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# Integration of refugees in Serbia



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## RECENT MIGRATION CONTEXT IN SERBIA: BACKGROUND

Recent mass migration flows that affected Serbia (through, now officially closed, 'Balkan route') raised questions of the capacity of institutions and the local community to face new challenges in relation to integration processes of this population and accommodation of local communities to the altered social, cultural and economic context. The changes in these contexts have been reflected in numbers of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees having passed borders of Serbia as of 2014. In 2015 the number of migrants passing through or residing in Serbia has peaked to approximately 800.000 people. According to available statistical data of the Asylum Office of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (APC, 2015), comparing to 2013 the number of asylum seekers in 2015 raised 35 times, from 5000 persons seeking asylum in 2013 to nearly 580.000 asylum seekers in 2015. In that period the vastest number of migrants and refugees who expressed intention to seek asylum was from the countries that produces refugees: Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia and Eritrea (APC, 2015).

However, during the first half of the 2016, at the time 'Balkan route' was closed, the migration flow changed its character which affected de facto policies in domains of refugees and migrants rights and integration processes in Serbia. Although the number of migrants and refugees in Serbia in 2016 has plummeted comparing to 2015, it still has reached considerable levels: 12,811 persons expressed intention for asylum mostly coming from Afghanistan (43%), Iraq (21%) and Syria (17%) (APC, 2016; Republic of Serbia, 2016; Asylum Information Database, 2018). By the end of 2016 number of migrants and refugees in Serbia came down to approximately 6400 (UNHCR, 2017a). Therefore, the agreement reached

between EU and Turkey that amongst others has aimed at the closure of the 'Balkan route' was only partly achieved. Migrants and refugees continued to pass and stay for shorter or longer periods in Serbia in 2016 and 2017.

Figure 1: Applications and granting protection at first instance statistics for 2017

	Intentions to apply for asylum	Submitted asylum applications	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Rejection
<b>Total</b>	6 199	235	3	11	11
Breakdown by countries of origin					
Afghanistan	2 483	48	1	0	2
Iraq	1 177	30	0	0	1
Pakistan	1 091	49	0	0	0
Iran	488	13	0	0	0
Syria	370	16	1	0	0
Algeria	83	4	0	0	0
Bangladesh	58	1	0	0	0
Libya	51	6	0	9	0
India	48	0	0	0	0
Morocco	43	5	0	0	0

Source: APC Statistical Database, 2017; Asylum Information Data Base, 2018.

Figure 2: Gender and age breakdown of registered asylum seekers for 2017

	Number	Percentage
Total number of applicants	6 199	100%
Men	5 140	82,92%
Women	1 059	17,08%
Children	2 630	42,43%
Unaccompanied children	156	2,52%

Source: APC Statistical Database, 2017.

In the period from January 2017 through December 2017, 2483 migrants from Afghanistan, 1177 from Iraq, 1091 from Pakistan, 488 from Iran and 370 from Syria have expressed the intention to seek asylum in Serbia (APC, 2017). In total 6,199 persons expressed intention to seek asylum in the 2017, considerably less when comparing to 2016. Still, these numbers are not definite as they relate only to those who are registered by the Serbian authorities while those who reside in Serbia having irregular status usually not being accommodated in 18 asylum, transit or reception centres are in the shadows of statistics. According to some estimates in September 2017 there has been between 2000 and 3000 persons with no status at all in Serbia (APC, 2017). Having been in irregular position implies that irregular migrants are having no rights at all and that their integration in any kind of social structures is completely undermined.

Moreover, expressed intention to seek asylum does not imply that migrants have entered asylum procedure. Namely, according to available statistics in 2017, 235 migrants submitted asylum application and 106 had hearing (APC, 2017), while 3 persons were granted refugee protection and 11 persons were granted subsidiary protection (APC, 2017). This indicates that most of the migrants who have expressed intention to seek asylum have never got to enter the asylum procedure, demonstrating fast flows of this population through Serbia towards EU borders on the one hand, while on the other, implying alarmingly weak features of asylum and migration system in Serbia (established as of 2008) that evidently lacks capacities to address challenges it faces in the past few years.

Among total number of regular and irregular migrants residing in Serbia there is a bulk of minors. According to APC statistics (2017), around 43% of total migrants registered in 2017 were minors, while 156 of them come from the population of unaccompanied minors or separated children (APC, 2017). This extremely vulnerable migrants' population is exposed to many risks in Serbia including different abuses, violence and human trafficking risks in the asylum/transit/reception centres (Sokolović, 2017: 2). Additionally, available data shows that considerable number of unaccompanied children

reside outside of asylum or reception centres often being in irregular status having no possibilities to be involved in any kind of social structures, as well to get protection and support they need.

Although officially 'Balkan route' is closed it still makes one of the main routes on the migrants' and refugees' way to the EU. During 2017, in majority of cases migrants and refugees have been entering Serbia from Macedonia and Bulgaria trying to reach borders of Hungary and Croatia. At the same time, new migration routes are emerging, specifically via Romania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Besides, during 2017 a number of the cases of *push-backs*, from or to Serbia was reported. This represents illegal practice of pushing people back from Hungary, Romania, Croatia to Serbia (APC, 2017), or, in a much smaller scope, vice versa from Serbia to Bulgaria and FYROM. These practices seriously undermined the principle of *non-refoulement* notably when migrants and refugees are summarily, without examination of individual circumstances, returned back to Serbia, or from Serbia to bordering countries such as Bulgaria or FYROM (BCHR, 2017). This situation particularly makes Serbia a 'tampon zone' of migration flows towards EU, a place of those who have been not succeeded in crossing EU border on the way to desired destination. According to APC (2017) field insights, those who have been pushed back to Serbia reside in the grey zone of the Serbian asylum system, having no possibilities to be accommodated in one of the asylum centres or exercising any rights that enable involvement in the system.

Available data shows that influx of migrants and refugees will remain considerable in Serbia in coming years, including increased trend of their residing in the country. These facts and prognosis call for strengthening systematic response of the relevant actors in the field in order to enable effective and meaningful processes of integration of this population in Serbia as their final destination country or a stop on the way to their final destinations. In any case, establishing firm grounds for policy implementation and responding effectively to challenges of the integration locally and nationally against the backdrop of migration flows in Serbia seems to be indispensable.

## BOX 1: Italian Case – Brief Migration Context

Immigration flows in Italy have been intensive for a quite a long time, affecting the development of the asylum system having passed through several stages since 1990s when 'Martelli Act' has been introduced in legal practice (Puggioni, 2017). Yet in recent years, notably since 2014, the influxes of migrants and refugees gradually increased in Italy which posed a number of challenges to the Italian asylum and migration system. For instance, during 2014 through 2016, over 500,000 migrants crossed the Italian borders which is more than the total number of those who arrived in the country in the previous 17 years (European Parliament, 2017). Only in the first three months of 2017 a total of 94,802 persons crossed Italian borders who in great majority of cases requested international protection that has become the main means of entry in Italy in recent period (ibid.). For instance, over 270,000 requests for asylum have been filled from 2014 through 2016 while in 2016, according to the available data, a total of 123,600 asylum request have been submitted (Ministry of Interior, 2017) which is 47% increase comparing to 2015.

However, the trend of increase of the number of asylum seekers in 2017 continued: a total of 130,119 asylum requests have been submitted (see Figure 2). In the last three years, the majority of migrants and refugees comes from African countries, followed by the migrants from Asia, notably Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and Syria. According to Asylum Information Database (Bove, 2017) in 2017 the vastest number of asylum seekers has come from Nigeria as the first country of nationality of asylum applicants (approximately 20%) followed by the migrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan (ibid.).

Interestingly, while in Serbia the greatest number of migrants comes from Afghanistan, in Italy, the situation is the opposite. A total of only 982 asylum requests have been lodged by the nationals of Afghanistan in 2017, which in fact is the least represented group of migrants in the total population of migrants and refugees during 2017 in Italy. This is particularly due to the characteristics of Serbian and Italian mass migration flows including spatial factors and developed migration routes used by Middle East and Asian migrants as opposed to those fleeing from the African continent. Besides, it can be argued that representation of Afghan migrant population is scarce due to strict border controls along northern border notably with Austria. On the other hand, the migration context in these two countries shows some overlapping features notably in relation to so called 'transit character' of migration flows. It is indicative that the officials often emphasize the 'transit' character of migration flows both in Italy and in Serbia, underlining that their country (Italy or Serbia) is only the stop on the migrants' way to other EU final destination countries. Still, in Italian case these assumptions cannot be sustained any longer notably concerning the Dublin III Regulation and Schengen *acquis* (Puggioni, 2017). On the other hand, as reported by the migrants and refugees themselves (UNHCR, 2017b) the general high rates of unemployment and lack of the systemic support for refugees and migrants to enter employment in Italy affect secondary migratory movements to other, 'better-off' EU countries. Additionally, due to stricter northern border controls, Italy is increasingly becoming a destination country for asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2017c).

In terms of the migration population gender and age structure, the vastest number of migrants and refugees who applied for some sort of protection are males in 2017 (over 83%) which is approximately the same portion of this population when comparing to Serbian gender migration profile.

Moreover, in 2017 the number of minor asylum seekers in Italy, including unaccompanied minors, is far lower comparing to the Serbian case. In Italy, approximately 20% of minors (out of which 7.5% are unaccompanied minors) in total migrant population in 2017 have been registered seeking asylum while in Serbia approximately 45% of total asylum seekers belong to the population of minors. As reported by the ASGI (Bove, 2017), throughout 2017 there have been cases of unaccompanied children accommodated in the adults' reception centres, or having been left without accommodation at all which led to lodging several appeals to the European Court of Human Rights against inappropriate accommodation for unaccompanied minors. Overall, reception conditions in 2017 shows that the vastest number of migrants and refugees (80%) are settled in CAS reception centres (first-instance reception centres) that features temporary accommodation

character, while at least 10,000 migrants and refugees among whom are those granted asylum are outside the reception system being left without assistance in informal settlements across Italy (ibid.).

When it comes to granting a particular sort of protection to migrants in Italy in 2017 it is indicative that rejection rate has been considerable, standing at 58.2% while only 6,827 migrants have been granted refugee status (8.4%) including 24.9% of those who have received humanitarian protection (see Figure 2).

Figure 3: Applications and granting of protection status at first instance in 2017

	Applicants in 2017	Pending at end 2017	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Humanitarian protection	Rejection
<b>Total</b>	130,119	145,906	6,827	6,880	20,166	42,700

Breakdown by countries of origin of the total numbers

Nigera	25,964	:	806	302	3,406	11,882
Bangladesh	12,731	:	84	20	1,828	3,742
Pakistan	9,728	:	346	1,035	1,524	5,624
Gambia	9,085	:	139	59	2,510	3,723
Senegal	8,680	:	81	33	1,416	3,570
Cote d'Ivoire	8,374	:	203	104	1,237	2,470
Guinea	7,777	:	58	38	1,162	2,188
Mali	7,757	:	76	605	1,329	2,431
Ghana	5,575	:	54	35	1,235	2,117
Eritrea	4,979	:	269	109	10	42
Syria	2,270	:	1,703	36	1	17
Iraq	1,661	:	345	785	139	58
Afghanistan	982	:	362	1,497	47	54

Source: CNDA: <http://bit.ly/2p5em4C>. "Rejection" includes inadmissibility decisions.

Figure 4: Gender/age breakdown of the total number of asylum seekers in 2017

	Number	Percentage
<b>Total number of applicants</b>	6,199	-
Men	5,140	82.9%
Women	1,059	17.1%
Children	2,630	42.4%
Unaccompanied children	156	2.5%

Source: Asylum Office

In addition to high rejection rates, the practices of *push-backs* have been implemented. Although the main entry points of migrants are situated along the south Italian coast via Mediterranean sea routes, northern borders (with Austria specifically) are equally active when it comes to facilitation of migration flows. As reported by the AIDA Country Report (Bove, 2017), since February 2017 readmission measures have been initiated against migrants coming from Austria by train. A number of *push backs* practices thus has been reported which, as in Serbia, seriously undermined the principle of *non-refoulement*. If persons arriving by train from Austria do not hold valid documentation for entry in Italy, they would be immediately directed back to the same train by which they arrived having no possibility to seek asylum while their individual circumstances are not examined. According to ASGI, the train controls have been based on racial profiling, intercepting mostly Afghan and Pakistani nationals (ibid.) who were push backed to Austria. On the other hand, at the Italian-French border, French authorities arrested nearly 50,000 people, of whom 98% have been pushed back to Italy. According to a report of the Senate, from January to mid-October 2017 this included approximately 8,000 people with authorization to stay in Italy and 15,000 undocumented persons (ibid.). Moreover, the same Report indicated that in 2017 severe barriers to asylum procedure have been spotted. Specifically, they relate to limiting the number of people allowed to apply for asylum per day or are allowed to lodge the application only on a specific day, while certain nationalities were banned from applying for asylum (ibid.).

In sum, the trend of migration influx in recent years is rising and peaking in 2017, while the trend in transit character of migration flows is decreasing placing Italy among the EU destination countries for forced migrants. This situation poses many challenges to Italian asylum and migration system, amongst which the system of migrants' and refugees' integration is challenged the most.

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## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRATION IN CONTEXT

This study is based on the concept of integration. It investigates the processes of integration of specific vulnerable groups of population, in this case of migrants and refugees, in the host (or transit<sup>1</sup>) society. This is why we found it necessary to clarify the concept of integration and its interdependence on the specific social context in more detail in order to set out the framework for empirical and comparative application in this study. Only in this way we could identify the nature and the factors impacting integration processes of migrant population in Serbia. In addition, while integration processes in Serbia inspected through the lenses of the role of institutional and non-state actors in the system of asylum and migration are the focus in this publication, our analysis includes examples from integration processes and practices in Italy as the country of the EU that in certain respects show similar contextual features as those in Serbia.

## TOWARDS THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRATION

In recent years integration has become a foci of both policy objectives and the public debate in the domain of the resettlement of the migrant population. Still, the productive policies and public discussion are often confused by the differing meanings ascribed to the concept of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008).

The concept of integration and its application pertaining to migration, is open to a number of approaches and definitions including its interdependence on the specific social context. In essence, it refers to the processes by which particular individuals and/or groups who are willing to settle in a country became the integral part of the society and its full participants (Rudiger and Spencer, 2003: 4), while at the same time, being able to retain their own cultural identity (Wong and Tezli, 2013). The approaches to the processes of integration varies in the literature, policies and practices across countries from those advocating assimilation as a path to integration to those indicating that integration is multi-dimensional and at least two-way process involving complex dynamics between immigrant and host communities (Wong and Tezli; Spencer and Charlsey, 2016). Thus in contrast to assimilation approach to integration as one-way trajectory to integration and cultural assimilation of the minority into a majority (host society) largely exercised in the United States and some European countries (Rudiger and Spencer, 2003) for example, recent research, policy making and practice underline more complex

<sup>1</sup> According to Lukic (2016) 'migrants who feel they lack the social or human capital to move straight to their final destination move to a country near to their final destination where they have some social capital and where they hope to build up the social and human capital that will enable them to move on to their final destination.'

processes at play. Integration is neither one-way nor linear trajectory. Nor is the balanced process (Wilkinson, 2013). The integration process engage not only the immigrants but also other residents of the community including **institutional structures from local to national level**. This interaction is fundamental to the outcomes of integration (Spencer and Charsley, 2016).

While many research and analysis still focus on the side of immigrant engagement needed for meaningful integration, there has been little discussion about host society engagements, their communities and institutions as they also have an important role to play in the outcomes of integrational processes. **This analysis therefore takes the outlook to integration processes via investigation of institutional and policy perspectives and practices in the host society**. As Heckmann (2006) argues, ‘integration research must not only be on immigrants, but also on natives and the openness of their institutions’.

Moreover, integration processes are also seen as two-way in the sense that they may well be advanced in one social sphere and reversed in another. For example, a migrant or refugee may be well integrated into the labour market but at the same time excluded from the local community, lacking bonds and bridges for positive outcomes of meaningful integration.

There is thus no ‘full’ integration, or no ‘integrated and fully cohesive society’ but rather an ever evolving and reversing process (Spencer and Charsley, 2016). The process that is uneven and can result in significant success in some domains but also failure in others (Wilkinson, 2013). Hence, **integration is not a single process but it spreads across a number of domains**. As Spencer and Charsley argue that the categorization of domains in the literature often find a common ground (2016). First, *structural* domains that entail integration in the education, housing, health and labour market; *social* that refers to social connections and the fabric of the society; *cultural* domain that concerns changing values, attitudes and behaviour; *civic and political participation* in community life and democratic process, and the domain of *identity* which comprise development of shared identity and the sense of belonging (2016: 5). Many factors bolster or impede integration processes across the domains. These factors range from **facilitators** such as language and cultural knowledge to **barriers** such as discrimination, or restrictions to civic participation for example (ibid.). Among these factors, proposed by Spencer and Charsley (2016), we can distill *opportunity structure in the society* and *policy interventions* as an angle of introspection relevant for this current study.

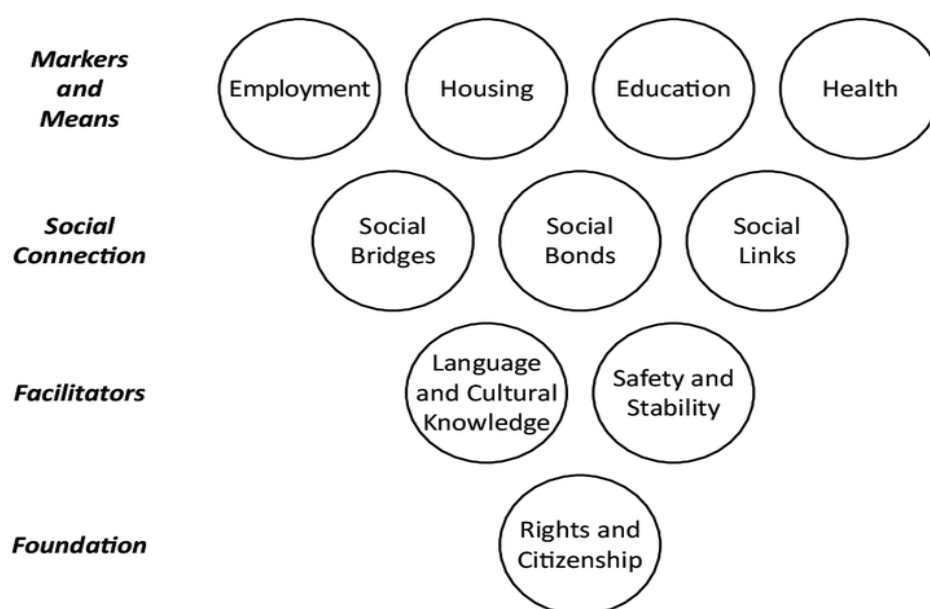
Namely, *opportunity structure* in the society and related policy interventions are considered key to integration. For example *opportunity structure* may refer to the position at the labour market, housing and health sectors

and is strongly related to *policy interventions* that address these structural issues (ibid.). *Policy interventions*, local or national, those of mainstream and/or integration policies, define the approach to integration, its facilitators and barriers. Policy may increase opportunities for integration in labour market, education or housing, or may restrict opportunities for participation in certain integration domain.

