspora communities, a type of migrant networks often organised around nationalities, are true hubs where a wide range of resources are regularly made available and accessed.

Despite traditionally low institutional interest in working with them, diaspora communities often play a key role in connecting newly arrived migrants with existing services and, in some cases, even provide services on their own to complement or replace public and private actors. This was particularly evident during the big migration flows of 2015-2016 and, more recently, the Ukrainian crisis, when European societies were asked to welcome and quickly integrate millions of migrants. In both cases diaspora communities proved they could mobilise and flexibly adopt different integration strategies in an evolving context and cater to different migrant groups across gender, age and legal status.

Engaging with diasporas stakeholders in integration policies and services, however, is not an easy task. To begin with, external and internal definition of what diaspora and diaspora stakeholders are is still unclear, making their involvement difficult for policymakers and civil society stakeholders, who tend to prioritise more institutionalised and clear-cut actors like diaspora organisations. In addition, approaches to involvement vary considerably from country to country, from structural continuous involvement that sees diaspora stakeholders as peers in the migration governance to issue-based consultation that has major impacts on trust-building and, ultimately, strategic collaboration. From their part, diaspora stakeholders struggle accessing and, more generally, establishing a durable dialogue with the key actors that are responsible for designing and implementing policies and services that impact newly arrived migrants. As a result, information available to diaspora stakeholders is often outdated and imprecise, leading to an under- or misuse of services and opportunities available at local level.

Against this background, this policy brief aims to support the integration work of policymakers and civil society actors by providing key knowledge on diaspora stakeholders and looking at different strategies to unleash their potential as integration actors for newly arrived migrants. It does so by tapping into the experience of NEAR (Newly Arrived in a Common Home), a European project testing an innovative diaspora engagement model that could foster the co-creation and delivery of integration services at local level and that could be adapted to different local contexts and needs.

Funded under the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (2021-2023), NEAR empowers diaspora stakeholders to act as key players in integration services for newly arrived migrants by involving them and building their skills as well as cultural (knowledge) and social capital (network). Thanks to the efforts of project partners, the project has been piloted in four cities across three EU countries, namely Milan (ISMU, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Milano), Perugia (TAMAT NGO), Lisbon (AIDGLOBAL) and Nicosia (CARDET), and modelled into a set of resources for migrants, stakeholder and policymakers. Along with this policy brief, the project has produced local maps for newly arrived migrants, with key service providers and unconventional spots mirroring diaspora members' emotions and life experience, and several practice reports with tools and lessons learnt for local stakeholders willing to transfer the NEAR approach to new integration settings. This policy brief was made possible thanks to the local work done by project partners in the four cities.

Part 1 – What we know on diaspora stakeholders as actors of integration

This part provides an overview of the available knowledge on diaspora stakeholders and their work as integration actors for newly arrived migrants. It looks at who diaspora stakeholders are, what resources they contribute and how they operate in the framework of integration support.

What do we mean by "diaspora"?

The term "diaspora" generally indicates a dispersion of peoples forced to abandon their place of origin and scattered in various parts of the world, thus recalling the etymology of the word itself from the Greek διασπορά ("dispersion"). In the field of transnational relations, including migration, it indicates a group of people and their descendants who share the same country of origin.

In practice, however, the way the diaspora is defined and therefore studied varies considerably. Some agree that the element that distinguishes it from other migrant groups is the existence of a strong cultural, historical, religious, linguistic and emotional bond with the country or community of origin, as well as a sense of shared identity and belonging[1]. However, a definition based on nationality (e.g., "the Congolese diaspora", "the Lebanese diaspora" etc.) risks minimizing or hiding the differences that exist within these same groups on the basis, for example, of religion and ethnic group. Defining the diaspora for statistical purposes is also complicated. Although some countries adopt a statistical definition at national level in order to meet their domestic and foreign policy interests, migrants and their descendants are free to decide whether or not to identify as members of the diaspora. Statistics also depend on the availability of data in the countries of residence that often cover foreigners but not their descendants. These limitations make it difficult to systematically map out the presence and characteristics of the diaspora around the world.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) uses "diaspora" and "transnational community" interchangeably to refer to "migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background"[2]. Through this definition, the IOM defines and applies a comprehensive approach to leveraging the potential of diaspora in development cooperation according to the 3 Es: Enabling (activation of the potential of diaspora), Engaging (involvement of diaspora according to their characteristics and needs) and Empowering (empowerment of the diaspora, their potential and their resources).

