



CommunicAction

Together to protect human rights at the local level

ECCAR General Conference 19 and 20 november 2020 - Online



Recommendations Working Groups ECCAR General Conference 2020

Local authorities play a key role in safeguarding human rights, fighting discrimination and guaranteeing equal access to public services such as housing or education for all their citizens. At the same time, the voices of European cities are essential to build inclusive narratives that demonstrate the value of pluralism for our communities and prevent polarization. The 2020 ECCAR General Conference “CommunicAction – Together to protect human rights at the local level” conducted in cooperation with the City of Bologna brought together a wide spectrum of perspectives – European institutions, international organizations, activists, cities and their networks, media and young generations. Focusing on the role of education, youth and communication in shaping inclusive cities and the promotion of human rights, three working groups as part of the conference developed key findings and formulated policy recommendations for local authorities in Europe.

- 1. Recommendations Working Group Islamophobia**
- 2. Recommendations Working Group Housing**
- 3. Recommendations Working Group Speaking Up**

1. Recommendations Working Group on Islamophobia

Muslims in Europe face multiple forms of discrimination. Surveys and reports from civil society organisations show that Muslims do not only experience violence, harassment or hate speech online, but also structural forms of discrimination. Often their equal access to public goods and services, but also employment, education or housing is denied. Inclusion policies at the local level may have tremendous impact by offering i.e. easy and accessible ways to report episodes of discrimination and racism, to develop inclusive measures related to the delivery of basic services and to empower the political voices of those affected by anti-Muslim racism.

The discussions in this working group were organized along the three dimensions of the conference: education, communication and youth. In each, good practices of cities were introduced during the discussion with the aim of highlighting key tools, approaches, target groups and challenges.

An overarching first recommendation was to establish a structured working group to discuss local policies to fight anti-Muslim racism within ECCAR. This will help to ensure that the discussion at the conference is not a one-off but is the first step of a longer process, which will entail the sharing of good practices, tools, and solutions.

Recommendations and key findings for local authorities in Europe:

Education:

- Education as key vector to challenge structural forms of racism and discrimination against Muslims or people perceived as such, to challenge stereotypes among the majority population
- Kindergarten and primary education should be seen as crucial spaces for “teaching” inclusion. This means reflecting on teaching civic education; familiarise with diversity since early childhood; training of teachers.
- Education is also about vocational training and training for adults. Training for adults becomes crucial in relation for example to public administration officers, which should receive training about unconscious biases, inclusion and non-discrimination to foster understanding and knowledge of the different communities including Muslims.
- In order to help Muslims with the articulation of their views and beliefs as well as in order to increase visibility of Muslim commitment for the society as a whole, it is necessary to promote the consideration of Muslim perspectives within the public discourse.
- It is key to start by needs assessment surveys and participation/involvement of the concerned communities

Communication:

- Create platforms for dialogue between civil society and religious communities and the local governments for regular discussions and exchange on a variety of aspects of public life at local level

- Communication and awareness raising campaigns on inclusion to have due attention to framing and messaging and again the importance of having community-sensitive and participatory approaches

Youth engagement:

- City government to undertake leisure and cultural activities, which target and involve specifically younger generations, with a view to bridge between minority communities and the majority population
- Involving youth means working on two tracks: empowering young boys and girls belonging to most vulnerable communities to speak up, participate, engage in local public life and raising awareness of majority population youth about diversity and importance of respect and mutual understanding.

2. Recommendations for the Working Group on Housing

Having a house where to live is not enough, instead guaranteeing decent housing is fundamental, since it allows to create a feeling of belonging, put roots, have a place where to feel safe, and where to relax. It means having the possibility to create a family and to guarantee to every component a life in dignity. Since housing is very connected to aspects such as labour, health and education, it is important to keep all this aspects connected while thinking of an initiative tackling discrimination in this field. This right needs to be considered of the same importance as the other aspects mentioned and needs to be treated as such.

Recommendations and key findings for local authorities in Europe:

- Cities should consider the close link between housing segregation and discrimination and they should therefore promote the principle of social mix in urban development plans and social housing assignments – where foreseen by national legislation – in order to avoid all people with fragilities to concentrate in specific areas with the risk of social tensions as a result. Enlarge the stock of decent (social) housing for vulnerable groups, introduce agreed rents, activate and strengthen economic support tools for accessible rent
- Build partnerships to collaborate, share best practices and network. Complement the work at the local level with the international level, for example by creating a Working Group on Housing within the ECCAR in order to foster continuous exchange on the topic and engage as ECCAR in national and international projects and platforms on sustainable cities (Shift project platform, Cost Group, ICLEI). Use the SDGs, especially goal 11, strategically to overcome the challenge that the discourse and platforms on anti-discrimination, human rights and anti-racism are a bit side-lined/isolated from the more accepted and general understanding of sustainability
- Doing community-based research and a polyphonic analysis of the context by hearing different points of view: institutions, civil society organizations, inhabitants, real estate agents, tenants, owners. Maintain a lively dialogue with all actors who develop policies; promote cooperation of the cities with civil society organizations, academic and political world
- Give victims a voice in the debate: promote empowerment, guarantee the direct involvement of discriminated people, and put their perspective at the centre of any initiative in this field. Provide tenants information in different languages about rights, subsidies, where to report discrimination.