The conceptual framework for integration that has (rightly) the most popularity amongst policymakers is the one developed by Ager and Strang (2004; 2008). Their integration framework, in fact duly brings together the theory and practical notion of the integration. This is why it is well used in developed countries' immigration and integration policies. For the purpose of this study authors in great part relied on this framework taking into account specific contextual setting and the focus of the research – *structural opportunities* and *policy interventions* (Spencer and Charsley, 2016).

Ager and Strang (2008) differ among four domains of integration: *markers and means* (employment, housing, education, health); *social connection* (social bonds, bridges and links); *facilitators* (language and cultural knowledge and safety and stability); *foundations* (rights and citizenship). See Figure 1.

Figure 1. A conceptual framework defining core domains of integration



Source: Ager and Strang, (2008: 170)

*The Foundation* domain reflected in the rights and citizenship makes the initial step in enabling meaningful integration in the social, economic or cultural sphere of a society. Articulating migrants and refugees rights defines the roots of integration policy to which governments are accountable (Ager and Strang, 2008: 175). Legal and citizenship statuses of refugees and migrants (e.g. regular vs. irregular migrants) grant further rights that enable integration in the structural manner (employment, housing, education and health). A spectrum of rights considered may include right to asylum, rights to citizenship, to equality in education, employment, health and housing, rights to family reunification etc. These rights according to Ager and Strang do not define integration but underpin the nature of integration processes themselves.

The question of rights raises the questions of responsibilities of migrants and refugees, institutions (local or national), non-governmental sector and the community. Thus the contribution to integration depends on the rights, responsibilities and practices of all relevant actors in this process. Still, it is the responsibility of the host state to create appropriate legal and institutional frameworks and enable the access to rights of refugees and structural factors to support further integrational processes. Still in many cases access to rights keeps on framing the debates about when integration starts, who is eligible to undergo the processes of integration and does different statuses of migrant population in the host society presume different levels of integration or even allows for integration to begin at all.

Further, in moving the barriers for integration and enabling quality access to spectrum of rights *facilitators* of integration such as language and cultural knowledge including safety and stability are suggested as indispensable ingredients in this process state is responsible for. An ability to understand and speak the language of the host community repeatedly is identified as central to integration – to social connections, economic integration and full participation in the community (Ager and Strang, 2008). Many states organize language classes for immigrants and/or translation of the most important information regarding inclusion in the health, education, housing and labour market which is essential for the initial steps of integration. Thus translation and interpreting in sharing essential information is considered necessary tool to avoid language barriers. Still, as literature largely show the cultural knowledge is valuable aspect that supports integration processes. This includes both migrants' knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, procedures at local and national level, customs and facilities and to some extent it presumes a knowledge of a host community about cultural background of migrants and refugees (ibid.).

Likewise, the safety and stability makes integral part of the facilitators of integration. A sense of personal safety for both host community and migrants is declared to be paramount (ibid.). The studies have shown that there is powerful influence of insecurity to creating the sense of well-being, which in effect undermines the possibilities for further interaction and making social connection into community. The stability of community is affected by the often resettlement of the migrants and refugees but *vice versa*, the high mobility of the population in general in the communities undermined the sense of community at large. With reference to the stable access to public services, instability in terms of often resettlement, diminishes possibilities for wider integration.

Social connections – bonds, bridges and social links to institutions (and among them), makes one of the key domain in driving the process of integration at the local level. The mutual accommodation at the community level is best seen through the prism of the nature of social connections. Social connections, bonds, within migrants' community enhance prospects of integration by for example participating in the community groups that serves to support refugee and/or migrant population and ease the process of integration in many respects from structural to community integration. Social bridges established with the host community and institutions enable increased participation in the community develop sense of belonging and shared, new identities for both immigrants and non-immigrants (Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Ager and Strang, 2008). Support, contribution and exchange in the neighbourhood is indicated notably significant for enabling social bridges that further extend to participation in education, employment and other structural levels of integration. In that sense, social links of migrant population with relevant structures of the state and among state structures in relation to implementation of the integration policies represent an additional ingredient for integration processes. In achieving functional links that enable equal access to rights it is necessary to unblock information sharing and communicational channels between actors in these relations for better understanding of rights and responsibilities and their implementation. In this manner, the capacities of a system to support integration plays an important role. These range from financial and technical capacities, human capacities and human capital, organized multisector coordination and information sharing as predispositions for further structural integration in the structural domains or domain of *means and markers* – employment, education, health and housing which are repeatedly central issues in analyses of integration process.

In the literature the most prominence was given to employment as a mean and marker of integration, but often with the reference to barriers to employment such as non-recognition of the qualifications and previous work experience which often results in consequences such as underemployment of this population category (OECD,

2018; Ager and Strang, 2008). In this vein, vocational trainings and further (in)formal education may serve as instruments of integration in this field (Duke et al, 1999).

While education improves possibilities for employment for adult migrants and refugees, for children it is central place for integration in various aspects – learning language, sharing culture and being structurally included into the society. Likewise, school has important role in establishing relationships that foster integration (Ager and Strang, 2008). However, the integration in schools often fails to afford adequate host-society language learning support, or is unable to prevent social isolation of refugee and migrant children including the lack of information about the education system (Ager and Strang, 2008; HAYS and Kirby, 1998).

Access to health care indicates interaction with the key state service. Integration in this sphere is a key for physical and mental well-being including community well-being at large. However, lack of information sharing, understanding of the particular policies in this domain from both parts, institutions and migrants, may prevent effective integration in health system.

Finally, the features of migrants and refugees housing impact integration in various ways. For example it is well confirmed that the housing has enormous effect on the migrants' and refugees' physical and psychological well-being and establishing functional safe and stable neighbourhood relations (Sholten et al, 2017, Phillips, 2006). Thus the nature of integration is obviously impacted by determined housing models and capacities of institutions for their implementation.

In direct relation to the process of integration are further the question of *when integration starts*, inspected via policy and practice lenses, including *how specific national and/or local context impact this process*.

Although the integration in policy and formal terms begins once the status to refugees and/or migrants is granted, the literature indicates that the process of integration begins upon arrival of migrants in the host country. As a social, cultural, economic and legal process it cannot be bounded by the formal status acquiring stages (e.g. Strang and Ager, 2010; Sholten et al, 2017; OECD, 2018). Moreover, with regards to temporal dimensions of integration, it should not be regarded as possible only for those who intend to settle in a long term or have acquired legal status, but should also include all those residing in the country irrelevantly of their status, short or long term intention of residing in the country (Spencer and Charsely, 2016). Therefore, in this study, **we regard at the integration process beginning at the point of migrants/refuges registration by the border police and upon their first arrival to Serbia.**

## THE INTERDEPENDENCY OF THE CONTEXT AND CONCEPT OF INTEGRATION

The process of integration is highly context-dependent (e.g. OECD, 2018; Sholten et al, 2017; Spencer and Charsley, 2016; Strang and Ager, 2010; Castles et al, 2001). Many factors impact upon this interdependency including social and economic context in the country and locally, culture and values, relevant migration policy, the level of development of integration policies and the level of institutional mechanisms developed both at national and local levels. Hence, place of integration matters, bringing various opportunities and drawbacks resulting in different integration processes in different contexts (Spencer and Charsley, 2016).

Serbia has never had experience with mass migration flows from Middle East, Africa, or Asia, before the year of 2015, with exception of refugees from the former Yugoslavia (during 1990s) and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kosovo during 1999. Since May 2015, Serbia has been facing an unprecedented refugee crisis (EC, 2017) as stated in the previous sections (see Background information on migration flows).<sup>2</sup> Yet, developments in 2017 show no specific signs of repeating 2015 migration crisis since the number of migrants and refugees (with legal and irregular statuses) stabilized while their stay in Serbia prolonged with prospects, for some, to be permanent. Still, there is constant flow of migrants and continuous trend in numbers of those entering Serbia, while exiting and moving forward became harder, leading to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees staying for much longer time in Serbia than before. Considering wider migration flows, a significant number of migrants and refugees will succeed in coming to Europe while a number of them will, as expected, permanently remain in Serbia (Vuletic et al, 2016). Faced with new challenges, without capacities to deal with increased migration trends, system continued to function in “crisis” mode, approaching it from emergency perspective and neglecting integrational needs. For these reasons it has become increasingly important lately to assess, analyse and yield researches to support policies and practice on different aspects of integration of refugees and migrants in Serbia and therefore to conceptualize integration in specific Serbian context.

As of 2014, there is an augmenting number of researches, policy analysis and public discussions about migrant and refugees’ integration in Serbia that can be thematically classified in the following clusters<sup>3</sup>: foundational aspect of integration such as **rights of migrants and refugees** in general and in specific fields of education, employment, health and housing (e.g. Vukašin et al, 2015; Petrović, 2017; Smilevska Kecheva et al, 2016; Petrovic and Toskovic, 2016; Grupković et al, 2016); public perception on safety and security, or humanitarian and security aspects in public perceptions on migrants and refugees (e.g. CeSID, 2014; Vuletic et al, 2016; Fondacija Ana i Vlade Divac, 2017), integration in cities (e.g. Lažetić and Jovanović, 2018), the role of migrant social networks and transit migration (e.g. Lukic, 2016); local policies and practices of integration with the view to vulnerable groups of migrants and human trafficking (e.g. Moraca, 2014);

<sup>2</sup> In 2015 and in the first quarter of 2016, more than 920 000 refugees and migrants - primarily from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq - passed through Serbia on their way to EU countries.

<sup>3</sup> This classification is based on available researches as of 2014 in the domains of integration of migrants and refugees in Serbia in order to select the main concerns and questions of integration process since the migration crisis.

integration of unaccompanied minors (e.g. Krasić et al, 2017) the role of civil society organizations in integration of refugees and migrants (Group 484, 2016). However, these assessments rarely propose focus on specific integration framework relevant for Serbian context while debating specific themes in relation to integration process in specific sector such as education or labour market for example.

Moreover, while thoroughly addressing legal and institutional frameworks in the domain of asylum and migration, the aspect of **integration** in policy and practice of asylum and migration and interrelated sectors is timidly shown except in discussions that address practices about inclusion in education and labour market particularly. Likewise, analyses that address the issues of migrants and refugees' rights often include only legal analyses lacking evidence of practice of integration in the field.

The importance of the local level integration processes in Serbia has been recognized in the recent available literature too – the local level institutions role and their participation in integration processes, the role of local community and information sharing and communication and participation of the local community in these processes. Still, wider and specific perspective on local policies and practices in migrants and refugees integration are needed as to increase understanding of integration mechanisms in specific local context. This current research addresses some of the above gaps.

## THE APPROACH IN THIS ANALYSIS

This publication (analysis) hopes to offer evidences of the good practices and common challenges for institutional and community actors in processes of integration of migrants and refugees in Serbia in the period of post-migration crisis (the reference year for the crisis peak is 2015). Thus the main research questions are as follows:

- What are the **capacities of local and national institutional and non-state actors** to respond to integration needs and rights of refugees and migrants in Serbia?
- How **policy implementation practices** address and affect integration processes and what is their relation to available capacities of institutions and non-state actors?
- How local community is involved in integration of migrants?

Drawing on conceptual framework of integration developed by Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) discussed above, the study focuses **on the engagement and capacities of institutional structures from local to national levels and the civil society organizations in enabling and affecting integration processes in the context of Serbia during 2017**, simultaneously underlining some of the practices from the Italian integration context. In addition, it looks at implications of policy implementation practices on integration at local level and the ways in which local community is engaging in integration processes.

The discussion in this study entails the following aspects of engagement and capacities needed for the processes of integration from the institutional and policy perspectives: a) the **structural domains**, or means and markers (education, employment, housing and health), b) **foundations** such as rights to access to structural domains including statuses of migrants in these matters, c) social connections in terms of interaction of local community with migrant population via CSOs and d) interaction within institutional realm in form of information sharing relevant for integration and coordination of activities.

## METHODOLOGY

The main methodological approach in this study is a qualitative, an approach that investigates contemporary phenomena within its real-life context. Data collection methods included: a) Desk research; b) Case study research: focus groups and individual interviews held in Serbia and Italy, c) Asylum Protection Centre's multidisciplinary mobile teams' information and insights from the field as well from years of active work in asylum field.

**a) Desk research** encompassed a review of the relevant primary and secondary literature addressing issues of integration processes locally and nationally in different contexts with the focus to Serbian (and Italian) context of migration and integration processes. Desk research entailed the review of conceptual and theoretical frameworks on integration in relation to the migration, review of international and EU policy and practices in the domain of integration of migrant population in the past few years notably with reference to the migration crisis peaking in 2015 and 2016. It encompassed review of available legal databases, relevant statistical sources, and media reports.

**b) Case study research** was based on focus groups with two groups of stakeholders – institutional representatives and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in the field of asylum and migration in five local communities in Serbia and individual interviews with relevant national stakeholders and representatives of international organizations and national NGOs. In addition, individual interviews with representatives of local institutions, NGOs and media active in the fields of asylum and migration have been conducted in Trieste, Italy with the aim to envisage a case of local Italian asylum and migration practices and challenges.

**Focus groups in Serbia** are designed as to be implemented in five local communities that have experience with migration and asylum having asylum centres and reception centres established in their communities. The focus

group took place in Lajkovac, Loznica, Subotica, Preševo and Belgrade from May 2017 through July 2017. In each local community two focus groups are envisaged to be held – with representatives of local institutions in the system of migration and asylum and local NGOs active in the field. However, response rate of local NGOs to participate in the focus groups was moderate which at the same time implicates the level of their involvement in local integration practices. The participants in the focus groups from the institutional sphere were mainly representatives of primary schools, health care, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, social protection services, national employment service – local branches and representatives of the local self-government – thus those who makes integral part of the structural domains of integration. In total, 9 focus groups were held (2 in Lajkovac, 1 in Loznica, 2 in Subotica, 2 in Preševo and 2 in Belgrade) with 34 participants in total – 25 form the ranks of institutions and 9 from the NGOs.

Interviews are designed as to address national but also local level issues in the domain of policies, institutional capacities, coordination and cooperation in the system of asylum and migration. Considering different mandates of selected interviewees and their institutions in the system of asylum and migration, interview agenda was adjusted to the particular mandate and practice of the institution interviewees represented. In total, 15 interviews were conducted between June and December 2017 in Belgrade.

Individual interviews were held in Trieste, Italy with locally engaged actors in the processes of asylum, migration and integration in December 2017. In total, 9 interviews were held on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> December.

The sampling procedure for participants in focus groups and individual interviews both, within the respective group of stakeholders, was informed by two, mutually complementing, sampling techniques. Firstly, the purposive or *targeted selection* of key local institutional informants and relevant civil society organizations active in the field was used, in order to identify individuals who were able to provide detailed insight into issues of interest for the study. Secondly, the *snowball* method was used as a sampling technique to further select participants by asking key informants to recommend other potential respondents mainly for individual interviews.

Focus groups and interviews were semi-structured in order to harvest copious answers relating to the informant's standpoint. This type of interviewing technique was used because it allowed flexibility, balanced by structure and quality of data obtained.

The interviews, and focus groups both in Serbia and Italy, were recorded and transcribed and used for analysis along with a reviewed documentary sources. The analysis of data involved thematic categorization and coding and identification of new themes and codes that were not covered by the predesigned interview/focus group schedule.

c) **Asylum Protection Center's multidisciplinary mobile teams' information and insights from the field** were gathered through analysis of field reports in 2017. Moreover, years of experience and built expertise of Asylum Protection Center in field of asylum and migration contributed significantly to the development of study.

The next sections of this analysis will address legal and institutional framework of asylum and migration systems in Serbia (and with the reference to Italian system) inspected through the integration concept lenses.

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## INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK: RIGHT TO INTEGRATION

In the Serbian legislative framework, the right to integration is exclusively related to persons who have been granted asylum, in the scope of refugee protection, and as such is explicitly envisaged in the Asylum Act. Under the same law, no other categories of persons are entitled to integration, nor are persons who have been granted asylum in the scope of subsidiary protection. In that sense, integration is understood as inclusion of refugees in social, cultural and economic life in Serbia, as well as assistance in order to enable refugees' naturalization in Serbia. (RS Law on Asylum, Official Gazette No. 109/2007, Article 46).

The 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees of the United Nations, ratified by Serbia as a binding international source/legal act, provides in Article 34 that States parties to the Convention should enable assimilation and naturalization of refugees, with particular efforts to accelerate the process of naturalization and to reduce, as much as possible, the fees and expenses of that proceeding. (FNRI – International Agreements and Other Agreements, No. 7/60).

According to the newly adopted Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection (adopted in 03.04.2018.) and which will apply from the beginning of June this year (03.06.2018.), the right to integration is guaranteed in addition to refugees and all other persons granted asylum protection, which means that the scope of its holders has been extended to subsidiary protected persons (persons who have been granted asylum in the scope of subsidiary protection), unlike the current Asylum Act (Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, Official Gazette No. 24/2018).

Although notion of integration was initially regulated by Law on Asylum and Positive Regulations, in rather vague and general manner, more precise definition of the concept and elements of integration came after more than 9 years since the adoption of the Asylum act with the adoption of the Regulation on Integration (Decree on the manner of inclusion in the social, cultural and economic life of persons who have been granted the right to shelter Official Gazette No. 101/2016).