The involvement of diaspora stakeholders in the migration governance

Although the involvement of diaspora stakeholders in policies is not new, over the past twenty years the focus has primarily been put on *external* initiatives, namely on how stakeholders could assist in developing their country of origin. From the first mention of "co-development"[3] in 1999 to, more recently, the consensus on promoting the "migration-development nexus"[4] in line with the Sustainable Development Goals[5], European policymakers have increasingly sought to include diaspora stakeholders in bilateral and multilateral development programmes.

The engagement of diaspora stakeholders in *internal* initiatives has slowly but steadily entered the EU policy debate, yet often in connection with external policies. As early as 2011 the EU recognised that not only did migrants' countries of origin play a role in migrant integration[6] through predeparture measures (training, information sharing etc.), but also that increasing cooperation with diaspora stakeholders could leverage their potential for the process[7]. A similar shift in policy approach also occurred in countries of origin, where governments in several major immigrant-origin countries progressively

stopped seeing integration abroad as a betrayal of the homeland and started lifting regulations and actions that hampered the full integration of their nationals in host countries[8].

There is a strong, direct relationship between transnational engagement and integration, that are seen as mutually supportive processes[9]. Evidence suggests that because transnational engagement requires resources, diaspora members who intensively engage in transnational practices are not less integrated than others. In fact, the reverse can be true[10]. As a result, integration in the country of destination becomes a key measure to empower and promote the development contributions of diaspora stakeholders. Policymakers should build policy coherence to avoid inconsistent or incompatible policy objectives in the fields of integration and development cooperation that could ultimately hamper effective engagement of diaspora groups[11].

The integration role of diaspora networks

Diaspora stakeholders can facilitate the integration of newly arrived migrants through their networks and skills[12]. Migrants moving to a new country often settle in regions with already relatively larger existing communities from their country of origin[13] as diaspora communities help alleviate the initial cultural, linguistic and administrative challenges that newly arrived migrants face. Diaspora stakeholders can also play an important role as substitutes of state functions in times of crises, since when the state lacks the capacity and/or political will at the local level to effectively act they deliver initiatives key for individual survival strategies[14].

Relying upon diaspora communities can enhance integration outcomes. In terms of labour market integration, for instance, the existence of established migrant communities seems to make it easier for migrants to search for jobs that are equivalent to their educational background[15]. In regions with a larger share of migrants who have lived in the country for at least ten years, the differences in over-qualification rates between migrants and native-born are lower than in regions without such established migrant communities[16].

Diaspora stakeholders' resources for integration

Diaspora communities can facilitate the integration of newly arrived migrants because they work as hubs where resources, relationships and knowledge circulate regularly depending on the needs and issues at stake. In this perspective, migration can be seen as an individual and collective experience that generates and mobilises different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital)[17] that have increasingly been come under the radar of researchers, practitioners and policymakers. While the recent debate has primarily focused on ways to enable diasporic capital in the external dimension (e.g. in development programmes), interest has grown on how resources can facilitate the integration of newly arrived migrants in destination countries.

Economic capital

Economic capital refers to material assets that are immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights. Economic capital includes all kinds of material resources (e.g., financial resources, land or property ownership) that could be used to acquire or maintain economic gains. It is useful only if it is recognised and appreciated within a specific field.

For migrants, developing and feeding economic capital is strongly conditional on access to the labour market, which is therefore given high priority as a way to achieve personal wellbeing, for instance in terms of better health[18]. The presence of clusters of ethnic networks seems to positively influence individual employment prospects, although this depends on the

quality of local diaspora networks[19] and shows a strong nexus between accumulation of economic capital and development of social ties and status. Refugees, for instance, seek to professionally integrate into the host country's labour market by often re-evaluating their position in a given field and find ways to create new capital in a new field[20].

Social capital

Social capital is the combination of available or potential resources linked to a durable network of relationships that can be formal or informal. Social capital, however, is not about the resources per se but rather whether and how they can be used for social advancement[21] or as opportunities available to people who occupy particular positions[22]. The networks that best feature social capital are the most diverse ones, i.e., the ones characterized by a high variety of ties (strong and weak ties) and a wide-range of ties with different connections to diverse "others" both in terms of gender, ethnicity, class—or more general, status—and in terms of roles (kin, friends, etc.)[23].

There are different types of social capital[24]. Horizontal forms of social capital tend to reflect ties that exist among people or groups of equals or near-equals and help individuals connect to their narrow group (bonding capital) or broader society (bridging capital) based on the trust they put in know contacts or strangers[25]. Vertical forms of social capital have been less researched and focus on the ties between hierarchical or unequal individuals/groups with different access to resources and power (linking capital)[26]. They connect individuals with institutional structures and are therefore very relevant for developing social capital as a whole and, ultimately, seizing integration opportunities at local level.