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Provide free legal advice to victims or potential victims of discriminations. Set up guarantee funds to support people being discriminated, as foreigners are often perceived as unreliable and unable to pay the rent

- Provide clear and convincing evidence through testing to let also hidden discriminations and new discrimination procedures appear (i.e. advertisement websites selecting the advertisements to show on the basis of EU or non EU national origin). Combine academic and legal tests: if kept together, they are effective in making discriminations visible. By starting with measurements, we have the opportunity to show even to people that are more reluctant that discrimination exist.
- Keep together testing and training, as experiences show that the combination of these two elements works. Keep the situation monitored by doing permanent testings. This is important in order to keep into consideration new players (in Belgium, for example, terrorist attacks increased the discrimination rate after a decrease)
- Offer support and mediation in order to build trust, achieve good neighbourhood relationships and the integration of newcomers within the community. Activate penalties for more serious discrimination cases, when applicable; in minor cases, better trying to communicate and mediate.
- Raise awareness about the problem: work on the demolition of negative labels and activate public campaigns on the right to housing.
- Make the rental process more transparent and objective, as in many cities there is a lot of room for subjective evaluations
- Take into account the needs of real estate agents and property owners and make use of incentives for non-discriminatory / virtuous ones; provide advice to agents facing discriminatory questions enhanced by property owners; provide training for both.

3. Recommendations Working Group Speaking Up

Awareness raising actions targeting both hosting communities and migrants play an important role in fostering integration. Fighting discrimination, promoting a positive approach to diversity, combating xenophobia and hate speech are necessary elements for a fairer and peaceful society. On the other hand, negative framings about migration, which portray foreigners as a threat to the local identities and customs, can increase dichotomies within the local communities and feed into the rise of populism and xenophobia. This working session will focus on why migration narratives matter in shaping public attitudes and political narratives towards refugees and other migrants within their host communities. Participants from migrant associations, youth groups, media outlets, civil society organisations together with the local authorities will explore the challenges in communication and highlight the inspirational examples on how media, youth and migrant voices can effectively engage and re-shape public opinions about migration in their cities.

3 pillars of the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027:

ENGAGE: Fostering young people's participation in civic and democratic life

CONNECT: Connecting young people across the European Union and beyond to foster voluntary engagement, learning mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding

EMPOWER: Supporting youth empowerment through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work

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Recommendations and key findings for local authorities in Europe:

Communication

- Promote exchange of existing practices and tools, at the local and international level, that show diversity without fear, use story-telling and real stories (videos and communication campaigns) and promote art as a way to communicate and re-frame migration
- Engage diversity advisors to improve diversity in editorial teams and strengthen employment opportunities for journalists/communication staff with migrant background
- Provide a space for citizens' expression and policy proposals also on web platforms and make sure that migrants' participation and contributions are encouraged about issues concerning everyone: not only about migration
- Stress out common aspects and similarities to start communication channels, using pleasant activities and sharing leisure time
- Promote the role of municipalities on freedom of speech and of expression, especially in the countries where these freedoms are challenged by the national government and so municipalities can counteract such pressure
- Engage as ECCAR on a shared protocol on inclusive communication and/or on a Youth City Council

Education

- Recognize the crucial role of education in time of pandemic, connect education practices and promote networking among them;
- Support access to education for people of migrant background, also in cooperation with CSOs;
- Promote the knowledge of memory and history of the geographic context to bridge the gap between new and old citizens;
- Strengthen activities that can connect the receiving communities with the newly arrived people, for example by supporting the role of diaspora communities in acting as a bridge or by supporting citizens' volunteering activities that go in this direction

Youth

- Adopt an intersectional approach (gender, origin, generational) instead of working based on separate targets and categories
- Engage families in actions addressing young people, for example by providing families with tools to understand youths' choices
- Recognize and ensure the role of youth as key-actors by promoting conferences and forum events, as well as by involving them in the decision making process of Local Authorities also on the allocation of budget (e.g. Gothenburg Youth Council)
- Engage young people in the communication process (e.g. Youth Council)
- Build young people capacities and provide specific training to support the role of youth as multipliers, as well as internship opportunities within Institutions and Media Outlets; encourage volunteering experiences around Europe
- Provide public spaces and facilities for young people to meet and do activities, including sport

Bologna, 20 November 2020

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