However, even with the existing regulation, little has been done in terms of further elaboration and specifying of the concept of integration as a viable concept that would be a rational and expected completion of the asylum procedure for all those who have grounds to obtain asylum in the country and remain in Serbia. The Regulation on Integration itself is rather concise, defining more precisely integration process: full and timely information sharing on rights, opportunities and obligations, learning Serbian language, learning about history,

culture and the constitutional order, assistance in inclusion in the education system, assistance in the realization of the right to health and social protection, assistance in access the labour market (Decree on the manner of inclusion in the social, cultural and economic life of persons granted the right to asylum, Official Gazette No. 101/2016).

What is missing is definitely a clearer and more detailed refinement of the integration assistance itself, means of providing support and assistance, determining the specific roles and responsibilities of all actors involved in supporting integration, the way of monitoring integration process, communication and coordination of actors in charge of implementing concrete support activities.

Inclusion in the social, cultural and economic life of persons under the Decree is provided by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, which according to the Law on Migration Management is in charge of determining and undertaking measures for integration of persons in accordance with the Law on Asylum (Law on Migration Management, Official Gazette. No. 107/2012, Article 10) and the newly adopted Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection (Official Gazette No. 24/2018).

In order to implement activities aimed at inclusion in the social, cultural and economic life of refugees, the Commissariat shall develop an individual integration plan, for individual person or family, for a period of one year. The integration plan contains information relevant for making decision on the type and scope of assistance to be provided and other information of importance for proposing appropriate activities.

The Commissariat regularly monitors the implementation of the integration plan and, if necessary, proposes its amendments. The relevant center for social work, educational institution, National Employment Service and health institution participate in preparation of integration plan, as well other bodies and bodies of the local self-government unit, if necessary, considering the personal characteristics of the refugee.

When designing an integration plan, the Commissariat can be assisted by associations that have experience in providing legal and psychosocial assistance to different categories of migrants. The Commissariat is announcing a public call for the selection of associations that can help in preparation of the integration plan. The criteria of selection of association shall be determined by the Commissioner, with the previously obtained consent of the Asylum Office and the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society. (Decree on the manner of inclusion Official Gazette No. 101/2016, Article 9)

When it comes to assistances provided by Regulation on Integration, they are divided in 6 elements: full and timely information sharing on rights, opportunities and obligations; learning Serbian language; learning about history, culture and the constitutional order of Serbia; assistance in inclusion in the education system; assistance in the realization of the right to health and social protection; assistance in access the labour market.

Full and timely information on the rights, opportunities and obligations includes information about refugee's rights, opportunities and obligations provided through information material in printed or electronic form, which is published on the website of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. Information material itself is prepared by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration in cooperation with the relevant ministries and relevant institutions, in whose jurisdiction are the activities related to realization of the rights of persons granted refugee status, in a language understandable to that person. The material should contain information on the rights, duties, employment opportunities, education and personal training, as well as information on existing programs and projects intended to include these persons in social, cultural and economic life. At the request of a refugee, the Commissariat is obliged to provide all relevant information verbally. (Decree on the manner of inclusion in the social, cultural and economic life of persons who have been granted the right to asylum, Official Gazette No. 101/2016, Art. 3)

The general comment is the neglect of direct interaction and oral sharing of information, except on the explicit request of the person itself, but reduction to an alienated way of getting information and facts through written materials. The question remains how written information is going to be disseminated further and shared among users, and also sharing of electronic materials for people who do not have internet or do not have devices to be able to access them.

Learning the Serbian language and letters is provided to persons who have been granted refugee status and are not included in formal education in Serbia, those who attend regular schools and to persons older than 65 years of age. The scope of language teaching implies 300 school lessons during one school year organized by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, via engagement of foreign language schools, regular schools or organizations/associations, no later than two months after the decision on granting refugee status becomes final. However, unreasonable non-attendance to the classes in the period determined by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration serves as a reason for denying support in integration. There is no ratio for this provision, having in mind that sanctions for missing support programs should not be denial of assistance in integration, since integration is not only in the interest of the refugees themselves, but also of the wider social environment

where they are located and the very country in which they should become its citizens through the process of naturalization. Likewise, the question of defining justified reasons for non-participation in the program arises, since it is not clearly and precisely set out in the regulation itself. (Decree on the manner of inclusion in social, cultural and economic life of persons granted asylum, Official Gazette No. 101 / 2016, Article 4)

Learning of culture, history and constitutional order of Serbia includes program of getting to know Serbian culture and constitutional order, proposed by citizens' associations and financed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration for a maximum of 30 hours a year, according to mandatory plan and content which remains to be determined by the Commissioner for Refugees in cooperation with the Ministry of culture and the Ministry of republic administration. Non-attendance of this program carries the same consequences like previous, denial of support and assistance in integration. The effect of such denials remain questionable, having in mind the purpose of motivating and involving refugees in social, cultural and economic life in Serbia, when it is already quite certain that they should become citizens of Serbia through the process of naturalization. Likewise, in this aspect also question of defining justified reasons for non-participation in the program remains. (Decree on the manner of inclusion in the social, cultural and economic life of persons who have been granted the right to asylum, Official Gazette No. 101/2016, Article 5)

Assistance in joining the education system is provided to adult illiterate persons through assistance for inclusion in adult literacy programs in cooperation with the ministry responsible for education. Material and other learning aid is provided to children involved in preschool, primary and secondary education by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration when included in the education system in Serbia in the form of providing textbooks and school supplies, financial assistance for inclusion in extracurricular activities, while assistance in initiating the procedure for recognition of foreign school documents and providing learning assistance is provided in cooperation with schools and associations. (Decree on the manner of inclusion in social, cultural and economic life of persons granted asylum, Official Gazette No. 101/2016, Article 6)

Inclusion in the labour market is provided with assistance in entering the labour market and in obtaining the necessary documents for registration with the National Employment Service and employment agencies; assistance in initiating the procedure for recognition of foreign school documents; while measures to ensure inclusion in additional education and training in accordance with the needs of the labour market, and assistance in inclusion in active employment policy measures are provided in cooperation with the National Employment Service. Training for the purpose of requalification and additional qualification is provided by service providers

that implement certified training programs (Decree on the manner of inclusion in the social, cultural and economic life of persons who have been granted the right to asylum, Official Gazette No. 101/2016, Article 7).

The Commissariat also may provide one-time financial assistance to a person who has been granted the right to asylum in cases of special social or health need, in accordance with the law. One-time financial assistance is provided at the request of a person whose refugee status has been recognized, or at the proposal of a social or health care institution. The procedure for obtaining one-time financial assistance and its amount should be determined by the Commissioner for Refugees (Decree on the manner of inclusion in the social, cultural and economic life of persons granted the right to asylum, Official Gazette No. 101/2016, Article 8).

Despite mentioned, the Regulation leaves a wide space in terms of interpreting the scope and manner of support in the integration process, as well concrete steps and instruments of integration, with only indication of specific goals that should be fulfilled, in relation to each refugee in Serbia. The decree itself leaves asylum seekers and those granted asylum in scope of subsidiary protection, without any assistance, although the same persons have the right to education, social assistance, health care, access to the labour market during their stay in Serbia, which lasts as long as the war/general violence lasts in their country of origin.

Furthermore, the decree does not stipulate the justified reasons for denying further assistance in language and integration if a person is prevented from attending a certain number of classes, while an extremely small number of classes of Serbian culture, history and constitutional order are provided (only 15 times). The individual integration plan does not consult the refugee, and informs him about the final plan in a language that is believed to be understandable. It appeared to be very controversial in practice, having in mind cases when problems in finding or hiring an interpreter coincides with assumption that the person understands other languages of generally accessible interpreters. Also, it remains highly questionable why association chosen to provide integration assistance require the consent of the Asylum Office, which is a party in the asylum procedure whose decisions are often appealed by organizations that provide legal and other assistance in the integration phase.

## BOX 2: ITALIAN CASE – ASYLUM AND MIGRATION SYSTEM AND INTEGRATION POLICY

### Overview of the Asylum Procedure and Reception Services

Italy ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1954 and the associated New York Protocol in 1972. In Italy the right to asylum is regulated by the article 10.4 of the 1948 Constitution (T.O.R.E., 2013). Over the years asylum system evolved through several phases notably starting from 1990s while in 2002 new asylum system has been introduced holding the principle of decentralization of integration processes of migrants and refugees with the first and the second instance reception systems developed (Puggioni, 2017).

Overall, the asylum and migration legal and institutional framework are mainly collected under the three main decrees (D. lgs 140/2005, D. lgs 251/2007 and D. lgs 25/2008) in coordination with the main migration law (L. 189/2002) and based on the relevant EU directives (T.O.R.E., 2013).

The asylum process starts with the application procedure for the recognition of international protection which goes through the several phases. Firstly the request for asylum must be presented to the Border police at the time of arrival to Italy or if applicant is already in Italy to the Police Department-Police Immigration Office. The police is responsible for initiating the administrative process but do not evaluate the application. Secondly, the applications are sent to and evaluated by the Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection which is the body responsible for the asylum granting process. Thirdly, according to legal provisions the hearing is taking place after 30 days application is lodged while the Commission would make a decision up to three days after the hearing. In practice these timeframes are usually not followed and are extended to several months (ibid.).

The cases that involve vulnerable applicants and those that involve detention in a CIE have priority. The hearing comprises of an interview with the applicant that is based on the questions that examine the personal circumstances of an applicant and the reasons to seeking asylum in Italy. If the application met the criteria of the international protection the Commission is issuing one of the three forms of protection: asylum, subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection. If there is no ground for meeting criteria for international protection the request for asylum is denied. The applicant whose asylum request was denied can appeal to the Court within 30 days from the date of the communication of the decision from the Commission (the term for the appeal is 15 days if the person is in former CARA or in CIE). The presentation of the appeal to the Court suspends the decision of the Territorial Commission. If the Court confirms decision of the Commission it is possible to submit an appeal to the Court of the Appeal within the 30 days of receiving the decision from the Court. The final instance in case of negative decision of the Appeal Court is the Supreme Court that which deals only with legitimacy questions and may be sued within 60 days starting from that date on which the appellate court's decision is communicated to the applicant. Throughout the judicial protection process and until a final decision is taken, asylum

seekers are entitled the access to the so-called 'Patrocinio a spese dello Stato', that enables applicants to obtain free legal advice through application to the local council of lawyers with the costs covered by the Italian State. In any case, access to free and qualified legal assistance is usually provided through NGOs and volunteer associations that work with migrants (T.O.R.E., 2013).

### The Reception of Asylum Seekers

Although there is no uniform reception system in Italy it could be argued that reception system is divided between the first aid and assistance reception centres, the first reception centres and the second reception centres. According to the latest AIDA report for Italy (Bove, 2017) LD 142/2015 has amended the Procedure Decree 25/2008 and has repealed the previous Reception Decree 140/2005 (with the exception of the financial provisions), without substantially modifying the previous reception system. Articles 20 and 21 of the Procedure Decree, respectively on reception and administrative detention, have also been repealed by LD 142/2015.

According to LD 142/2015, there is a phase of first aid and assistance, operations that continue to take place in the centres set up in the principal places of disembarkation followed by the first reception phase, to be implemented in existing collective centres or in centres to be established by specific Ministerial Decrees or, in case of unavailability of places, in 'temporary' structures; and finally second reception phase carried out within the SPRAR system (ibid.).

The first reception centres revolve around the type of accommodation for migrants and refugees necessary for the operations needed to define the legal position of the migrants. The first reception is also provided in the temporary facilities (CAS) set up by the Prefecture in cases of increased influx of migrants and due to unavailability of places in the first and the second reception facilities. The accommodation in temporary reception centres is allowed for the period of time strictly necessary for the transfer of the applicant in the first or second reception centres. Namely, the first reception centres encompass the following types of accommodation: First Aid and Reception Centres (CPSA), created in 2006 with the aim to provide the first aid and identification before persons are transferred to other centres, and now formally operating as 'hotspots'; Collective centres previously known as governmental centres for accommodation of asylum seekers (CARA) and accommodation centres (CDA) and Temporary Reception Centres (CAS), implemented by Prefectures in case of unavailability of places in the first or the second line accommodation centres.

The legal provisions do not specify exact time limit for the stay in these centres but do provide specification that applicants stay is dependent on the completion of the asylum procedure or on the time necessary to be transferred in the second line reception structures, the SPRAR. Yet, the lack of places in the SPRAR system affects the duration of stay in the first line reception centres gradually.

The first line reception centres offer basic services to asylum seekers consisted of meals, clothing, accommodation, basic information services including legal assistance, first aid and emergency treatments. Each centre is run by the different entity and the quality of service differs (European Parliament, 2017). The principle of operating the centres include respect for private life, gender differences, health protection services, respect the family unit, specific measures for those most vulnerable among migrant population in centres and ensuring the safety of the centres users. Moreover, asylum seekers can be dispersed in centres along the whole country depending on the available spaces and due to limited places within the SPRAR system may remain in the first line reception phase during the whole asylum procedure. In practices asylum seekers are often moved from one CAS to another CAS in order to balance their presence at the whole country's territory (ibid.). These transfers are decided by the prefecture and cannot be appealed.

In cases in which asylum seeker has breached the law and has committed some of the serious offences such as war crimes and/or offences involving sexual violence, illegal migration, prostitution and the exploitation of minors the reception which in fact presumes detention is available in the Centres for Identification and Expulsion (CIE). Additionally, the law also provides for the detention of those implicated in relatively minor offences such as robbery and drug crime when they are 'caught in the act'. (T.O.R.E., 2013).

The second line reception is provided under the System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR). The SPRAR was established in 2002 by L 189/2002 and represent a publicly funded network of local authorities and NGOs which accommodates asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. The SPRAR is granted access to the National Fund for asylum policies and services for the projects of integrated reception (T.O.R.E., 2013). It consists of the small reception structures where assistance and integration services are provided. In contrast to the large-scale buildings provided in CARA, CDA, CPSA and CAS, SPRAR comprised of over 876 smaller-scale decentralised projects as of February 2018 (Bove, 2017). The second line reception in SPRAR accommodates those asylum seekers that have already formalized their applications. Likewise, asylum applicants already present in the territory may have access directly to the SPRAR centres (ibid.). The reception under the SPRAR system is allowed up to six months maximum period and is guaranteed instantly after the asylum decision had been notified and as soon as local prefecture had verified that a person under consideration has insufficient means of living (Puggioni, 2017). At that point integration process of refugees within the SPRAR system is commencing.

In addition, asylum seekers who have already applied for protection from within the national territory and therefore cannot be hosted in SPRAR venues may settle on their own but are required to inform the police of their every single movement in the country.

### BOX 3: INTEGRATION POLICY AND THE SPRAR SYSTEM

Italian approach to integration of asylum seekers and refugees is highly decentralized comprising features of local context for integration of this population. Namely, at national level the government set minimum standards and the key priorities for integration led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies as a key responsible institution in setting the integration agenda, while on the regional and municipal levels the very policies are tailored to local circumstances. According to Scholten and colleagues (2017), regions and municipalities are the key actors in the implementation of integration policies given their competences in the fields of education, labour market, health care, social policies and anti-discrimination. As of 2014 the Ministry has signed an agreement with majority of Italian regions on Integrated Planning of Integration Policies 2014-2020. As a result Regional Interventions Plans have been drafted that have set the key priorities, models and instruments (in line with local contexts) for integration of migrants in Italy (ibid.).

The SPRAR system makes a central part of the integration framework which is available to the asylum seekers and to those who obtained recognition of international protection, as mentioned earlier. This system offers first instance integration tools for those accommodated in the second-line reception facilities. According to Puggioni (2017), the SPRAR system was set very ambitiously based upon the idea of establishing a public system of 'international protection' in cooperation with local non-governmental organizations and municipalities to develop its own reception and integration plans according to local circumstances. As noted above, the SPRAR is composed of great number of smaller-scale integration projects implemented locally. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs Decree of 10 August 2016 (article 30) the projects cover the following: interpretation and linguistic-cultural mediation service; legal counselling; Italian language courses and enrolment in schools for minors; health assistance; socio-psychological support; support in finding employment; vocational trainings; counselling on the services available at local level to support integration; information sharing about voluntary return programme and information sharing on recreational, sport and cultural activities and events (European Parliament, 2017). Moreover, some of the SPRAR venues are specialised to receive and start integration plans for vulnerable groups such as persons with physical and/or mental disabilities, unaccompanied minors, torture victims, single-parents and pregnant women (T.O.R.E. 2013). In addition, the SPRAR is accessible to refugees and beneficiaries of both subsidiary and humanitarian protection but the admission is subject to availability. As reported in the literature those who enter the SPRAR system are still in minority in comparison to overall needs (Puggioni, 2017). Some figures support this argument. For instance in 2013 against an influx of nearly 43 000 migrants in Italy only around 3000 beds were available in the SPRAR system across the country in total (ibid.), meaning that a great majority of migrants and refugees had no option other than to find solution by themselves.

However, without being registered in adequate housing facilities refugees and asylum seeker cannot be entitled to social protection and health care which enables them to enter integration processes at most basic levels. Thus, anyone without

residence is therefore barred from receiving welfare benefits or registering in the National Healthcare System (T.O.R.E., 2013). In terms of medical care, only emergency care is guaranteed. This is usually one of the main obstacles to the social integration of refugees. Moreover, in terms of **housing** as a structural level of integration of migrants, the issues emerges in post-reception phases. Namely, after six-months spent in SPRAR or other reception centres refugees and migrants are left without any assistance in because there is no specific policies concerning access to housing. Yet, different NGO initiatives partially fill this void in terms of support in finding accommodation for refugees. On the other hand increased discrimination of refugees on the housing market in Italy prevents from integration in this sector too. As a result a vast numbers of refugees live in informal settlements across the country (Scholten et al, 2017).

As of August 2016, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a decree to better facilitate the accession of municipalities to the SPRAR system which should impact increased engagement of municipalities and NGOs in the SPRAR. Presumably, this will positively impact the integration processes at local levels notably in terms of housing and related medical care.

In cases refugees and migrants are registered in the population registry and the list and have proper residency registered the integration in **healthcare** and **education** is granted upon the same rights as for Italian nationals. Asylum seeking children and those obtained the status have access to the same public schools as Italian citizens and are entitled to the same conditions and assistance as Italian citizens. This means that they are automatically integrated in the National Education System (ibid.). Integration in education does not foresee preparatory activities for the inclusion in education. Still as Italian education system envisages some degree of autonomy, the schools in some cases organize additional courses for migrant children in order to better facilitate integration. As of 2015 universities in Italy opened its doors to migrants too as a result of cooperation and implementation of initiatives for integration in higher education with relevant NGOs.