Networks play a significant role among migrants in the initial settlement process. They make resources available, for instance by helping to find a job or accommodation and giving support, and buffer the negative effects of weak cultural and economic capital as well as lack of a stable legal status[27]. In the case of labour market integration, vertical social capital can help secure adequate employment, whereas horizontal social capital and independent job-searching methods may lead more often to low-skilled work or underemployment[28]. However, networks may also force migrants into specific ethnic niches and therefore exacerbate competition, rivalry and exploitation. Migrants could then remain within thick bonds of trusted family and friends[29] that may constrain a job seeker in their choices[30]. Newly arrived migrants may sometimes experience "ethnic path integration" by accessing more insecure work in secondary labour markets such as cleaning services, aged care, disability support services, meat processing, taxi driving, security and building[31].

Cultural capital

Cultural capital refers to the symbols, ideas, tastes and preferences that can be strategically used as resources in social action. There are three different groups of cultural capital. Embodied cultural capital indicates the knowledge or skills that a person acquires as part of his habitus (e.g., accents, etiquette, vocabulary), objectified cultural capital is the value held by objects of culture (e.g., works of art), and institutionalized cultural capital is the value that come from being recognized by an elite institution (e.g., obtaining an Oxford university degree).

Cultural capital acquired and mobilised within diaspora organisations facilitate the lives of people with a migrant background by enabling them to complete their own projects and find their way through their different stages of migration and settlement[32]. The community where migrants live also has a strong influence on migrants' knowledge of the host country's culture and resources[33]. Diaspora stakeholders, especially the ones active as organizations, can help mobilise and

institutionalise many resources in terms of language, educational, and professional certificates and skills[34]. In particular, organizations managed and led by people with migration background can help generate skills among their target groups that people can capitalise on for their education and professional careers.

The focus on cultural capital is very important because both knowledge and skills allow migrants to find sources of protection outside formal structures (e.g., public and private housing systems) that might be discriminatory or not accessible[35]. In addition, skills and capabilities have recently been emphasized as important parts of social protection interventions as they contribute to the resilience of people dealing with social risks and vulnerabilities in the context of migration[36].

Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital indicates the resources available to an individual on the basis of honour, prestige or recognition, and serves as the value that people hold within a given culture. More broadly, it results from economic or cultural capital as soon as they are known and acknowledged.

Culture is highly instrumental to symbolic capital. When settling into a new environment, migrants seek to transfer and activate cultural capital and resources that are negotiated based on the minority (migrant community) and majority population (host community), for instance in terms of education, taste and language[37]. According to migrants, these resources not only serve as means for positioning in the new society but are sometimes also employed in making distinctions among themselves and other minority members. They are used sometimes to distinguish between "good" minority members who had learnt local habits and language properly (or were trying to do so) and "lazy" ones who had not bothered to do so.

Although migrants feel confronted with the dilemma of learning the majority language while keeping minority language skills, they still deemed very important to understand subtle cultural codes and to read the undercurrents behind people's words and acts as one of the most crucial resource participants to personal and collective positioning[38].

The role of diaspora organisations

When designing and implementing integration policies and services, policymakers tend to engage with migrant-led institutions such as diaspora organisations. This type of organisations have increased in numbers and engaged in an ever-widening array of issues, ranging from support to local integration and better working conditions to development cooperation and peacebuilding[39]. They are deeply rooted in the territory, have direct knowledge of present gaps and engage in frequent exchanges with local authorities under partnerships with high added value that capitalise organisations' knowledge and skills and allow them to respond more coherently to the needs, priorities and objectives of the local communities[40]. As transnational actors with knowledge and experience of culture in both countries of origin and destination, they have often been asked to act as bridges by European countries and development agencies[41].

Diaspora organisations, however, face a number of challenges that affect their integration role for newly arrived migrants. They are often run by volunteers with limited resources, and as such, they face financial, administrative and capacity constraints[42]. The life of an association is also often short and characterized by several changes in management and a high rate of turnover due to increasing human mobility and influence of members' work and family commitments of its members. This makes it difficult for diaspora organisations, especially recently established ones, to learn from one another

(e.g., in terms of good practices and coping strategies), exchange ideas, create collaborations and act in synergy[43]. Some organisations are not familiar with legal and administrative legislation, which is essential to access funding opportunities and obtain resources for integration activities[44].

Diaspora-specific differences in integration support

Diaspora stakeholders may have a common ethnic or national background, but the reality is they gather several profiles where priorities, objectives and approaches in integration might differ based on personal and group factors. This could influence how diaspora stakeholders create and apply their capital for the integration of newly arrived migrants.