Integration in the **labour market** is allowed after 60 days from the moment of lodging asylum application (LD 142/2016). Yet the law does not allow for stay permit to be converted into a work permit in situation an asylum seeker finds a job. Additionally, asylum seekers accommodated in the SPRAR centres have access to various vocational trainings and language courses which increases their possibilities to find a job. Yet, as in Italy the unemployment rate is high chances of getting employment for this population are generally low. In addition, those who are looking for the first job are not entitled to the social assistance. However, as of 2015 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies launched couple of initiatives that introduce activation measures for labour market for nearly 2000 refugees and asylum seekers within SPRAR that include mix of active labour market policy services and improving individual skills to increase employability (Scholten et al., 2017). In addition to introducing labour market activation measures, the voluntarily work of refugees in local communities emerged as a practice as of 2014 (ibid.). Asylum seekers in Italy can undertake volunteer activities in favour of the host community which undoubtedly facilitates integration through direct contact with local community while making contribution to it.

Finally, developing connections with the local community and taking part in the community life is facilitated through participation in sports and cultural activities. For instance, the agreement between Italian Olympic Committee and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy have been signed with the aim to promote integration through positive values such as respect, diversity, co-existence and anti-discrimination (ibid.).

In sum, in contrast to Serbian case, the integration process of migrants and refugees in Italy is structurally based on the premise of contextualization of integration to local needs and tailoring local projects of integration implemented in coordination between local government and relevant local NGOs funded by the government through municipalities that have applied to be included in integration programmes notably through the SPRAR system. Thus the role of coordination and networking among local actors is key to fostering integration processes locally while committing to the same aims in integration processes at local level. However, after the initial period of implementation of integration measures undertaken within the SPRAR system, the post-SPRAR integration is mainly unregulated and left to be sole responsibility of the migrants and refugees. This fact calls for further strategic plans in the domain of integration of all categories of migrants to be set locally and nationally. In Serbia as we could see, integration is led by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, a national body that locally is establishing networks of cooperation with local institutions and various NGOs in fostering integration processes. Such model is applied in the majority of asylum/reception/transit centres at local level. Besides, a number of NGOs in Serbia are acting in favour of fostering integration processes independently of the government through various projects and initiatives.

Besides and in contrast to Italian case, in Serbia integration plan can be designed only for those who were granted international protection. Yet, the new Asylum Law (to be implemented as of June 2018) previews that the holder of subsidiary protection are entitled to enter integration process led by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.

In Italy as in Serbia migrants and refugees are entitled to health care services and primary and secondary education in the same manner as nationals of the countries. Yet, in Italy full range of health care services may receive only those with valid address and status. In Serbia in contrast to Italy, inclusion in education is fostered by the formal and informal supporting initiatives organized by the state and the NOGs.

Moreover, while in Italy integration in the labour market is possible after 60 days of lodging application for asylum, in Serbia the integration in labour market may commence only after 9 months of lodging asylum application. This measure leaves the vacuum in comprehensively approaching to integration processes. On the other hand this vacuum may be used for engagements in the local community, volunteering and participating in local sports and cultural events as Italian case portrayed.

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## FINDINGS: CHALLENGES FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND RESPONSIVE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTIONS IN INTEGRATION PROCESSES

The nature of integration process is dependent upon the context of multi-faceted, comprehensive legal and institutional frameworks. Therefore, the levels and characteristics of integration are directly impacted by policy implementation at local and national levels comprehensively and in different domains of integration in a host country. As such policy and institutional frameworks and their implementation practices represent the foundation for integration or in other words they shape the *opportunity structure* for integration in the host society. Thus, the investigation of the relevant *policy interventions* that in fact define the approach to integration, the barriers and facilitators including the features of *opportunity structure* for integration of migrants and refugees seems highly relevant. This chapter will address findings of the research in the domains of the approach to politics of integration, policy gaps and interventions, including most

common challenges related to the policy implementation, capacities of relevant institutions to effectively implement existing policies, including the nature of social connections at multiple levels of policy implementation in the domain of integration manifested through the mechanisms of coordination, cooperation and responsible information sharing.

## THE POLITICS OF MIGRANTS' INTEGRATION IN SERBIA

The premise for implementation of the asylum/integration policies by the institutional actor's active in the field, at both local and national levels, is strongly related to the understanding of the politics of asylum, migration and integration, along with a comprehension of policy framework, institutional mandates and roles. This further affects the practices in existing policy implementation and points to the most repeating challenges to be addressed in order to foster the integration of migrants and refugees in different structural domains including local community.

In Serbia, according to testimonies of interview and focus groups respondents, institutional representatives and civil society organizations (CSOs) active in the field of asylum, migration and integration, the politics of migration and integration of migrants and refugees is not clear and/or is absent. In that regard, the responsible institutional actors at the local and national level are confused and in most cases misinformed about the processes of integration as the logic of the very system and the state's approach to integration is not in majority of cases comprehensible. Although Serbia has developed policy framework for integration of this population group as a part of the activities needed to be implemented for the Action plan for the *acquis* Chapter 24, it is still in its naissance phase and require further development especially to fit the local context. Moreover, according to field reports the system of asylum, migration and integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees is under the pressure of rather confusing political approach that includes *ad hoc* and rather emergency responses to this issue, than long-term solutions aimed at building sustainable system of integration.

Within the all groups sampled, as well data and insights from the field of multidisciplinary mobile teams of Asylum Protection Center, it is shown that the politics of migration is not transparent, clear and in consequence not applicable in the real context. As the interview respondent from the Asylum Protection Centre reported:

*(...) What does this system look like, who makes decisions, what does it all look like when they make decisions, it is a big question, everyone is trying to [understand] it, everyone, how are decisions made in the field of migration? Who is the one who forms the migration policy? We have a general strategy which is nothing, so there is nothing, but also some conclusions of the migration management body, but it is all at the level of ad hoc and at the level of short-term immediate reaction, no plan, no strategy, no serious thinking. (...) And now it's a big question, everyone is interested in catching it, what, when it's not written,*

*there is no plan, who is the one who makes decisions at the high level: we will open so many centres, they will be here, we can accommodate so many people, these people should be in the process, these should not, we will return these ... Anything at that basic level to some more complex things, there is no such thing. (...) There is no expert body, no knowledge ... It is left to individuals to make decisions. (APC interviewee)*

It was further reported that there is a trend of riding on the wave of the so called 'transit' migration flows politics in Serbia by the institutional representatives, which in essence are not committed to meaningful integration processes, justifying this attitude by the fact that people have intention to move forward and not stay in Serbia. This attitude is especially problematic in cases where a person is granted a refugee status:

*(...) When we talk about the integration of asylum seekers, I think that the biggest problem arises because we are so kind to those who transit here or stay temporarily, or do not have status. But the question is what happened to the persons who received asylum in 2008, when the new law came into force, because we are obliged by law to integrate them. (...) The question is how much of this is happening in practice and whether it works properly, because I just think that those people who have decided to stay in Serbia and who are legally under the protection of Serbia, did Serbia provided for them as much as they need . I don't think that's exactly how it should be. (Interviewee Adra)*

The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (CRM) as the main responsible body for the integration of migrants and refugees confirmed that **'transit' character of migration** in Serbia affects their work and approach to integration, but that they had a clear message from the Government about strong commitment to integration processes of migrants and refugees:

*Interviewer: And did you have a clear message from the Government, the state? In the sense that they are for that policy, admission, inclusion of these people...*

*Respondent: Well, that was never a question ... And now is it because it is known that these people do not want to stay in Serbia, at least not in the long run and not of their own free will, really most of them ... A small number of them, probably you know how many received protection in Serbia in the end, even those who received protection are trying and finding ways to go further. Not because they are not well accepted here, but primarily because of the bad economic situation and that...*

Still, in the field it is shown that there is no intention of CRM to put effort in developing integration mechanisms, although they should be leading actor in this field. Quite the opposite there is impression that their intention is to keep migrants,

asylum seekers and refugees “on the move”, directly and indirectly preventing them to get in contact and integrate into local communities.

As reported in the focus groups and interviews, the state representatives consider integration as a process that cannot be implemented in the circumstances of limited stay in the country and in the context of high fluctuation of migrants in Serbia. While this could be somewhat understood in the midst of 2015 migration crisis, in 2017, when the number of migrants stabilized and their stay in Serbia gradually prolonged, this cannot be taken as a valid argument. This only confirms the disputable level of preparedness and commitment of the government and institutions to duly implement integrational policy framework and to fill the policy gaps with new solutions to bolster the processes of integration, notably at local level.

Equally, a number of focus groups respondents from the ranks of institutions locally mandated for integration processes, confirmed that politics of migration and integration is based on the premise of short stay and ‘transit’ character of migration in general, thus leaving no space for integration processes:

*Migrants have not been talked about that much, because it is known that at least 95% of all those who are here have stated in a police survey that they do not want to seek asylum here. Therefore, it is not realistic to expect that there will be a significant number of those who would choose to stay here to seek asylum, but also of these remaining perhaps 2, 3, and 4% who may formally seek asylum here. Calculate that at least half or more at some point later will only continue, because seeking asylum is only one tactical option, to buy more time, to exercise some rights that as invisible people in the waiting room for Hungary, which we have now turned a little, do not have any special other rights such as when he submits an application, so if 9 months have elapsed from the formal submission of an asylum application in Serbia, they have the right to be employed and to register with the labour office. (Focus groups with institutional representatives, Loznica).*

Furthermore, while representatives of the state bodies often positively refer to integration policy approach as functional underlining ‘humanitarian approach’ to the migrants and refugees reception and integration, some state and a majority of the interviewed CSO actors strongly confirm **unregulated character of policy framework and absence of the clear vision of the migration politics** and policy framework for integration of migrants and refugees in the specific Serbian context that cannot be supported by the ‘humanitarian approach’ platitude.

In that manner, the member of Group 484 indicated the following:

*But that the state must first agree with itself, discuss through all the levels at which it operates, what they want from the integration process. How they see the integration process, how they see the process,*

*the first step, how they see the migration management process. And then at that level when the guidelines are clearly defined, with clear instructions. Because, the sentence that "all persons who enjoy international protection in RS have the right to free primary and secondary education" means nothing for the local self-government in Bogovađa. (...) Essentially what is important to understand, we need to regulate our migration management system, regardless of fluctuation. Simply, the migration management system is important because of us as a state. It is part of economic strategies, part of development strategies, security strategies, and fulfilment of human rights obligations.*

Besides, in order to delineate the course of integration politics and further regulate policy framework in general, there is a need, including political and policy commitment, for regulating statuses of relatively high number of irregular migrants in Serbia, as status is basis for further steps in integration and defines scope of rights in this aspect person is entitled to.

## LEGAL STATUS OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES AS INTEGRATION PRECONDITION AND REPERCUSSIONS ON THE LOCAL SYSTEM OF ASYLUM, MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

The emerging issue that was widely discussed at the interviews and focus groups and in relation to undefined politics and policy framework (and their implementation) is the legal status of migrants, precisely the position of irregular migrants, those who did not express the intention for seeking asylum, and whose number in Serbia in 2017 was significant, as well those who try to cross the borders and then are pushed back to Serbia - they all fall into the group of migrants whose status is considered irregular. In these circumstances, lack of responsibilities, political will and capacities, strengthen the strategy of the relevant state institutions in asylum and migration system not to be responsive in resolving the position of irregular migrants and keep them on the move, instead using the set of the regulations such as temporary protection mechanism, which have their place in the existing legal framework (Article 36, the Law on Asylum) to deal with this issue. Although the politics towards this group of people is wrapped up in a 'humanitarian' approach, tolerating migrants' irregular status in fact speaks for the politics of supporting and accelerating 'transit' migration.

According to a set of interviews held with Serbian CSOs, this issue is persistent and requires relevant actions in the domain of activating mechanisms for access to rights and integration processes:

*There is no I want I don't want, the problem of what you said, transit and temporary integration is a question for those thousands of people some 3,4,5 who are not even asylum seekers and it is now a completely new field because they are not asylum seekers and it is a problem because of a completely new field of law has opened up for you here and that is what to do with migrants who are not asylum seekers, who are not legal here, according to our law on foreigners they are illegal foreigners and (...) in that context as they are on a territory of some countries, you have to provide them with a basic set, primarily to provide economic and social help, but these*

*people have been here for a year or two, they are trying to go they get returned, they are trying to go abroad. It is a very long period, people are tired, they have no more money, they have no more will, they are frustrated, they have had enough of everything ... and that is a big problem, then you allow a completely parallel system to be formed on the black market. (Belgrade Center for Human Rights interviewee)*

Or as a Group 484 representative underlined:

*(...) There is a category of people who are currently both de facto and de jure staying illegally on the territory of RS. They are irregular migrants. (...) It is very important to define their status in RS. Because if their status is defined, then it is clearly defined what their corpus of rights and obligations is. Once the corpus of rights and obligations has been defined, then it is easy to agree on how these specific measures will be applied. (...) You now have a situation in which it is not known who is entitled to what, who is in what status. (...) You have had such a status quo situation of such people here for a long time. Which is not good for the system or for them personally. (Group 484 interviewee)*

Defining the status is one of the preconditions for the integration processes, however those without status may be eligible for integration if the measure of temporary protection is to be applied by the government. Likewise, APC interviewee notes that although in irregular status, some of the migrants are accommodated in governmental asylum/transit/reception centres without being registered. Such politics of accommodation interrupts the politics of migration and asylum and brings a commotion as to who is eligible to what set of rights and responsibilities, and more important huge number of people are by this being kept outside of the system, in grey zone:

*They do not know (KIRS) who is in their centres at what time. This leads to such problems that you have people who are sleeping but are not registered, they are not in the records, and none of them are registered in the correct procedure. (...), all are in the grey zone. Most of them. Completely grey, they have no documents (...) these are people who are not visible to the system. And that is the biggest problem, these are people who do not have a legal basis to stay here. They have no rights because of it. (...) On no grounds. And now that is an important question. What do you do? You here, and that is illegal behaviour, you as an institution, as a system, cannot tolerate the illegal stay of someone in our territory. You can't tolerate him, he can be punished and have a notice to leave the country, he can be deported, he can seek asylum, but he can't be anywhere. (...) But when you are not in that system, does that mean that I should not have rights as a citizen here. (APC interviewee)*

The representative of the Ministry of Interior, the Asylum Office, indicates that the inability of the system to deal with the issue of irregular migrants in Serbia is dependent upon the current asylum, migration and integration politics which goes hand in hand with the principle of upholding 'transit' character of migration while residing in the legal grey zone:

*Interviewer: what about those people who do not apply, but are only registered?*

*Respondent: I really can't answer that question. So those people are placed in reception centres. What is happening to them? They are on some waiting lists for Hungary. The policy of the state is obviously that no one touches them. So the Asylum Office really has nothing to do with them. We prosecute those who want to apply for asylum, and that's it. (Ministry of Interior, Asylum Office interviewee)*

On the other hand, for those who are registered, which means that they expressed intention to apply for asylum, Asylum Office is obliged to organize asylum application submission through interview. This implies further that responsibility for low rates of those who got chance to start their asylum procedures lies in low capacities of Asylum Office.

The issue that the interviewee from Asylum Office further highlighted relates to the high fluctuation of migrants, their repeated returns to Serbia after failing to cross the borders. The interviewee also noted that the very Asylum Office is treating these cases in line with the existing law but as a matter of fact, at the end these cases remain unresolved, again resulting in high number of people that are in irregular status and invisible for the system:

*Great fluctuation. They leave and come back again. Well then, what are they, the same thing we were facing? For example, they repeatedly express their intention. And then, based on the fingerprints, we determine that they are the same people. (...) Then, it is taken over by the department for foreigners, it is in their jurisdiction. It brings them a decision on illegal residence, and ordering them to leave the territory of RS. They cannot leave RS because they have nowhere to go and it is a vicious circle. (...) We act properly, they get a decision on illegal residence and that's it. Now, the fact that the person cannot leave is another problem. Then he is placed in the reception centre. So he is not interested in applying for asylum, which is 99%. And that is that. So it's a vicious circle, but they're waiting for their turn at the border to come out. I think families have some advantage to say and that's it. (Ministry of Interior, Asylum Office interviewee)*

Moreover, resolving strategies for the status of vulnerable migrants and refugees such as single mothers and unaccompanied minors indicate that institutional officials duly implement 'humanitarian' approach while committing to the 'transit' character of migration and tolerating irregular status of migrants:

*Definitely minors have an advantage, mothers with small children whose husbands have left. They went somewhere and now them ... Either they stopped somewhere or whatever. Now, in that sense, they have an advantage when it comes to leaving the country. I mean, how I can tell you. Mothers with children rarely want to stay here if their spouses have already travelled somewhere. Then they definitely go for that family reunion, they are on the waiting lists for Hungary and they will definitely leave. (Asylum Office interviewee)*

Another indicator of supporting transit character of migration is that in reality asylum procedures for unaccompanied minors (UAM), one of the largest vulnerable group of migrants, are slower and longer than for adults. Together with that, here is resistance of Asylum Office to resolve very few cases of UAMs which started asylum procedure, resulting in 0 granted statuses from the beginning of asylum system in Serbia.

Vulnerable categories of migrants with severe physical and mental health problems and with no grounds for being granted asylum also remain in the legal grey zone as the current legal framework does not allow for humanitarian type of protection:

*We have, for example, in Slankamen, we have asylum seekers who had a traffic accident near Nis. I think these are very difficult objects. In the sense that it is very difficult to have a conversation with those people themselves. We, what are we going to do with those people? What are we going to do? Now, Slankamen informed us that they, the rehabilitation in their centre has been completed, and what to do with those people. So they will have to be accommodated somewhere. (...) And they, how can I tell you, have nothing (...) basis to make a positive decision. You simply do not have a basis ... There is nothing ... It should be a humanitarian stay that we do not have regulated. That will be certain with the law of foreigners. And for now, we don't have that as a category. (...) On the other hand, you can't give them a negative decision because you can't make someone who is immobile, like, a decision on illegal, on cancellation of residence, I think?! How, how?! A person cannot get up. In that sense, well, we are facing a problem, we just don't know what kind of protection to give them and how to act. (Asylum Office interviewee)*

In 2017, as the evidence shows, the government did not put an effort to find a solution of the issue of irregular migrants and those with unresolved statuses in Serbia, which significantly contributed to disorientation and lack of clarity in asylum, migration and integration politics including confusion in the approach to this population category in terms of their rights and obligations, especially at the local level. In such circumstances the access to rights and integration processes are

limited to *ad hoc* solutions and unregulated 'humanitarian' approach that is dependent on the individual institutional perceptions, as well as local institutional response translated into a set of actions.