Gender

Gender substantially influences the types of capital that diaspora stakeholders develop and how they are applied for the benefit of migrants. Some studies found that migrant women are more likely to develop networks around schools and home, while men build networks around employment[45]. Gender differences were also found within networks for undocumented migrants as men are more likely to connect with co-ethnic groups to access informal employment while women deepen smaller networks of friends and civil society organisations. Both genders rely strongly on co-ethnics and civil society for food and shelter, although women's networks are smaller than men's as they are sometimes subject to sexual exploitation when seeking support from people they are not closely connected with[46].

Although networks can also have positive impact on integration paths and, more generally, on their wellbeing (e.g. better health outcomes[47]), access among women is still affected by unequal power relationships and reinforcement of patriarchal behaviors and attitudes. Indeed, because international migrant networks tend to reproduce the origin norms and customs in the host community[48], there is often a conflict inside diaspora communities between preserving traditional gender roles and adopting of more egalitarian views, even within the same gender[49].

Legal status

Migrants' legal status considerably affect the initial trajectory of network development. Forced migrants often have no foundation networks, i.e., pre-existing networks of family or friends, to rely on upon arrival, meaning they have less affective networks and rely heavily on formal organisations at local level for advice and support. However, through these organisations they gained information on the highly functional aspects of integration[50]. Territoriality is also a limitation as the dispersion policy that is often part of national asylum procedures means many forced migrants experience a rupture in their network development. As for irregular migrants, networks are a lifeline for personal plans as having a reliable contact in the receiving society pays more than a high school diploma in their ventures[51]. Likewise, the political and cultural activity of ethnic networks and organisations is essential as it juxtaposes the criminalisation of irregular immigrants and supports the protection of asylum seekers[52].

Age

Most of the research on participation among young diaspora stakeholders has focused on *political* participation. Young migrants, in particular, seem to participate less that their native peers not as a result of their migrant background but rather due to differences in socio-economic and family political socialization[53]. On the other hand, when they had the chance to participate through volunteering, their sense of being connected or belonging were improved. Volunteering or social activism can then be seen as a way to react to exclusion from many legal rights, such as political rights, and re-claim their citizenship, something that has been observed among other migrant groups[54].

Just like in development cooperation[55], different generations of diaspora stakeholders seek to promote different goals through their individual and collective actions. In terms of migrant integration, young diaspora stakeholders value issues such as discrimination based on gender identify or sexual orientation are perceived as more relevant[56].

Family and community dimension of integration support

Support from significant "others" is fundamental for newly arrived migrants. Social support can indeed reduce the isolation and solitude perception[57], fosters a sense of altruism and fulfillment[58], and favors pro-social behaviors, optimism and propension towards cultural change[59].

Newly arrived migrants usually prioritise support provided within family networks. The largely unknown new socio-cultural context increases uncertainty and precarity among migrants who, pushed to adapt to mainstream culture, need to rely on family ties—both extended and dense—to mitigate the risk of their individual resources being overwhelmed[60]. Families ties are preferential also for people migrating through regular pathways. Private sponsorship programmes developed in Canada, for instance, have long relied on family members sponsoring relatives and as a way to expand family reunion[61]. The scope of "family" has also changed in an increasingly inclusive way to reach beyond the immediate family class (spouse or partner, dependent child, parent, or grandparent) and include extended relatives (uncle or aunt, brother or sister, non- dependent son or daughter, nephew or niece, grandson or granddaughter). Families seem also to facilitate positive integration outcomes, as some studies found that those who moved through friends and relatives were relatively more successful in terms of salary earned and being happier with the job, compared with those who moved through recruitment agents[62].

Diaspora stakeholders can also provide support at community level beyond the family unit, helping other migrants from their or other countries of origin. Feeling part of a community allows migrants not only to support one another but also to maintain a shared interpretation of their collective experience and share knowledge and significant relations, including relations with locals[63]. Organized ethnic communities in host countries can guarantee continuity with previous cultural traditions and provide an adequate framework for socialization, emotional support and the possibility to distribute collective resources among conational[64]. The cultural proximity and emotional support that come with migrant communities also helps resident migrants share their experience and know-how to newly arrived migrants, who can regulate their expectations accordingly[65] and reconnect past and present[66]. However, without a wider integration context fostered through formal and informal interethnic relationships in the host community, the risk of isolating the newcomer trough the so-called "cocoon effect" increases[67].

Information sharing within diaspora communities

Within the family and community networks that migrants relied upon, information is regularly shared and used as it has already passed the social filter and screening mechanisms[68]. Ethnic network ties are considered as more suitable and trustful to channel more diverse information than other strong ties[69] and networks characterized by structural holes[70].