While some of them have access to reception/asylum or transit centres (Belgrade Center for Human Rights interviewee; APC interviewee, Ministry of Interior interviewee), other reside outside the camps in makeshift and informal places, and are totally invisible for the system. Some still have access to emergency medical check or in some circumstances may be received for the regular medical checks if relevant local institutions are willing to deal with the case. Such lack of policy further increases vulnerability of e.g. women, children and especially unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, causing their invisibility within the system, and further increasing their chances for abuse, mistreatment and exploitation.

Still without clear standpoint at national level translated into national legal framework and local policy implementation, the issue of unresolved statuses will remain to undermine asylum and migration system and will overall negatively affect any sort of access to rights including integration processes for this population.

## POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS FOR POLICY INTERVENTIONS IN THE DOMAINS OF INTEGRATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

The integration processes of migrants and refugees are, as we have noted earlier, first and foremost dependent upon institutional structures, the opportunities within them and due policy implementation, while structural barriers and facilitators define the features of structural environment for the integration processes to emerge and develop. In that regard, this research yielded results whose analysis show that the barriers and facilitators in relation to policy interventions and the opportunity structure refer notably to existing **policy gaps and implementation strategies** in general and in **specific sectors and** domains that emerge with reference to local level practices of integration.

It is widely reported that there is a gap in **regulations and procedures at local level that spreads over all structural domains of integration including inadequate existing policy solutions for the local context** of migrants and refugees integration.

Majority of institutional representatives at the local level highlighted the issue of **missing procedures** (and missing knowledge about existing procedures) that burdens policy implementation and relevant solutions in the domain of integration indicating that the institutions themselves lack the flexibility and a lack of implementing policy solutions at the local level. On the other hand, as noted, even existing local policy solutions (e.g. Local Action Plans for Improvement of the Position of Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Returnees under the Readmission Agreement) do not relate to the real needs in the local context, impacting relevant responses to be dependent on *ad hoc* solutions:

*(...) That local action plan, it is at that moment a cross-section of some actions and values. Nobody reads it, nobody looks at it, it's archived, and it's standing there in a folder. When the help of the commissariat needs to be obtained, it is photocopied, attached and we move on. And when a crisis comes, few will take that plan and say "wait, there is a solution on page 27 in the second paragraph." So imagine that. So ... When problems come up, it's just a matter of improvisation. That's why we're just where we are. (Interviewee institutions, Lajkovac)*

Closer interrogation of above matters yielded evidence about specific sectoral issues in policy implementation in health, employment and education domains that will be discussed in the following lines.

## INTEGRATION IN HEALTH

One of the key principle in enabling health care services to migrants and refugees at local level in Serbia is the principle of inclusive provision of health care notably at the primary level. Although, those who are registered should be provided with health care in the local and national governmental institutions in the same manner as domestic population, while those who are not registered are entitled to emergency medical services, in all accommodation centres general practitioners ambulances are open, funded by international organizations. In one hand, it helped non-registered migrants to get access to health care but on the other restricted integration in health, creating parallel and temporary health care system for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. As reported by the majority of research participants in the situations of increasing health needs of migrants in Serbia, their statuses do not represent a barrier to obtaining health care services, which causes both positive and negative practices in health care provision. On the other hand, the lack of institutional health care provision for those migrants residing in makeshift areas, outside of the asylum/transit/reception centres are in some instances replaced by the services of some international organizations active in the field such as Medicines sans Frontiers, Medicines du Mond, Catholic Relief Service, etc.

In terms of implementation of procedures in the area of health at local level, interviewees confirmed that although the Law on Asylum indicates that the integration in health should start immediately after receiving migrants and refugees in one of the asylum/transit/reception centres, this is not always the practice or this practice is postponed for couple of days or weeks after registration in the centre (APC interviewee). Moreover, although a set of regulations define the scope of medical examinations after receiving migrants and refugees at the centres, these examinations in practice often do not abide to full set of prescribed procedures as regulated by the relevant policy framework in this sector.

Furthermore, the results show that during 2017 the primary health care was mainly removed from the local health centres to the asylum/reception/transit centres while in great part being provided by the medical doctors engaged on the projects of international organisations active in this area. This practice in 2017 intensified and actually removed migrants and

refugees presence from the local institutions where they have better chance of integration into the system and into the local community (APC, interviewee). The main arguments in favour of these practices are related to the current capacities in local health centres. In increasing number of cases, as noted by the interview respondents, migrants and refugees are denied access to the local health centres, although they have right to be treated there, supported by the fact that health care is enabled in the asylum/transit/reception centres. Such a discriminatory practise is deepening already existing gap between domestic and migrant population, creating favourable ground for further rejection and intolerance.

Experiences from the field in the local communities show that the provision of secondary and tertiary health care is not without issues. Namely, in the very asylum/transit/reception centres cases indicate that secondary or tertiary care is limited by the fact that engaged doctors in the centres often are uncertain who is eligible to what sort of health care, or who is responsible for covering the costs of secondary or tertiary health care provision to migrants and refugees. In one of the cases, as highlighted by the APC official:

*It was said to the parents of the five year old girl from Afghanistan who suffered from serious neurodegenerative disease that in Serbia she cannot have proper therapy, but after APCs intervention the girl with her mother was received in the hospital and she was provided with the necessary therapy and other orthopaedic aids to which as an asylum seeker she was entitled to. (APC, interviewee)*

Such practice indicates the consistent need for checking in with the health care system, pushing health care staff to recognize its legal obligations, legal provisions and rights to migrants and refugees. With the lack of expertise, finances, and capacity by the state officials and public institutions, the civil society is forced to regularly monitor health care provision in the field and to pursue accountability within the health care system. In most cases, the health care system is not overwhelmed – the provision of health assistance depends solely on knowing and being aware of the legal procedures, as well as willingness of the health care staff. Additional complicating factor is role and attitude of CRM which supports provision of primary health care in camps, and made agreements with local health centres to refer migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to the ambulances in camps. It led to confusion and rejection even in cases of asylum seekers and refugees who are living in private addresses, outside of CRM's centres, when local medical centres referred to CRM explaining that they are in charge of organizing provision of health care services.

Additionally, the findings from the field show that secondary and tertiary health care provision to the migrants and refugees residing outside the asylum/transit/reception centres is only provided in urgent, life-threatening cases (APC interviewee). As mentioned above, the state institutions lack initiative and knowledge of legal procedures on these matters, thus leading to serious slipups in caring for ill migrants, especially women and children. Even though the civil society is forced beyond its legal duties to assist and take over the state's responsibility in matters of health and migrants'

protection, the NGOs are in no legal obligation to do so, thus the continuous integration of migrants and refugees is always under question.

Implementation of policies in the domain of integration in health care system is, as reported, further undermined by the practice of cost covering for the services provision by the local health institutions and issues in immunisation of children and adult migrants and refugees.

It was repeatedly reported that although health care provision costs should be covered from the budget of the Ministry of Health at local level costs are often covered with delays or are failed to be covered at all. There is also a lack of understanding who covers different sorts of costs in health provision. While the expert NGOs, such as APC, greatly contributed in successfully resolving these issues by supporting and counselling local institutions on the regulations implementation at local level, the problem of cost covering is persistent and requires regular follow up.

Additionally, in 2017 the issues in children's immunisation protocols represented a significant obstacle in providing health care for the children. Namely, in the situations in which the history of child's immunisation is unknown, not supported by the valid documentation, the very immunisation in such cases should start from the beginning. Yet, there is a complete lack of such practices as noted by the participants in this research. Moreover as reported by the APC interviewee in some cases in which the history of immunisation is known and supported by proofs, the remaining required vaccination is not provided due to known reasons of their stay having a transit character, lack of vaccines and inconsistency of the health staff itself. On the other hand migrant children born in Serbia undergo immunisation processes from the beginning as the native born children:

*The health system of the Republic of Serbia, on the order of the Ministry of Health, reacts by vaccinating every child born on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. It is from our reserves, they are vaccinated according to our calendar. And those who came and who are somewhere there... The biggest problem is that we do not have any document, health card... (Institute for Public Health of Serbia interviewee)*

As evidence from the field show, such practice is a result of informal agreement made between the major actors in this field at the one of coordination meetings held within the Ministry of Health (APC interviewee). Thus it is not grounded in the formal regulation and their application. In the field, as stated APC official, this agreement is in majority of the cases respected except in some rare situations when paediatrics act in favour of children rather than in favour of informal politics in this field.

## INTEGRATION IN LABOUR MARKET

In this sector the barriers to integration mostly relate to the **missing knowledge of the existing regulations** in the area which affects policy implementation and **practices of inadequate or missing policy implementation that regulates integration of refugees and those seeking asylum**. The first instance issues refer to the lack of experience and due knowledge of regulations of local institutional officials within the branches of National Employment Service notably in the area of the mechanisms for integration of asylum seekers in the labour market.

This particularly refers to the exercise of the rights for those seeking asylum and whose requests for a work permit have not been resolved within 9 months of their submission. The representatives of local branches of the National Employment Service (NES) in majority of cases (Subotica, Loznica, Beograd, Presevo focus groups with institutional representatives) exemplified that they were not aware of such kind of possibility of integration in the labour market:

*We do not currently have any legal and legal regulations that cover this area. Well, we have instructions from our directorate on the basis of which we act, and when their right to asylum in the Republic of Serbia is recognized, then they have the status of foreign citizens. Let me tell you now. And they have all the rights that foreign citizens have on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. In order for us to work with them, they must be given status. (Institutional official, Belgrade Focus Group)*

This indicates that representatives of the local employment service will act only in the cases where asylum status is granted. Such behaviour puts huge barriers to integration of those category of asylum seekers that have a due right to work in Serbia.

Moreover the issue of granting the right to work to the asylum seekers is undermined by the inadequate practices of the institutional representatives such as the Asylum Office, as reported by the APC official:

*The Asylum Office refused to issue certificates that people had been in the asylum procedure for nine months. They refused! So, at our request, "we do not issue because a person does not, in our opinion, have the right to work."*

Another barrier to integration at the employment market concerns the lack of development of subvention measures for integration at the employment market or activation measure to support integration of this population. The official from the local employment service feels that subvention measures for the employment are not in line with the principle of the employment of foreigners: 'At the moment it doesn't go with each other. Foreigners and subventions are appointed for completely different groups.' And continues with the statement that indicates to 'transition migration agenda' approach of institutions to activation of integration measures of this population at the labour market: 'We have to start from idea

that it is a long-term process, whether these people are subject to it, whether their stay in Serbia implies their readiness for that, these are all some points that definitely make it difficult.'

Finally, the lengthy and expensive procedure of nostrification of educational degrees (necessary for further education and better employment chances) of migrant and refugee applicants at the National Employment Services, has been reported in majority of focus groups held with local institutional representatives, as a barrier to the processes of integration:

If it is done in a higher education diploma or high school diploma, it should be nostrified by the institutions of our state. This procedure is quite expensive and takes a lot for higher education institutions, while it is for secondary education institutions at the ministry, and it seems to me that it is somehow simpler. For higher education institutions, it lasts for several months, it is necessary to find a higher education institution that has similar staff and to issue some certificates, which is adequate in our country with those diplomas.

## INTEGRATION IN EDUCATION

As we have seen earlier, migrant, asylum seekers and those granted international protection have the right to be integrated in the education sector under the same set of rights as the citizens of Serbia. Yet, the system for integration of migrant children in primary and secondary education in Serbia is still far beyond from being regulated and functional, as evidence from the field suggests.

The processes of integration of migrant children into the education face numerous barriers amongst which the main refer to the implementation of regulations in the domain of teaching, language learning and documented proofs of former education levels, as well support to children in adaptation and involvement of parents as important factor in the processes of integration in schools.

In the second half of the 2017, a closer regulation of integration of migrant and refugee children has been designed by the Ministry of Education and Science in the form of Expert Instruction for the inclusion of refugee students / asylum seekers in the education system which aimed to closely define necessary steps for the schools in the process of enrolment and inclusion of migrant children in schools. However, the practice shows that there is a great number of practical challenges in implementation of policies in schools. Firstly, the proofs of the former education are mostly missing:

They only have a confirmation - Name, surname, they don't even have a date of birth, only a year, if that's true. Because the right to tell you and it seems to me as if it used to be. And only that, it's a piece of paper where it says what he is called, mom, dad, if mom and dad are there. Nothing about their education, their development. (Local school interview, Krnjaca)

In particular this fact indicates that the role of pedagogue and psychologist tasked with the evaluation of those to be enrolled in school is a crucial step in further integration in class and school environment in general. In some cases where the proofs of former education exist the very process of nostrification of diplomas is lengthy and disrupts the inclusion in the schools:

We send for nostrification, then we wait for something, not known what, so the child is growing up and there is no point for the child to wait for response from the Ministry ... I don't even know if we ever got it. So, in the end, we do it ourselves and somehow fit the child as we can. (Local school interviewee Krnjaca)

Furthermore, the same research participant suggested that activities teachers are expected to undertake in order to include migrant children in teaching process are designed on an *ad hoc* basis and in line with teachers' capabilities and commitment to inclusion including the restrictions in teaching that emerge with respect to the knowledge of foreign languages. Although there is a concrete regulation on designing and implementing **individual plans for support** for every migrant child enrolled in school, the interviewee testified that in practice teachers who are burdened with additional activities are rarely able to constructively approach each migrant child and find the individual solution for his/hers integration in a concrete class and in the school despite the evident efforts they invest in this process:

We made some plan, an assessment, what we can do with the child and then based on that step by step and slowly. It is a huge job for a teacher, they should see now what the child knows, but they do not know the language ... (Local school interviewee Krnjaca)

In addition, a set of regulations and steps in situations when children have already been enrolled in schools in their home countries remain unresolved. For instance, the principle of evaluation of children which is basically descriptive, the way in which reports on their achievements and proofs of being enrolled in schools should be designed, the way in which children are allocated across classes in schools, the number of children per class, etc. For instance, one of the strategies that prevents meaningful integration in the school community is allocation of the group of migrant children in one separate class (Ministry of Education and Science interviewee), which in most cases disables interaction with local children, while organized transport by CRM of migrant children to schools keeps these children out of the local community and diminishes the role of parents in integration processes. These are all the issues that emerge in local schools, additionally confirmed and summarised by the majority of interviewees:

School allegedly wants everything, but the school does not know what to do. They can't provide additional classes, they don't have that obligation, and they don't have instructions... (...) So formally it looks great, we enrolled 150 children, but what about those children. How many children out of 150 have finished school? What diploma did you give those children? Did they speak Serbian? What will these children do next? Will he then enrol in high school? What about children who do not have a nostrified diploma, who cannot get a diploma from

the country of origin? There are such children. How did you test their knowledge and skills? Is that check adequate? (Belgrade Center for Human Rights, Interviewee)

It is important to point out, that although “Expert Instruction for the inclusion of refugee students/asylum seekers in the education system” provides adaptation period from 2 weeks up to 2 months for migrant, asylum seeking and refugee pupils, during which their attendance can be shorten and adapted to their needs and capacities, during whole school year children were attending school for 2 or 4 lessons daily. CRM justified this by organization of transport of pupils (from camps to schools) and inability to modify meal distribution for school children. These technical issues certainly mustn’t prevent integration of children in local schools.

The list of barriers further indicates that in practice significant barrier to integration process in schools is the language barrier such as the lack of practices aimed at learning Serbian as a foreign language which is according to majority participants in this research indispensable step in integration in education. The program for learning Serbian as a foreign language in schools is completely missing despite numerous voices calling for this segment of integration to be involved in school practice formally:

*I think that Serbian language classes should have been organized for those children first. That is the first step, whether at the camp or at schools, but to be really learning a language as a foreign language. Only then should we include them in the classes. The children come in and don't understand. First of all, not all teachers know English. Even when children know English, we can't just ... (Local school interviewee, Krnjaca)*

The representative of the Ministry of Education and Science implies that there is still a long way to regulate this issue in schools:

*Serbian as a foreign language, meaning Serbian as a non-mother tongue, we have standards for that, but Serbian as a foreign language, it's a completely different methodology and a different way of learning, it's accelerated learning of the Serbian language and what the Danish Council funded is that the centre for foreign languages at the Faculty of Philology do something that they thought was something that I don't know what in fact it's just a methodology of learning Serbian as a foreign language and that some contribution to the methodology, is far from the program. It takes at least a year to adopt a program for learning Serbian as a foreign language in schools, because each curriculum is brought through a process that is very long. It is decentralized, that is why it is long and implies that the law for improvement creates working groups - those working groups are made up of you, you and you ... (Ministry of Education and Science, interviewee)*

Moreover, a debate about the relationship between formal integration in schools including formal enrolment *versus* informal education and preparation for formal enrolment in the asylum/reception/transit centres continues. Some Commissariat's officials from the asylum and reception centres are outspoken against integration of migrant and refugee children into formal education as they see a number of obstacles. Firstly, they argue that the transit character of migration cancels the efforts of officials and children in integration into local schools. Secondly, they justify their hard-line approach due to migrants' lack of language knowledge, extensive need for preparation for Serbian schools, inability of schools to deal with administrative issues in relation to integration process, but also availability of teachers in the asylum centres engaged by the international organization projects that may provide some sort of education to these children. Such an approach in the first instance shows that the right to education and formal enrolment in schools is neglected. Secondly, it shows that local institutions, first of all Commissariat for refugees and migration, would rather keep migrant children in the centres and thus disrupt any chances for integration in the local community. Thirdly, the agenda of international organisations to provide informal education in the centres is certainly not the way to pursue integration in education, while on the other hand, the interests of international organisations undoubtedly should not come before the rights of children to formal education in Serbia.

Although informal education is significant in preparation and support to school enrolment and process of adjustment and integration, the formal education is in the foundation of the integration of children in schools and the local community and no alternative should replace such an approach in practice.

Finally, the role of parents in integration in schools practices, as already noted, is largely neglected by the actors in this field. Namely, according to interviewees the engagement into the schools, interaction with teachers and other parents, participation at parents meetings is in great majority of cases inexistent and not supported by the institutional actors (APC interviewee). On the other hand, passive approach to integration in education from the part of the parents themselves has been reported from the actors in this field. The practices of organized transport of children by the Commissariat and certain international organizations from asylum centres to schools further negatively affects the engagement of parents with regards to the processes of integration to schools and interaction with the local community. As acknowledged by a majority of respondents and experts in the field, it would be extremely beneficial for children and their integration, if the parents took a more active role in their child's education. More so, it is of importance to motivate the parents to leave the camp premises, disrupt their daily routine, to encourage their participation and get them out of isolation, but also to provide conditions for that. The children and the parents should be stimulated, encouraged and supported to interact with the local community, to commute together and consequently normalize their lives as much as possible in the given circumstances.

## INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES FOR INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

The processes of migrants' and refugees' access to rights and integration depend on the existing capacities of relevant institutions to implement policies and yield adequate solutions for integration in the local context. The capacity of local and national institutions as Fukuyama suggests consist of different sort of resources (capitals) and notably the degree of professionalization of bureaucratic staff (2013: 16). Further, while capacities of institutions to implement policies and pursue state politics in certain areas of operation may be quantified, the quality assessment of capacities in fact speaks about processes, experiences and needs in the public sector in a certain area.

The research results show that the overall capacities (or capitals) – human, material, physical, social - of institutions to deal with integration processes locally and nationally are weak and rather insufficient. As a way to mitigate this lack of capacities and resources, in a great majority of cases international organizations provide the financial/material, human and/or physical capitals and intervene in the processes of integration of migrants and refugees via capacitating local (and national) institutions. On the other hand such actions yield another set of barriers for the system itself mostly referring to inability of the state to create self-sustainable development and desirable degree of autonomy in pursuing strategic aims in the area of integration of migrants and refugees. Moreover, as it was reported in interviews and focus groups, while the reliance on external funding for integration and provision of support to migrants and refugees of national level institutions such as for example Ministry of Interior, the Asylum Office, Ministry of Education and Science, the Commissariat for Migration and Refugees for instance, enables system to operate in a short run, it on the other hand works against long-term sustainability and resilience of the system to respond to the integration needs with existing capacities. In that regard, the role of local non-governmental organizations, notably those experienced in asylum and migration area, is seen as contribution and relevant for supporting capacity development of local institutions. However, as indicated by interviewees, the NGOs do not have the legal responsibility to take initiative in integration – the state is and always should be the primary provider of such support. As it has been suggested by a number of participants in this research, existing institutional solutions in the multilevel area of integration require restructuring, new mechanisms of operation including new models for interconnecting within this complex structural domain of integration. Lastly, the analysis of research findings points out to the issue of human capacities as the most pressing one, while the physical and material/financial capitals fall in the group of capacities being largely covered by the donations of international organizations which subsequently endanger institutional independence.

The key level of analysis refer to the lack of capacities of the Commissariat for Migration and Refugees (CRM) as the focal body responsible to coordinate and facilitate integration processes at local level. The interviewees made consensus that CRM lacks different sorts of capacities, such as humanitarian attitude, specific knowledge about culture, migration, recognizing, preventing and reacting in cases of violence, abuse, exploitation, knowledge about relevant legislative, skills

for communicating and working with this population and specific vulnerable groups within it (women, children, elderly, mentally and physically ill, etc.), professional education and experience in field of migration management, but also social protection and others, etc. The lack of relevant capacities to adequately implement integration gradually undermine access to rights of migrants and refugees and challenge various prospects for integration locally. To illustrate this, interviewee from the Asylum Protection Centre, the expert organization in the field stresses that:

*They [Commissariat] really don't have the capacity. You may have people engaged but you do not have the capacity. It's ... They made a problem wherever they could. They made it! Not the surrounding environment, not that someone initiated it, but they are the cause of the problem where the solution should be. Now that you have that at that level, you just don't have the capacity. When I say capacities, I really mean primarily professional, not even technical or financial. They already get a lot of money. (...) It is no longer about money. The point is that they can apply the regulation in an adequate way. The point is that they can approach this problem humanely. To treat people in a human way and professionally. To have good personnel solutions. That these people have fixed places, positions. That is the point with that system - those capacities in that sense. () In that sense, the capacities are unused. That system must undergo a complete transformation. That commissariat must be a unifying factor for everyone else.*

In parallel representative of the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights confirmed the statement above by indicating that the Commissariat constrains policy implementation in the domain of integration of migrants and refugees, by lacking relevant capacities on the one hand and by lacking commitment to exercise its mandate on the other hand:

*The Commissariat is not able to appoint one person for that, because the Commissariat is the central body, it was also according to the Law on migration, where integration and the law on asylum are regulated, and they did nothing.*

Additionally, respondents from the ranks of the local institutions imply that some asylum centres (particularly in AC Bogovadja) are not receptive to the idea of increasing capacities, notably in terms of expanding accommodation capacities as this would attain the additional burden for the centres' administration including increased exposure of the local community to migrants' presence. In the sub context, these narratives clearly show that in fact there is no readiness for capacity building as a consequence of rather discriminatory agenda justified by the efforts to keep migrants and refugees invisible to the local community at large 'for the sake of security and local stability' (Focus group institutions, Loznica).

Similarly the narrative of an institutional representative speaks for the above finding as well:

*One of the first actions I wrote in the local action plan was to expand the capacity in Bogovadja, this is how everyone jumped. They wanted to come from Bogovadja to beat me ... What an*

*expansion of capacity, we plan to close it, so that there is no more. The mistake was to open up, let alone expand the capacity. (). And then you get a situation where you can't react at all. That there is nothing you can do. (Institutional official, Lajkovac)*

While there is a general need for increasing capacities of the CRM as the key institutional body in order to address the capacity barriers for integration, other institutions also require substantial investment in all relevant capitals as it was reported. The practice shows that in these endeavours the state institutions in charge for asylum, migration and integration policy in great majority of cases rely on the financial and technical assistance of international organizations active in the field to fill up the needed capacities, which as shown is unsustainable and inefficient in the long run. In addition to CRM and the Ministry of Interior, this is particularly evident in the health care and to some extent in education and social care sectors.

The involvement of numerous international organizations in Serbia via capacitating relevant national and local institutions in the domain of asylum and integration intensified during the 'migration crisis' and remained significant in 2017. Such role of international organizations has largely been manifested within the health sector. In cooperation with local health institutions international civil society organisations invested in human capacities such as for example mobile medical teams, medical ambulances and psycho-social support for migrants and refugees in asylum/transit/reception centres including mental health care. Additionally, these organizations contributed to filling up financial and technical capacities for health care provision by donating medicaments, mobile clinics, sanitary vehicles and other.

The primary health care provision, as it was earlier indicated, is in great number of cases transferred from the local health facilities to the asylum/transit/reception centres. This practice, amongst others, is the result of increasing presence of international organizations ready to support provision of healthcare while simultaneously being unaware of the consequences of externalizing such practice for the integration processes in health care. On the other hand, with increasing presence of non-state health care providers the whole system of health care provision is under the risk of sliding into the slippery ground of unsustainable and fragile system in the long run:

*(...) we are obliged by law to provide health care, independent of the civil sector, I think this is important because - what could be a potential problem of this system, if the system would ever rely on it does not go to safer and more permanent sources of financing, so depending on how much money you have, you do not plan to provide health care all the time. Then when he retired, there were rare cases, to just happen overnight, we are, we have no more money, and we don't work anymore. (...) The goal is to be continuous health care. This is the most important. (Institute for Public Health of Serbia interviewee).*

Moreover, as practice has shown, the externalization and project financing of health care provision in the asylum/transit/reception centres raises the risks of terminating health care provision to the users with the end of the

project and withdrawal of staff and material resources as was the case (APC interviewee). This causes disruption in continuous health care provision, medicaments or transport to the local health centres or hospitals and ability to react adequately with existing capacities:

*We appointed a doctor who for years ... Once a week they worked for several years. However, for a year, the Danish association organized the daily presence of doctors, so they nicely received 1 health clinic, but now it is something controversial, so it is not up to us. Yes, is it funding and so on, so now we are back to the old system of work in the sense that when it comes to organizing examinations, of course it's all those who are there for the first time, who apply, then examinations are organized, (...) An examination is organized at the Banja Koviljača health center. (Institutional official, Loznica)*

Or as representative of the CRM from Banja Koviljaca indicates:

*Somehow we are coping, we are waiting for the Ministry to finally approve the Loznica health centre, to give consent for the employment of a two-member medical team in the centre, which has not been working for a month and a few days now. Here, purely for administrative reasons, it sucks. (...) It is a project of the DRC, the Danish Refugee Council, which can provide salaries by the end of the year. The health centre cannot sign the training for everyone. But I say, the capacities in Loznica for all that ... For us, what is needed the most honestly is health, because you have to have a systematic examination according to the law, everyone who comes for the first time must be examined. It's already a kind of expense.*

These statements indicate that stable and continuous health care provision is endangered by project financing, and that local institutions are not proactive in addressing the risk for the stability of the system and the sustainability of health care in the long run.

However, those who have been involved in the system of asylum and migration from its inception in 2008 and participated in the development of the system in Serbia such as Asylum Protection Centre, clearly indicate that ability of the state to undertake the entire health care provision to migrants and refugees is gradually endangered by the current practice of filling up capacities via project financing and the involvement of international organisations in this field.

Instead, as the same respondent suggests, the role of local civil society organizations that have capacities in form of the expertise and experience in the field of asylum and migration should be recognized as beneficial contribution for the system as is the case in Italy for example and adds:

*We went as legal representatives to social, to this, to that, and as an organization, we did not act as individual lawyers because it is not, our organization then over time just served as one support, a serious support to all these sectors or branches or parts of those institutions that have dealt with this issue (...) Local organizations should be built, exclusively local organizations. (...) Local and also local activist groups, local civilians, humanitarian organizations, students and volunteers. They should be one hand, but not a financial of them [the system]. Rather professional, intercultural professional and monitoring some side, not to go in the wrong direction. (APC interviewee)*

But as research results show there is a lack of local civil society organizations with expertise and practical experiences in this field or determination to be engaged in the processes of integration of migrants and refugees in the local community. This void is to some extent filled with establishment of local branches of NGOs, such as Asylum Protection Centre and field visits of other experienced civil society organizations based mainly in Belgrade.

Finally, the institutional capacities in the domain of asylum, migration and integration require establishing new roles and structures or restructuring existing institutional solutions to respond to the needs of migrants and to the local context. Namely, the interviewee from the Ministry of Education and Science underlined that the Ministry lacks the unit to exclusively deal with the issues of migrant and refugee integration in education, while on the local level, one of the barriers for integration in education is the lack of intra-school teams whose activities would be mainstreamed to support specific aspects of integration in schools as the interviewee suggested.

Moreover, there is a rather ineffective role of local Councils for Migration, a body in charge of local migration policy that is operating under the local self-government auspices. This body that is composed of the representatives of various local institutions in charge of integration and access to rights of migrants and refugees is mandated to coordinate activities of the local administration, police administration, employment service, school administration, health centre, migration trustees, and centre for social work, Red Cross and civil society. However, the majority of local institutional representatives noted that Councils for Migration are highly inoperative bodies that are not committed to coordinate asylum, migration and integration processes locally:

*[Here] there is some advice for migration, but it is a body ... it does not occur to them to solve something now. (...) They say something now, "the problem of migrants is the problem of the commissariat and the municipality of Lajkovac, you are paid for that and you solve those problems. Don't bully us for it. When a fire breaks out, we do not call anyone from the municipality of Lajkovac to solve the problem, so do the same. "Where is the solution of the council for migration, which is in charge in front of the municipality? The refugee commissioner is not in charge. The Migration Council is in charge of that. Institutionally in charge of solving these problems. (...) You know, the migration council in Lajkovac meets twice a year. It*

*meets twice a year. Only the bodies are inoperative. You can't gather, you can't tell the director of the primary school, the chief of police, the one from ... the manager of the fire station and the woman in the Red Cross, and now you will solve those problems. They say it's all nice, but does it have anything to do with us. There was no fire, that teacher says no, everything is under control. It's strong, those bodies are much encased and they are very non-operative.*

The need for a coordinating body in the domain of asylum and migration has been highlighted a number of times by both local and national institutional officials in this research clearly indicating that none of them recognizes CRM as an institution whose mandate is to comprehensively address issues of inter-sectoral cooperation, coordination and policy implementation in the domain of integration at local and national levels. Still, those who recognize CRM as the focal institutional actor additionally confirm that in order to be efficient and operative CRM requires substantial restructuring:

*[KIRS should] be a good coordinator of all these parts of the complex system and the foreign assistance and assistance provided. Definitely missing it. We cannot assume that the Ministry of Education can do anything but educate. Nor that the Ministry of Health can do anything but provide health care. But someone has to [unite] it because it is a multidisciplinary problem, to unite everything. (...) Complete restructuring of that body implies that in terms of personnel and the way of functioning and capacity and knowledge, because it is the key. Because they are hiding, it cannot be easily determined, who is not on the field, that they are the key! That they cause problems that they do not have a sensitive relationship with other institutions, which they implement some policies that are unofficial, that they have illegal practices, expulsions, etc. These are all things that need to change from that body. (APC interviewee)*

## HUMAN CAPACITIES AND HUMAN CAPITAL

In the above outlined terms including overall discussions during focus groups and interviews, it was evident that the most pressing issue and the weakest segment in total capacities of institutions are human capacities, hence the lack of human capital for implementation of policies at local level. As research informants suggested, this pressing issue persist over the years now, and thus requires thoughtful, planned and comprehensive actions to be undertaken in order to increase human capacities and stocks of human capital - the scope of knowledge, skills, experience and expertise in this area of policy implementation.

The void in lacking human capacities and capital spreads across the sectors of integration of migrants and refugees at local level, such as local schools, centres for social work, National Employment Service (NES), yet it is most present within the asylum centres (transit/reception) led by the CRM and generally within the CRM's structures. While the number of people engaged across abovementioned sectors has been outlined as one of the obstacles in policy implementation, the

quality of human capital, and trained officials represent the key missing resource in the system of asylum and migration. As emphasized several times above, while the international organizations contribute in covering human capacity gaps, this practice does not stand as a solution for building system's self-sustainability in the long run, even though the involvement of expert local civil society organizations in training and counselling local institutions may certainly yield positive effects in developing human capital locally. Finally, the narratives from the field reveal the importance of understanding the context migrants and refugees are coming from, their cultural and religious backgrounds, thus indicating the need for the staff to be educated and sensitive to migrants' diverse backgrounds. Further, there is alarming need in increasing knowledge and skills in recognizing, preventing and reacting in cases of violence, abuse, exploitation, working with traumatized, especially vulnerable, as well knowledge about relevant international and national legislation.

As suggested by the majority of the research informants, the body responsible for leading and coordinating integration processes, the CRM, significantly lacks human capital, while additionally the engagement of employees within this institution via the international organizations projects and donations, disrupts the sustainability of the institution.

*The professional capacities of the people who are employed are really limited, they are people who do not know foreign language, which is needed for this, they have no legal experience and they do not have professional knowledge in the field of asylum. Unprofessional staff of KIRS, everything is worse, they hire new people quickly, etc. Then that leads to dramatic problems on the ground. (...) Well, those are people who have no refugee, migratory experience. They have no professional knowledge in working with refugees, in migration policies. They are not trained for such jobs. That is one area that has been ignored for us. And it still is. (APC interviewee)*

Still, the representatives of the CRM state that during 2017 human capacities (in quantitative terms) were satisfying amounting to more than 300 employees in 18 asylum/transit/reception centres in total in 2017, while 90 per cent of the employed staff was engaged via mostly EU donations. However, as they confirm, the issue of human capital – skills, expertise and experience – persists: 'Due to the very nature of the problem, the migrant situation, we can not say that anyone had any great experience, that they worked in similar conditions.' And stresses the need for continuous trainings of staff due to constant fluctuation of staff, and overtaking them by the international organizations:

*For that a large number of trainings are conducted by the NV sector, through various international organizations, but I think it is always necessary because there are often fluctuations of people, new people come, a large number of young people are engaged in essence and work in asylum centres that do not have much work experience, so they definitely need additional training. (...) Let's say, specifically*

*in KIRS, it was perhaps a problem when international [organizations] came, which of course offer much higher salaries, which cause the quality people to leave. At one point there was a wave of people leaving in masses ... (CRM interviewee)*

In addition, respondents from the ranks of local institutions noted that as in other sectors employees in the asylum and reception centres often do not speak foreign languages, thus enforcing persisting issue of language barrier in the local context of asylum, migration and integration.

Furthermore, the processes of integration and access to rights in education and social care sectors, as highlighted during the fieldwork, are constrained by the unprepared pool of teachers who lack the skills and expertise for inclusion of this particular group of children in schools including missing human capacities within the centres for social work (CSW) locally.

Teachers in local schools as reported, are not capacitated to speak foreign languages while the staff who would be engaged to teach Serbian as a foreign language in local schools is equally missing. The lack of this sort of human capacities and capital, represents a serious threat to substantial, meaningful integration of migrant and refugee children in education as it was reported by the relevant informants: 'We cannot organize Serbian language classes without the support of an organization or the Ministry or someone else. We do not have the capacity for that, nor do we have people who are trained to teach Serbian as a foreign language.' (Local school interviewee).

The representative of CEP commented this issue in the following manner: 'We just know it's necessary [learning foreign languages in schools]. If all teachers in schools speak English, then it would be different, then it could be organized so that they only have an additional two hours a day, say Serbian, and the rest can be realized, but not like this. '

Furthermore, the barriers to integration in schools with respect to human capacities consider skills of teachers for inclusive education, understanding the context of migration and the background of children integrating into local schools: 'It is very important to them to understand how their education system is and it is very important that they recognize what the children have gone through.' (Ministry of Education and Science interviewee).

Or as another respondent comments:

*It is necessary to continue working with teachers, to demystify the notion of a migrant, to simply explain that it is an inclusive vocation. It's like a Serb to you. They sometimes say they are not trained for it, but*

*none of them ask to be diagnosticians. This is done by someone else, and they do what a teacher should do (...) (CEP interviewee)*

In addition, skills and the knowledge about traumatic experiences and psychological condition of migrant and refugee children involved in schools deserves special attention and teachers' capacity development as noted during the fieldwork: 'There is need for some psychological debriefing to be present in schools. Over the summer, we also need to design some training programs for our teachers and staff which will provide that kind of support. And they need support because many of them have not met children who have that kind of crisis.' (Ministry of Education and Science interviewee). Therefore, investment in human capital in the above indicated areas within local schools are recognized as necessary preconditions for substantial integration process of migrant and refugee children.