Information are shared through various channels across multiple nations and languages with individuals disseminating ideas rapidly through social circles and across platforms, making "local" problems "global" ones[71]. This process has been facilitated by technological advances (e.g., mobile and smart phones, VoIP protocol) or access to venues that other migrants attend (church,

cafes)[72]. Migrants with limited language proficiency often turn to ethnic media, including print, broadcast, and social media, as primary sources of information[73] to stay updated on happenings in the country of origin while reinforcing group identification[74]. This trend is reproduced online, with media platforms representing an information-rich space for community, news, entertainment, and business[75].

Migrants often use informal social networks via friends and family members to accumulate information on employment laws of destination countries. This information, however, is sometimes the result of other migrants' real-life experience with the law often entailing a negative outcome and may then not apply to others[76]. Personal advice or specific migrants' stories can sometimes be seen as useless, if not even harmful, to some migrant groups due to the rapidly changing legal and administrative policies affecting third-country nationals[77].

The engagement of diaspora stakeholders can be very effective to promote public services and ultimately societal objectives. This was observed, for instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, where in many European countries information on behavioural response (prevention, treatment) was conveyed to migrants not only by public officials but also by migrant-organized groups[78]. However, the source and quality of information within diaspora communities seem to play a role. Some studies indeed found that obtaining health information led to perceived benefits only if it came from official sources and not informal sources such as friends and family[79]. Likewise, using social media platforms as main source of COVID-19 information was found to lead to less health-related protective actions[80].

Maps have recently been used as tools for approaching local opportunities through the eyes of migrants, who in some cases have been invited to represent their image of the host territory[81]. In this perspective, maps become a tool for undoing the traditional observer-observed hierarchy by including the view of invisible observers (migrants) in the observed object (the city). As such, they are instrumental to acquiring information on the territory that would not be retrieved by technical maps and help migrants become aware of the city and move from a condition of foreignness or uprooting to thinking of themselves as inhabitants.

Part 2 - Strategies to unleash the potential of diaspora stakeholders as integration actors

This part presents a set of strategies to maximise the contribution of diaspora stakeholders in the integration of newly arrived migrants. The proposed strategies build on the knowledge presented in part 1 and on the evidence collected through the NEAR project, namely its implementation in the four target cities (Milan and Perugia in Italy, Nicosia in Cyprus and Lisbon in Portugal)[82].

1. Adopt a strategic definition of diaspora stakeholders

Integration policies and practices have often looked at migrant communities, by leveraging their knowledge and networks, to make measures as effective as possible. Attention, however, has been primarily directed towards migrant-led organisations, which may be a handy solution allowing to have one single interface at institutional level but also neglects that **several migrant groups operate in a highly informal way or fail to formalise and sustain the activities as organisations**. This is due not only to lack of funding but also, more broadly, to the absence of the necessary skills as migrants struggle accessing training or updating their skills, which means that organisations strongly rely on volunteers who are eager to support integration but cannot reskill themselves or commit enough time due to parallel paid jobs. Capacity building becomes key for migrant groups to formalise and cater to groups that are underrepresented in the integration debate. In this sense, capacity building programmes across the EU are increasingly considered in other aspects of migration, for instance development cooperation, but **to fully maximise the circularity of migration policymakers and stakeholders should build the capacity of migrant stakeholders to structure themselves and act within host countries as actors of integration**.

Broadening the scope of what "migrant communities" means is also important to engage strategically with the most relevant actors. **"Diaspora stakeholders" can be a useful term as it has the potential of being more inclusive by looking not only at people with first-hand migration experience but also at people born in the EU to migrant parents or grandparents**. The stakeholders involved should have the right profile, personal skills and network to actively contribute to integration policies and practices, and this opens to **unconventional profiles**. When raising awareness on integration services, for instance, **network capillarity and reputation should be particularly valued** as they can respectively affect whether information find its way to the right recipients and whether access to services actually occurs. In this perspective, **policymakers and stakeholders should work with key diaspora members, such as teachers, nurses and workers operating in the non-profit sector, who are particularly connected and trusted within their community**. Cultural mediators are particularly useful profiles who have the right knowledge of the receiving society and the key intercultural skills to understand potential issues and socio-cultural barriers that hampers full access to services. Likewise, locally elected representatives with a migrant background can act as brokers between migrants and local policies.

The inclusive use of "diaspora stakeholders", however, should not erase the great diversity of how individuals and organisations feel and express their diasporic identity. The belonginess to a national community and the willingness to help depend on factors, such as personal history (e.g., persecution, short-term or circular migration) and national politics (e.g. internal affairs, inter-ethnic relations) that deserve full consideration to support meaningful and smooth involvement in integration initiatives. **Sometimes people do not want to be formally affiliated with specific institutions and act based on rationales and preferences that deserve full**

recognition. Preferential aspects can include linguistic affinity and the target group for integration support (children, women etc.).