In terms of numbers, the social care sector, considerably lacks staff engaged in the Centres for Social Work (CSW). The shortage in staff in CSW that is amongst other a result of regulations that ban new employment in the public sector in Serbia, is in some cases compensated by the project engagement of staff in CSWs supported mainly by the international organizations such as UNICEF for example. Yet, it was shown that even project engagement of the staff cannot address issues in the social care sector but may assist social workers in the field and at least to some extent ease the burden centres for social work carry locally:

*Well, they have those field workers, well, they are called social workers, in the least number of cases they are social workers, they are usually, there are mostly special pedagogues, psychologists, young people who are out of work and then UNICEF provides funds for their salaries and get employs, they are employed through the Center for Social Work (CSR). CSR supervises their work. Now you have two categories of those people. Some can exercise these public powers, there are very few of them, so they can, exactly, exercise public powers under the law on social protection, while most do not have these public powers but are only field workers (...) What is problematic is that they are very often inexperienced people, people who do not know the social protection system itself, have never worked in it, of course they do not know this population, and on the other hand, we have people who are permanently employed in CSR, who they also don't know enough about this population ... (UNHCR interviewee)*

Still, as it was indicated by the local institutional representatives, engagement of project staff within the CSWs is a part of an unstable and unsustainable strategy pursued in the area of human capacities the system should not be relying on in the long term.

Moreover, as practice has shown, the difficulties with available human capacities within CSWs including the number of cases from different social aspects per employee overcome the capacities of available human resources for handling them. Above all, the issue of integration of migrants and refugees into the sector of social care, as it was noted in the field, is one of the least represented areas of work in the CSWs. Therefore, as indicated by the informant from the Institute for Social Protection, an institution responsible for monitoring, research and development of the social protection services and sector in general, the CSW staff are unprepared for integration of migrants and refugees, and notably unaccompanied minors, in the system of social protection in Serbia. They lack quality staff with relevant skills, know-how and experience in this domain. Moreover, the issue of language barrier including complete lack of knowledge about the contexts migrants are coming from and their cultural and religious background significantly disrupts potential for integration and provision of adequate social protection services to this population:

*I speak openly ... human capacities are very limited in the Centres for Social Work. (...) I can't do the professional work and I think that what needs to be done is to strengthen the interpreter capacity at the moment. Because we have employees, so we have, we can't change them, we can't accept new young people who speak, who know, and that problem will certainly still be present. So, the capacities should be strengthened in that sense as well. (...) Centres for social work they... we have one simplified opinion, they are all Arabs, that they do not know that some Pashtun, Tajiks come from there, that some Christians come from Syria, they do not know that they are Sunnis, Alawites, Shiites are completely different. ..No one knows that. When someone from the Center meets them, he doesn't know that (Institute for Social Protection interviewee)*

In order to overcome the key barriers in the development of human capital, it is essential to scope the strategies for development of continuous education and trainings curricula in specific domains of integration locally. The results from the field point to the efforts that have been undertaken in the domain of training and capacitating the staff in the realm of education sector including the Asylum Office, yet as suggested, the work is not done yet, human capital is still weak and requires significant increase in all the relevant sectors and many areas of expertise. In that regard, the role of local civil society organizations with knowledge and professional expertise in the field of asylum, migration and integration in institutional capacity building should be fostered. At the same time informal and formal capacity building of local institutions via engagement and interaction with local CSOs is a way to achieving sustainable links, cooperation and coordination practices among actors within the whole sector of asylum, migration and integration. As an informant from the Asylum Protection Centre

indicated their formal and informal support to institutions is continuous and is provided as a way to overcome a number of barriers in relation to human capacities. These include assistance in translation, understanding specific procedures in different sectors, counselling on good practices and specific policy implementation steps, migration context and background:

*We helped in the phase, I say, translation, the phase that over time we gained experience in working with these people, both professional and practical, they are different categories of people with whom these institutional bodies have no way of communication at all. Now that sounds like: how come they don't? They will listen to the regulations. No, the relationship with refugees from Asia, Africa, for us is a different relationship, a different understanding of the concept of time, a different understanding of truth, how it is formed, facts, experiences, trauma, all that, it's a different context, about which no one was trained, not today, not then. (...) So since 2011 we have been intensively working on the first workshops related to empowering these people, to establishing some contacts in the local communities for understanding culture, creatively, etc., these are some revolutionary moves. (APC interviewee)*

Finally, the expertise in different sectors in the area of asylum, migration and integration of local CSOs and notably in the domain of social protection of children and unaccompanied minors is often a vacant resource for the CSWs. Although the standard operative procedures for protection of migrant and refugee children envisage active engagement of local CSOs in the fieldwork and cooperation with the local CSW in filling up human capacities, not surprisingly, this practice is not in place yet or is hardly evident in sporadic cases.

## MATERIAL AND PHYSICAL CAPACITIES

Another set of capacities indispensable for efficient policy implementation in domain of access to rights and integration involves designated financial resources to relevant national and local institutions, including physical capacities such as accommodation conditions in asylum/reception/transit centres, transport conditions, and other physical assets needed for the system to operate effectively at the local level.

As we have seen earlier, material resources in the sector of asylum, migration and integration come from the state budget in small portions while majority of the material capacities are dependent on the project financing on a part of international organizations that are pursuing relevant development agenda in this sphere. While this enables system to operate in a short run, it disrupts system's autonomy and prospects for building self-sustainability in this area of operation. For instance, the representatives of the Commissariat for Migration and

Refugees indicated that the institution's budget (allocated from the state budget according to the Budget Law) has not been changed since 2014: 'Perhaps it is good to say that the budget in general, as far as asylum is concerned, has not changed, so the Government has allocated the same funds for CRM (for 2017) for asylum issues as in 2014.' (CRM interviewee). However, as the respondents have stated, for Commissariat this is not an issue as this institution receives considerable material resources via donations of international organizations.

In the similar manner, implementation of integration policies within the Ministry of Education and Science is not based on the designated budget for this category of population and their integration in schools which makes this system fragile and volatile:

*It was also important to us, in fact, that the non-governmental sector jumped in at a time when we, due to lack of resources and resources are also funds, because we do not have budgeted funds for that. We did not budget for next year this year either. (...) So I think we will have to somehow get through the work of sensitive groups ... For migrants, it means nowhere and does not exist in the budget. So we will probably draw this one from others, from all possible ones. Because a new one cannot be introduced now ... I think every budget is a budget law, that's how it is for you. I mean, let's not complicate things. In any case, we will draw some funds, but these are not funds that can be so large that they can cover all needs. (Ministry of Education and Science interviewee)*

The representative of the Asylum Office from the Ministry of Interior confirmed that increasing of material capacities and number of employees in the Office will be possible only through international donations as the state budget cannot cover their increased needs (Asylum Office interviewee).

At the local level, as it was stated in the focus groups there is no solution to allocate certain resources through the local self-government budget to the local asylum centres for example, or comprehensively for local institutions active in the field of migrants' and refugees' integration:

*As for the budget funds, they are by nature, by default, indefinite, there are no funds in the budget that can now, which are sent to the asylum centre. There are no funds. I am now when I wrote lap, I have foreseen some funds and then people tell me in the budget you cannot foresee funds for that. These are not open funds. (Institutional official, Lajkovac)*

Thus, material or financial contributions from the state budget are gradually constrained in this area with implications for local institutional sustainability and autonomy in pursuing particular activities in the domains of integration.

Two sets of narratives have been noted with regards to the issues of accommodation capacities as a part of physical capacities and overall conditions in asylum/reception/transit centres and accommodation facilities for unaccompanied minors. The representatives of local civil society organizations including local institutions indicate that these capacities are inadequate, and cannot satisfy the actual needs in accommodation and living standards. This situation is particularly perturbing in the facilities for unaccompanied minors as stated by the local branch representative of the APC in Subotica:

*Then there was the story that children up to the age of 14 can be accommodated in Kolevka. In the end, Kolevka roughly stated that they will not accept anyone, that they do not have accommodation capacities, even if they accept them it can be up to 7 days, possibly up to 10 days. So far, we have not had a single situation where we managed to place a minor, only in the reception centre. However, they were expelled by the manager.*

On the other hand, representatives from the CRM and the officials from the local asylum centres claim that accommodation capacities and living conditions in the centres are adequate and sufficient. These narratives as we have seen earlier support politics of preventing new migrants' inflows in the local communities by limiting accommodation potentials, both in capacities and quality of accommodation.

## THE PLACE OF MULTILEVEL COOPERATION, COORDINATION AND RESPONSIBLE INFORMATION SHARING IN INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Underneath the institutional capacities to support integration processes lays the quality and the nature of social connections, formal and informal, weak or strong, within and between the institutions, civil society organizations, including social connections established within migrant and refugee population and the local community. These social connections represent an additional capacity of the system to implement policies that enable access to rights and integration processes to migrants and refugees. Yet the level and the type of networking developed in this aspect, directly impacts the nature of coordination and cooperation mechanisms and information sharing between institutions and beneficiaries. The practices of establishing formal, bridging

networks, horizontally and vertically within and outside the system ensure vital mechanisms of cooperation and coordination that can add to the overall system capacities in the long run. Additionally, while informal networks of personal social connections may contribute to systems vitality, they on the other hand represent a mechanism that cannot be perceived as a systems capacity but rather personal capacity of the institutional officials used when indispensable.

This section analyses the evidence from the field that consider the channels of cooperation and coordination among multiple sectors that facilitate the processes of integration, locally and nationally, their nature of communication and information sharing including links that are established with the civil society organizations, the migrants and the local community via information sharing channels, cooperation and participation in the community to enable the processes of integration in the relevant integration domains and in the local community at large.

Comprehensively taken, institutional cooperation and coordination within the realm of migrants and refugees access to rights and integration including external networking with other actors in these processes such as civil society organizations and the local community is in intersection of formal and informal networking, characterised by both weak formal social connectivity practices and dense informal networks of social connections at multiple levels in established networks. It depends on the formally established channels of communication on the one hand while on the other it is gradually impacted by the informal, ad hoc, personal connections that shape the nature of coordination, cooperation and information sharing as a resource for integration of this population group.

In order to assess the nature, quality, the levels of cooperation and coordination and information sharing channels across sectors and the community, it is indispensable to examine these from different perspectives and networking layers. Firstly, the analysis below considers the outlook to mechanisms of cooperation and coordination among institutions in the same sector horizontally and vertically including inter-sectoral formal and/or informal institutional connections in the system of asylum and migration. Secondly, it takes an outlook to networking and cooperation and coordination mechanisms between relevant institutions and local civil society organizations including cooperation between CSOs. Finally, the analysis looks at the ways in which relevant institutions, particularly at local level, share information with local community and facilitate establishment of links between migrants and refugees with the domicile population, including the role of CSOs in these endeavours.

## INTRA-SECTORAL COOPERATION, COORDINATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

The reports from the field indicate that cooperation and coordination mechanisms within the single sector locally and nationally significantly varies. As it was noted by institutional interviewees, in the system of health care vertical cooperation and coordination is formally established from local, regional to national levels via developed reporting mechanisms and information sharing through the platform of integrated information system in health care developed by the Institute for Public Health 'Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut':

*Established a system of coordinated and defined reporting from September 2015. Thus, practically every factor that participated in the provision of health care, from the primary level of protection, (...) is obliged to report on a weekly basis to the territorially competent regional public health institute, on the provided health care, on the one hand and on the other on the hygienic and sanitary condition of the facility where the migrants are staying. So all the information, to recapitulate, we have established a common information system, established unique forms on which all those involved in providing health care, give unique, fill in practically, so about the health care provided, about hygienic and sanitary condition, and the epidemiological situation in each reception centre and deliver Batut and we report weekly to the ministry. Then the monthly and annual report. (Institute for Public Health interviewee)*

The health care institutional interviewees argued that the information that are gathered and analysed through the integrated information system in health care enable due planning and response to the different risks that may emerge including planning of capacities for integration of this population into the health sector:

*(...) we do not collect that data in such a way, you know, that we would collect it, but so that we can follow the trends in relation to the possible presence of risk factors in relation to some diseases, and in relation to those that are contagious, so that we can react immediately. On the other hand, when it comes to transit reception centres, and of course, with the participation of the civil sector, we provided some basic assumptions about how many teams and what dynamics they should work in each transit reception centre. (Institute for Public Health interviewee)*

On the other hand, cooperation and coordination including information sharing is enabled through the organization of monthly coordination meetings within the health sector at the national level coordinated by the Ministry of Health and participated by the key health sector representatives including the representatives of the relevant international and national civil society organizations tasked with assisting in health care integration:

*We hold regular coordination meetings (...) means it is on a monthly basis. At that meeting, the period of a month is analysed, the problems that have arisen in that field and what it is, how the problem that has arisen can be overcome. (Institute for Public Health interviewee)*

Still, as implied by the official from the Ministry of Health this coordination mechanism needs to be improved in the domain of prompt and accurate information sharing practices as they directly impact the allocation of capacities and their planning in the system of health care provision and integration into this sector. In the field, effects of named information sharing were not quite visible considering improvement of quality and efficiency of provided medical protection, especially on secondary level, where there are still obstacles in timely response to medical problems of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Besides, the levels of cooperation and coordination between CRM, asylum centres under the CRM including the local trustees for migration and refugees appointed by the CRM in the local self-government and the local Councils for Migration are reported to be rather weak vertically but also horizontally at local level. In that regard, the representative of the local asylum centre from Loznica indicated that: 'It all happens at the central level. We have the leadership of the Commissariat and everything happens in Belgrade, and then what is agreed comes down. However, consultations take place here and there ...' Moreover, as it was pointed out by the local CRM's trustee from Loznica and Presevo, the cooperation with the representatives of CRM in the asylum centres is rather weak which disrupts functional information sharing and operations in the area:

*Communication is bad again, (...) as a Commissioner, I have to call there every week, no one gives me any information ... It's still inside, problems within the family. Because there are two KIRS managers, those two managers fluctuate there in the centre and I am an indirect KIRS employee, since I work for them and they don't pay me. So it is an internal problem, so, communication is bad first between us (...) Problems in the local community in Bogovađa, in Vračević, petitions are signed and no one knows anything. Poorly informed. (...) Simply ... And when such problems come out, then they continue, the whole bad vertical that exists simply comes to light. (Focus group Lajkovac)*

On the other hand, the representatives from the CRM stressed that vertical cooperation within the CRM's auspices is prosperous due to a novel mechanism established - the Councils for Migration within the local self-governments across Serbia. Still, as we have seen earlier, Councils are marked as rather inoperative bodies whose role in migrants and refugees access to rights and integration is minor:

*(...) I think that the network of the Migration Council meant a lot to us, especially in municipalities that have active councils, such as Sid, where it meant a lot to us that they do a lot locally because it is always necessary to sensitize the local community and ultimately the authorities. JSL to persuade them to open centres.*

*Interviewer: And how does it work in practice, are you satisfied with the Migration Councils and their work?*

*Respondent: Well, it depends from municipality to municipality, so there is a lot of personal, if someone is really engaged to do something. (CRM interviewee)*

This clearly indicates that the network of Councils is not fully effective and represent a model of cooperation that shows traits of voluntary institutional engagement not all the members are fully committed to.

The reports from the field further divulged that the level of cooperation and coordination within the social protection sector for example requires significant improvements. Although formal models of reporting and information sharing within the vertical line are developed it lack establishment of the integrated information system to support the sector at different levels of its operations. On the other hand, horizontal cooperation between CSWs from the local communities is mainly based on personal connections and ad hoc interventions.

Finally, in the field of education and employment, as highlighted by the participants in the research, vertical cooperation within the both sectors is sporadic and formal in character while horizontally local schools or NES with direct experiences in integration of migrants and refugees seldom or never establish the networks to share experiences and practices in relation to integration of migrant and refugees.

## INTERSECTORAL COOPERATION, COORDINATION, AND INFORMATION SHARING

The links formally established **between** sectors in the system of asylum and migration at national level show that although communication and information sharing flows are established, there is still a wide gap in institutional networking regarding the mutual issues of integration of the migrant population. The forms of cooperation and exchange of information between national stakeholders is rather bilateral although the mechanisms of coordination meetings are established within the sectors and sporadically amongst the sectors of integration. As such, the central discussion in this domain revolves around cooperation and coordination with the CRM as a focal managing body in the domain of integration of migrants and refugees. While the

majority of the respondents from the ranks of the ministries appraised cooperation and information sharing with CRM positively, others pointed to the weak cooperation and inefficient information sharing (Ministry of Health interviewee). This was confirmed by the relevant CSO actors in the field who stipulate that the CRM lacks effective mechanisms of intersectoral cooperation and coordination: '[It is necessary] to find a way for the Commissariat to build real institutional cooperation with the ministries so that it can all come to life. Because as long as it is up to civil society to regulate it, there will be no real system.' (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, interviewee).

Besides, from the perspective of the key CSO actors in asylum and migration sector, there is a tendency for the role of CRM's in information sharing to be centralized while characterized by single-angled perspective to the situation in the field. This directly points to the lack of exchange of information (or holding the monopoly on some set of information) and poor coordination mechanisms established by the CRM with other institutional actors active in the field at the multiple level of operations in this area, leading to slow, inefficient and inadequate responses to the needs of both migrant and local population:

*[CRM] is the main body that provides information for our state, our services and institutions. And the government. Which is wrong. And now all the forces in migration are gathering with one man, the commissioner and his deputy. (...) What is important is that the Commissariat, when it is in a situation where they are the only ones in the field to have information, is in a situation to inform about everything and to be the main eyes of the government and the state. This is very dangerous because then it depends on the policy, in fact the interest of the commissioner, how other decision-makers will be informed. We have seen that in working with ministers, with the government. When we go to meetings and when they consult us, it is always ignorance of the situation on the ground, only from one angle. (APC interviewee)*

In line with the previous comments, the representative of the Ministry of Education indicated that in order to be efficient in the field of integration of migrants and refugees, new intersectoral coordination solutions are required at the national level (as it does at the local level), indirectly implying that the current models of coordination are underdeveloped, or do not respond to the actual needs that emerge in the domain of intersectoral connections thus implying that the role of CRM is not adequate in this domain.