Gender is a critical dimension in migration that affects how migrant women access (or do not access) public spaces and services. For instance, newly arrived migrant women struggle between different sets of gender roles and, in the case of receiving countries, gender-insensitive services that do not fully respond to their habits and needs. Policies and services should therefore involve female stakeholders who are trustworthy leaders in their community.

Selecting certain stakeholders over others raises **issues of representation**, as diaspora communities operate in an already simmering environment where groups compete for the same opportunities to get influence and funding. **To get the broadest collaboration, policymakers and stakeholders should keep information as well as networking and training opportunities as open as possible in order for anyone interested to get on board**. When this is not possible, they should try to promote the narrative that engagement is not linked to competitive funding or opportunities but, rather, to the enhancement of diaspora stakeholders' impact in terms of social (networks) and cultural capital (knowledge) for the integration of newly arrived migrants.

Many people with a migrant background do not operate under a competition logic and cater to migrant communities as a way to improve individual conditions and out of reputation as well as psychological or identity-related factors. Some tend to prioritize migrants from the same country, others support migrants from the same region (e.g. based on common languages or on regional sentiment, see pan Africanism) or, more broadly, all migrants. Policymakers and stakeholders can leverage this attitude and cater to different communities by considering some key aspects when selecting diaspora stakeholders, such as language profile, age cohort, gender or regional background.

2. Centralise local integration services

When settling in a new country, migrants often have to rely on the network of other migrants, namely individuals and organisations representing the same nationality. The support provided is strongly comprehensive and aims to provide as much information on the host community as possible in the fastest way so that migrants can stand on their feet. However, because diaspora stakeholders are often not trained or briefed on integration services, the information conveyed may be partial and inaccurate.

Fragmentation of information on integration does not only occur within diaspora communities but actually also reflects the way this kind of services are provided and often even designed. **The more information is scattered, the more it risks being outdated, incomplete or even incorrect. Centralising information becomes critical, especially in the phase upon arrival (6-12 months)** where migrants enter the host community and need to access housing and work. There are two pathways to achieve this.

On the one hand, **policymakers and stakeholders could build the capacity of diaspora stakeholders to independently and critically find, access and disseminate the relevant information for their network based on the assessed needs**. Key questions that people should be able to respond to are: is the information accurate? Is it complete? Is it reliable? Is it relevant? Is it timely? This approach requires a considerable input at the beginning to set up and provide capacity building, while long-term input is less burdensome but requires sustained follow-up (e.g. to provide updates). Programmes that promote digital literacy, myth busting techniques and tools to identify fake news can be of great help.

On the other hand, **policymakers and stakeholders could centralise their services by design and condense all information into one-stop shops dedicated exclusively to or**

including migrants. This approach requires minor input at the beginning but calls for stronger, sustained work along the way to create synergies between service providers and policy officers working in different yet complementary policy areas. At the same time, it can greatly benefit from the input of diaspora stakeholders, who can show ways in which services become interconnected for newly arrived migrants. Centralisation should also be paired with proximity, as catering to communities directly in their neighbourhood can be very useful especially for women and vulnerable groups.

As **websites** are the most common interface where migrants retrieve information on services that they relay within their communities, sufficient resources should be invested to make information readable and up-to-date, possibly in several languages and in a mobile-friendly manner. A cost-effective way to do this is to rely on a network of local or thematic contributors providing updates periodically. **Including people with a migrant background into the staff** can help mainstream migrant needs into services from the outset, can enhance relatability among migrants and can anticipate or prevent miscommunication.

3. Value the contribution of diaspora stakeholders as actors of integration

Diaspora stakeholders contribute incredibly valuable social and cultural capital that can potentially enhance the quality of integration policies and services, and yet their involvement is often not coherently ensured. Involvement around specific topics can be a viable alternative solution to more-structural engagement as long as it moves beyond the "us vs. them" narrative to avoid the risk of alienating people, who may feel tokenised without their voice truly being heard. **Policymakers and stakeholders should involve diaspora communities by seeing them as full members of the local and national community and providing them with opportunities, including online, where services and actors involved are clearly presented and recent policy development are broken down**.

Involvement should not exclusively aim at enhancing access to services but should also allow to co-design and evaluate them. As actors positioned between service providers and users, diaspora stakeholders do regularly collect evidence on needs, habits and pitfalls that affect whether and how members of their community seize opportunities at local level, but they often do not do that consciously or empirically. **Building the capacity of diaspora stakeholders to scientifically identify and communicate the needs of their community is key to making their contribution most impactful and sustainable**. Among other tools, emancipatory research is a way of producing knowledge that can both benefit disadvantaged groups and change social dynamics through data collection and analysis. If policymakers and stakeholders provided the right knowledge and tools to run their research, diaspora stakeholders would become the subjects, rather than the objects, of the research, which would ultimately foster empowerment.

Evidence provided by diaspora stakeholders remains essential and should be valued strategically in integration policies and practices, for instance by organizing informal group feedback sessions and semi-structured interviews with diasporas stakeholders complemented, if necessary, by short questionnaires. To meet the daily needs of diaspora stakeholders, opportunities should be organised late in the day (late afternoon or evenings) or during lunchbreaks, prioritizing online formats or in-person events that are already scheduled within migrant communities. Atypical ways of collecting feedback include the use of social media (e.g. Facebook threads) and messaging platforms (e.g. WhatsApp chats).

Due to their valuable contribution, diaspora stakeholders should not be solely regarded as "side actors" but rather as actual professional

profiles who are embedded in the local integration governance. **This requires a change of perspective that, through full recognition, puts diaspora stakeholders at the same footing as policymakers and stakeholders in what is a dialogue among peers**. Recognition is also about providing the right tools for diaspora stakeholders to contribute smoothly and sustainably to policies and practices by **professionalising this kind of actors through funding, training, venues and employment**. For instance, public, private and non-profit actors that cater directly to the migrant population could include diaspora stakeholders such as cultural mediators in their staff or sponsor their inclusion into key local actors. They could also help diaspora stakeholders join up forces by establishing a "mediation centre" with people working with institutions in a more sustained way.

4. Transfer the right knowledge and skills

The information that migrants need and seek within their community in host countries is diverse and changes across countries, regions and nationalities and in terms of age and gender. However, **there are aspects of integration that migrants generally prioritise to be as independent as possible and where information gaps are particularly important and should be addressed**. In general, diaspora stakeholders are constantly interested in getting briefed and updated on relevant regulation to keep up with the rapidly evolving policy framework. Among several aspects of daily life, **work** is the most pressing issue for most of migrants and yet an area where people's social network can provide key support, especially upon arrival. Diaspora stakeholders are aware of public employment services but also know that eligibility conditions often depend on the legal status, leaving irregular migrants out of the scope of jobs and reskilling programmes. On the other hand, the overreliance on their informal network puts migrants at risk of exploitation and abuse in employment, so efforts to transfer knowledge should focus on aspects of labour law such as contracts, individual rights, safeguards and complaint mechanisms.

Housing is a steppingstone to integration according to migrants as it allows them to have a "base" to plan the rest of their life. However, the housing market in Europe is still predominantly private, with the result that access to affordable housing is particularly difficult for financial reasons but also due to the persistent discrimination by tenants and other private actors. Migrants often lack information on their rights and duties and are not familiar with different types of housing (public or private), forms of contracts (short- or long-term) and safeguards (anti-discrimination measures)—all dimensions where policymakers and stakeholders can step in and instil knowledge. Diaspora stakeholders should also learn about all the actors that are part of the housing ecosystem and provide complementary services so that migrants do not fall through the cracks.

Health is increasingly recognised by migrants as an important aspect of their life. The Covid-19 pandemics has exposed the impact that a lack of information on healthcare levels (primary and emergency care, prevention and treatment) can have on individuals or communities. Diaspora stakeholders are aware this is due to structural and socio-cultural factors such as miscommunication with general practitioners, stigma on mental illness or lack of gender sensitivity in services. Such challenges can be reduced by informing diaspora stakeholders on how to enrol to national healthcare systems, what the differences between healthcare professionals are and how primary, secondary and tertiary health prevention can be done. In the case of Covid-19 and other communicable diseases, accurate information on protocols and pathways to prevention and treatment can also have a positive impact, especially on migrants whose life and work conditions increase vulnerability. Healthcare is also an area that entails a rich, technical vocabulary

that migrants lack and requires specific language training.

Education tends to be put on hold among newly arrived migrants due to the low levels of recognition of qualifications and skills and the need to quickly join the labour market upon arrival. However, the lack of knowledge and skills, such as language proficiency, soon becomes an obstacle for many migrants as they want to change job or find a way out of unemployment. Diaspora stakeholders can therefore promote the added value of lifelong learning by raising awareness on training opportunities at local level or, as it is increasingly the case, online. Although there are several skills that diaspora stakeholders develop, often in an informal way, because of their or their family's migrant history, digital literacy remains highly demanded as those who do not possess it feel frustrated and slowed down in getting the right information. Other key skills include financial literacy, networking, project cycle management (namely needs assessment, community engagement, impact, sustainability), advocacy, fundraising and institutional communication.

Self-esteem and confidence are not often regarded as key components of capacity building programmes although they do affect whether and how diaspora stakeholders think of themselves as true actors of change within their communities. Some migrants have low levels of self-esteem and confidence as their personal history is often marked by shaming, discrimination and exclusion, which leads them to rarely thinking of themselves as community influencers or leaders and to mistrusting public institutions. As a result, people might react to integration initiatives with scepticism or make it hard for them to disclose information and contribute in general. **As for all relationships, policymakers and stakeholders should earn the trust of diaspora communities by working transparently and continuously with them**. They should also value all contributions by creating the right space and follow-up to allow for contributions. At individual level, diaspora stakeholders should be mentored in order to empower them through their life experiences and knowledge acquired. At the same time, they should be able to develop other soft skills that can be applied to their role of community leaders, such as public speaking, networking, negotiation, problem solving and empathy. Having trainers and mentors with a migrant background under the team can increase relatability and provide role models migrants can look up to.

5. Enhance social capital through networking

Diaspora stakeholders have particularly strong levels of symbolic capital (i.e., reputation) but struggle building other types of resources in the receiving community**. Social capital is particularly critical as it helps create a safety net on which newly arrived migrants can land once they enter the local community**. As people with a migrant background, diaspora stakeholders do already contribute valuable contacts in the field of work, housing, health and education but their network is often far from being comprehensive and up to date when it comes to key local actors.

The NEAR project piloted a new way of creating social capital among diaspora stakeholders by bridging the gap between training and networking, combining services and the institutions that provide them. Since migrants in need prioritise the right people over the right institutions, **having representatives of service providers present their activities as part of trainings can be a great opportunity to "give integration a face" and start connecting diaspora stakeholders with the institutions active on the territory**. This is particularly important for public service providers, who are often scattered across different neighbourhoods and have different mandates under a governance structure that is hard to understand, but should also refer to non-profit stakeholders (NGOs, charities,

citizen groups) and private stakeholders (shop owners, tenants, businesses).

The impact of this combination is twofold and can benefit all the actors involved. On the one hand, indeed, **it helps migrant offer comprehensive support to newly arrived migrants without anyone falling through the cracks of local services**. On the other hand, **it helps public and other service providers deliver quick, flexible and capillary services to the migrant population by reaching specific groups of migrants based on different needs and external contingencies** (e.g. big and unforeseen migratory inflows). For this to happen, diaspora stakeholders should be given opportunities for dialogue and networking, especially through in-person open meetings where participants can interact freely without the intermediation of a screen. Staff from institutions with different degree of openness to migrants can liaise with one another and learn from each by sharing the benefits and challenges of co-design and joint implementation of integration services.

6. Use innovative tools to promote formal and unconventional local services and actors

Migrants strongly turn to their local network to access integration services and build their life upon arrival. However, their knowledge of the local community is often limited and relies on information coming from different sources, focusing on different aspects of daily life and collected at different times. Migrants then systematize information in a spatial way by creating mental maps of their city of neighbourhood that they consult whenever they or other members of their community need it. **Working through maps can therefore be useful for policymakers and stakeholders to promote key services within migrant communities while connecting the dots between different actors and activities characteristic of the same territory under a cohesive network**. Online maps should be mobile-friendly and intuitive to allow diaspora stakeholders and migrants to browse and share information on specific themes (work, housing, health, education, health) and type of actor (public, private or non-profit). At the same time, sharing information also through non-digital tools remains fundamental due to the variable digital literacy among migrants.

The NEAR project piloted an innovative way of co-designing integration maps together with diaspora stakeholders through "unconventional maps" that offered information and hints for newly arrived migrants on the most relevant places, helping them settle in the new city and quickly feel "at home". On the one hand these maps clearly identify public, private and non-profit institutions that provide key services, such as city offices, schools, healthcare venues and public employment services with their website and phone number. On the other hand, what makes these maps unique is the inclusion of unconventional places that echo the lived experiences of diaspora stakeholders and are associated to specific positive and negative emotions, including parks, squares, libraries, and ethnic food stores. These maps allow for a mentality shift where services focus more on people's aspiration and resources as opposed to their needs and gaps and where people eagerly contribute as "citizens who help citizens". In addition, they can be used by local people without a migrant background as a way to (re)discover hidden spots, deconstruct biases on neighbourhood and see their city from a new perspective.

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[82] This section includes feedback provided during the NEAR European Workshop "*Building inclusive cities together – How to enable diaspora stakeholders in the development and provision of local integration services*" organised in Brussels on 8/02/2023. The event gathered 30 participants, including NEAR project partners and representatives of other AMIF-funded integration projects, networks of cities, diaspora representatives and EU-level stakeholder platforms representing actors that provide key integration services to newly arrived migrants across the EU.