In addition, the mechanisms of informal cooperation and information exchange are reported to be developed spontaneously via participation in the projects supported by the international organizations or trainings organized for the representatives of the national institutions in this area (Asylum Office interviewee). However,

while established informal networks of cooperation may facilitate partial cooperation in particular situation they cannot be considered as a resource the system can rely on but rather individual resource to be optionally used when needed.

Intersectoral cooperation at local level, where established, is in majority of cases based on the informal, individual connections used in an *ad hoc* manner when particular circumstances in the field require adequate reaction from a range of institutions. However, in some local communities such as Subotica for example, local institutional actors established a coordination mechanism that gathers relevant local institutions in the field of integration of migrants and refugees that is based on regular meetings organized with the purpose to discuss and plan the activities in the field locally. In fact, as it was stated, this mechanism (Working group for monitoring migration flows) serves as a platform for establishing bonding connections between institutional focal points who then mutually coordinate different activities and share relevant information in line with the specific needs in the field. The representative of the CSW from Subotica addressed the establishment of the coordination mechanism, information sharing and its efficiency as follows:

*On the territory of the city of Subotica, an operational working group has been formed to deal with information control. It was created due to extraordinary circumstances, it was literally created overnight "let's see what we will do" because the way of working of the institutions themselves was impossible to implement and there were big oversight in the work and that is why we urgently agreed on special working body was formed which deals with operational ... Not theorizing, but operational ... It functions on the principle that there are representatives of all local institutions and whether they are state, but who operate on the territory of the city of Subotica. Exclusively the city of Subotica. There are: labour exchange, Center for social work, police, border police, Red Cross, KIRS, Institute of Public Health, hospital, health centre...*

The non-governmental sector is not present. Everything works according to the principle that we, when it was somehow very intense, we met once a week, we specifically presented the problems, that is: this and that problem, what are we going to do? Everyone in their jurisdiction, but we jumped into each other's jurisdiction because there was no ...Still as it was confirmed in the focus group in Subotica, even formal mechanism for cooperation cannot prevent *ad hoc* interventions in the field. In such cases formal mechanism employs informal connections and mutual engagement of the institutions: 'When you asked about cooperation a moment ago, we have all reduced it to a personal level because we have already got to know each other much that we cooperate on a personal level.' The other focus group participants adds:

*That's right. It's based on the principle of that ... Now it happened in the morning, come on now, he's a member of this, call him what he can collect there, can I, give me a van, I can't, give me a van, does anyone have any clothes? I don't know, call CK, do you have? We don't have it, wait, we take it to the laundry, and some grandmother said she would give it. So it works on that principle, if that was a procedure, at least a little to ... (Focus group Subotica)*

However, this coordination mechanism doesn't include CSO sector, which is often more active in the field and thus ready to respond faster, and which holds valuable field information about the needs and risks of migrant, asylum seeking and refugee population, which are significant for reception, protection and integration.

To the some extent above comments of institutions from Subotica have been confirmed in other local communities such as Loznica for example. Although mainly informal models of cooperation and information sharing are represented, the formal exchange of information was established between, for instance asylum centre and the local health centre, but still the cooperation is in essence informal:

*In our institution, we have, as an accredited institution (Health Center Loznica), a protocol of cooperation with the asylum centre and we have established, of course ... Cooperation is direct, so everything you need, we have a contact person, we are available at any time. (Focus group Loznica)*

The relevance of establishing the partnerships and mechanisms of cooperation among institutions locally is further stressed as important in this area:

*The local government also supports and we are working on some strategies and local action plans, so we try to be partners, because that is the only way to do it, because it is difficult to do something like this until someone forces you, and when you write everything what you have to do ... You know how it goes, what you marked so it has to be mostly done, so I don't think we have any problems between organizations*

On the other hand, in most of the visited municipalities efficiency of intersect oral cooperation and information sharing is based upon the nature and the level of informal, personal connections established among institutional representatives. In Lajkovac and Presevo for example cooperation and relevant information sharing are weak or rather blocked: 'The cooperation between the Commissariat, the Ministry of the Interior and the municipalities is completely bad, there is no cooperation. No one informs anyone.' (Lajkovac focus

group). The same informant argues that the cooperation and communication locally among institutions show feeble character in general:

*In practice, communication is very bad, the police come, without any information, anything, they send people from the crossing to Bogovađa, probably to others as well ... Insulted, who told you that? They come in the dark to unload people, sign and go on. That really doesn't make sense. You know what, how much work do you need when ten people come to you, when ten people come to you from the border crossing? How much work is needed? It's a huge job for the police, for the officers. He needs a job as a medical worker, that, that ... And no one expected it at all. For the translator. It is necessary to provide food and accommodation for those people, that ... These are problems that exist in all centres (for asylum), it is not only Lajkovac...*

While confirming above statement, the informant from Loznica stresses that workable informal connections may result in overcoming certain barriers in the field:

*So it depends on our character and our personal relationships here, how many problems there were in 2011, we draw some consequences from there, a small lack of will to cooperate better, more closely, and there is a lot that is focused on our situations, financial and other. It is all known that you have to make phone calls, make reservations, crowded in the waiting rooms, waiting, but again, personal contact of my colleagues who take people for examinations with doctors or clinic directors, or the director of the health centre, we connect some things, but we still have problems that we have to lose staff for 3, 4 hours, to apologize, to lose time in the waiting room and that nothing happens, we are not asking to across the line, we just ... We had an agreement with the previous management, now I hear that a new director of the hospital has been appointed, so we have to agree again with the head nurse. We had an agreement with the former, I don't know if it remained the same, that if nothing else, we'll talk on the phone and say come to us before the end then ... (Focus group Loznica)*

Thus the facilitation of coordination, cooperation and information sharing in the local communities is based on the fabrics of informal, personal connections established between institutions. The nature of these connections dictates the nature, the form and the pace of exchange of information and mutual engagement in the field of integration of migrants and their access to rights locally. As such, due to underdeveloped mechanisms of sharing of information, communication and coordination of activities among institutional actors from health to education, migrants and refugees are in many cases left without proper support, often unaware of proper

procedures, information about how the system works, knowledge of their rights, since most of the interventions are done sporadically, and on an ad hoc basis. Such gaps in the system, further make it difficult for local institutional representatives to assist those in need. There is no flow in the system vertically or horizontally between the institutional actors, thus further blocking continuous and timely exchange of information, and in consequence hindering the much needed assistance, support and protection of migrant beneficiaries.

## THE COOPERATION, COORDINATION, AND INFORMATION SHARING BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL AND NON-INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS

The civil society organizations active in the field of asylum and migration invest considerable amount of efforts to support the system of integration at multiple levels and thus represent the key bridge between institutions, the migrant, asylum seeking and refugee population, and the local community. The support of the civil society to the system and the migrants covers the legal counselling, representing migrants and refugees rights, psycho-social support, mediating in social and health care cases, including education and employment, distributing information to migrants and refugees about their rights and obligations, and contributing to developing links between migrants and refugees and the local community, including local volunteerism and humanitarian aid. In that regard, the links established between civil society organizations, institutions nationally and locally, and the local community at large are directly related to the overall processes of integration of this population.

In the first instance the links established **between institutions and the civil society organizations** are characterised by bilateral connections and informality, and are enforced in an *ad hoc* manner. The established networks between these two actors are mainly dependent on the exchange of know-how and relevant information critical for the effective integration processes in total. The institutions that lack experience in the area of integration can rely on the exchange of knowledge, experience and information by the CSOs who thus facilitate positive policy implementation at multiple levels.

*An illustration of the nature of interconnections between CSOs and local and national institutions was provided by the APC representative:*

*That's how it worked, from case to case, and in the beginning, and that's how that practice was formed. And that's why our organization is dramatically important, because when it comes to hospitals, when it comes to the centre for social work, which does not know how to cope when there are people who need*

*social assistance, from appointing a guardian, to what a guardian needs to work, to what kind of social services and protection should the centre provide for refugees when there are only some basic provisions in the law, some rulebook that is not so clear, we helped there. Many people have asked us to check, so that I don't do something wrong, so that you don't chase me, but so that some boss doesn't chase me, what should I do? And when it went as it should in the regulations, those institutions relied on us, because they knew that the Asylum Protection Center is someone we can turn to in good faith.*

Locally the cooperation with schools that have migrant and refugee children enrolled have benefited from the cooperation with the CSOs as well:

*Well then he was, in the local communities, we immediately started working with schools, now what does that mean? With the school at the level of acquaintance. We asked in civic classes, specifically, and in others, to get to know each other, even though the children stay for a short time, to get to know each other. Schools received support. We have organized joint workshops, children and both, it is a practice until today. (APC interviewee)*

Correspondingly, a majority of CSO representatives interviewed during the fieldwork confirmed the functional cooperation and exchange with institutional actors at multiple levels:

*We work great together. First of all, with the Ministry of Education. We will not even cooperate with other ministries, because we have no idea about that. We are not a full partner in that process either, and in that sense we are addressing the Ministry of Education, which is always willing to collect data and forward them to us. We communicate very well with school administrations. (CEP interviewee)*

Still narratives from the field at the local level are divided about the degree of cooperation between these two entities. While in certain municipalities cooperation is functional and rather of bilateral character, in other such as Subotica for example it lacks.

Additionally, the cooperation, coordination and information exchange between CRM as a key body in the system and CSOs varies and is dependent on both formal and informal mechanisms of connections being established. While some organizations, as stated, created functional links with asylum authorities, enabling them access to the asylum/reception centres and providing support in integration and access to rights to migrants, other CSOs have had different scale of issues in accessing the asylum/reception centres locally. This was particularly stressed in TC Subotica and RC Presevo during the focus groups and during interviewees with

selected CSOs, where the CSO respondents emphasized the inability to enter the centres or to provide necessary legal, psychosocial or medical support to those migrants in need.

The voices from the part of institutions largely supported the view of positive cooperation developed with CSOs with the exception of the representatives of CRM who claimed that at the beginning of the migrant crisis cooperation was barely efficient but improved over time:

*I think it's settled now. The chaos was in 2015, when we were literally in a situation where different NGOs came to us every day. They came from literally all over the world, so that at one point you didn't even know what to do, where to send them, and everyone always focuses on something similar. For example, children are always the focus of everyone, and no one ever thinks about teenagers. So sometimes some things, when, say, there was humanitarian aid, you had a lot of clothes and shoes for children, and you didn't have any for teenagers at all. And it was very difficult to coordinate there, because they also write projects, and they received funds in advance for certain things, so it was difficult for them to transfer funds now and to adapt. (CRM interviewee)*

At the local level, institutions often highlighted the value of cooperation and coordination with CSOs:

*We have been cooperating with APC for the longest time and I usually hear from them and I have the most help from them. That's how I personally come from this place. I always get information, they always meet. We also received help as far as - notebooks, books, in that sense for children. They also provide volunteers when needed. Until they learned to come with their parents on their own. We cooperate with them the most and the best. (Local school interviewee)*

The dynamic and the nature of cooperation, coordination and information sharing **between CSOs** active in the field additionally influence the use of resources in supporting integration. The links between CSOs are mainly informal and bilateral in nature. Yet, creating formal networks of cooperation between relevant CSOs took place in this area as well. These range from formal bilateral networking to the wider networking of organizations in the domain of research and advocacy in the field of asylum and migration. Interestingly, as it was reported in municipalities of Lajkovac and Loznica, including cities of Subotica and Belgrade, the links between CSOs are rather weak and inoperative while donors' coordination supporting local CSOs is lacking.

A number of CSOs interviewed indicated that informal networks of cooperation and coordination between relevant CSOs represent an added value in effectively covering different aspects in integration processes:

*But in general, the cooperation is OK with other non-governmental organizations, yes. Cooperation in the sense that if we estimate that we are not in charge, in fact that we are not able to help in a particular case, then we go to SOS or an organization that we think can help in that situation when we are not able in some way. So in that sense, I do not see any problem, on the matter, that there is no cooperation with NGOs. (Focus group CSOs, Presevo)*

Yet, the APC representative indicated that while these forms of informal bilateral coordination between organizations (both international and national/local) can yield positive results, they represent an unused capacity and require further strengthening:

*With Medecines du Monde, if I need anything, we talk about it. They provide psychological help. (...) They go where there is no health care. And now they are coordinating with us because they are providing psychological help. Of course, we will coordinate in any case. But it's not that we're not going to provide psychological help just because you're here. That is not a guarantee that you have provided ... So that bilateral coordination must be strengthened. That is the right solution, for each specific case. (APC interviewee)*

Moreover, sporadic formal bilateral coordination and cooperation have been established between local CSOs whose mutual engagement encompasses wider fields of integration of migrant population:

*For example, we have an agreement on technical cooperation with Athens, because there are many situations on the ground that women are victims of violence and that they are trusted to us because they are constantly in the Center, but our competence simply reaches a certain limit and then we inform further. We also have a good cooperation with PIN. It is an organization that deals with the psychological support of migrants. So, for all those cases that we think another NGO would provide more adequate support, we direct them to them. (ADRA interviewee)*

Yet, the very networks when established are dependent on the individual preferences and informality rather than on planned and coordinated networking strategies which often result in inadequate and asymmetrical distribution of resources covering the same fields of engagement by different organizations:

*On the other hand, it seems to me that the cooperation of non-governmental organizations depends much more on non-governmental organizations per se and who works in them, than on some systemic factor. We get along very well with other non-governmental organizations, primarily because we do not*

*interfere in their work, we do not go out on the field, nor do they work formal way, and then we cross paths. Let's borrow translators, drive the kids to school and get supplies. We network here. But when you have 5 organizations on the field doing the same thing, then it's a bit of a struggle. (CEP interviewee)*

As noted by the CEP interviewee and other respondents in focus groups, the lack of coordination and the asymmetrical provision of aid by NGOs across asylum and reception centres in Serbia, is to a large extent influenced by donor preferences and project financing, which causes discrepancies in how and to whom the aid is delivered, as well as the extent of cooperation between CSOs.

On the other hand, wider formal networking has been established in the area of research and advocacy including information exchange. While this form of networking can certainly directly contribute to fostering organizational capacities, it on the other hand and possibly in a long run has potential to support the wider system of integration of migrants and refugees in Serbia:

*And when it comes to civil society organizations, first, one of the most important segments of our work was the idea of involving as many civil society organizations as possible in this topic, and then we started, I mentioned in 2010 to develop this so-called Policy Advocacy Group. First consisted of five organizations. Our idea was that, in fact, through mutual exchange of experiences, at that time organizations that cover different aspects of the topic of migration, we learn from each other and simply consider the topic of migration from a more complete and broader scope. However, over time, this Policy Advocacy Group, from five civil society organizations, to date, in 2017, has grown into a network of organizations that now consists of 13, 14 members. And every year we have certain types of activities that we carry out together. (...) But mostly our idea was to work with organizations to build capacity for research, policy monitoring and just the practical aspects of dealing with a topic that turned out to be great. (Group 484 interviewee)*

Overall, a significant number of interviewed CSO representatives underlined that there are still underdeveloped models of cooperation, lack of established links between organizations and coherent engagement in different fields of integration. As mentioned above, the dependency on project financing and adherence to strict donor and project criteria, leads to overlapping in aid, and to some extent a race between CSO actors in reaching out to migrant beneficiaries.

In that regard, even though the accounts from the field clearly show that CSO cooperate (mostly bilaterally) in numerous cases, still this capacity of the CSOs and the system at large requires improvement in the domain of both bilateral cooperation in the relevant fields of integration and access to rights, and wider planning and

networking as to contribute to effective and efficient support to the system and overall integration processes of this population in Serbia.

## COOPERATION AND INFORMATION SHARING WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The local communities in Serbia in which migrant and refugee population is situated (in asylum, transit and reception centres) in great majority of cases lack interest in building bridges and establishing social connections that can facilitate integration processes in the local community. As noted, the local community rather see migrant and refugee population as a security threat or is largely indifferent towards this population. In that regard, the informant from the focus group held in municipality of Lajkovac indicated the following:

*The first problems started in Bogovađa in 2012. In 2013, even with Vračević, not only with Bogovađa. There was, there was some, from a few months, from November to January, there was some temporary accommodation in Vračević, not only in Bogovađa, because Bogovađa is not enough. So then the petitions went. Well, they came here, to this place, so the hall was full, a conversation with the police and the municipal leadership. Not to mention the winter of 2013. When they were freezing, when were those incidents? And just people, you know what. They didn't move, they didn't travel and they didn't do anything. And when he sees a coloured man, he gets scared. They never saw a black man. And then a group out there, talking and drinking beer in front of the store and talking in a foreign language ... It's a disaster for them. (Focus group institutions Lajkovac)*

In that regard, respondents from Loznica and Subotica indicated that local population was concerned about security issues and took over information exchange with local institutions in order to report alien circumstances spotted locally: 'Citizens in Banja Koviljača complained and reported for a while. You know how, a conservative environment. They move in groups, some 4-5, there they are sitting in the park, sitting in a cafe in the centre ' (Focus group institutions, Loznica). Similarly, the informant from Subotica local institution stressed the following:

*Respondent: We have a problem with dissatisfied citizens who constantly write complaints, call by phone ...'*

*Interviewer: What are the most common complaints?*

*Respondent: "Here they are in the park, my child is not allowed to go to school"...*

*Interviewer: Security?*

*Respondent: Well, yes. "They pee around the corner", "They disturb my fruit trees", "They destroy cemeteries" ... That's how it was, they went through that orchard, and that's it. They cut some trees and made something for themselves where they could sleep, and that's how it was and no one could stop it. They were hungry. They go through it, orchard, so take it there I think, that's it. (Focus group institutions Subotica)*

However, although present, such negative and security-oriented attitude does not dominate the narrative around migrants and refugees. Accounts from the field also confirm a positive sentiment towards migrants and refugees in some communities. Such positive attitude towards migrant and refugee population in local communities is directly correlated with the engagement of local institutions in charge of integration in sharing relevant and timely information to the local community. Although, as confirmed by a bulk of accounts from the field, such engagement of local institutions is rare and sporadic, and it represent an unused capacity and source of information. While some communities, such as in Sjenica and Tutin are engaging with the local community in sharing information, other municipalities lack willingness, promptness and organizational capacity in information sharing to the local community about the issues of integration of migrants and refugees:

*Informant: I'm just sure that people are simply not informed enough about the reasons why people will come here, they are simply not familiar enough with the cultural differences between them, I think at least 80% of people know nothing about the culture of countries where migrants currently come from, I'm sure that 90% have never come into contact with any refugees, regardless of the fact that the refugees have been here for a very, very long time, it's just the fact that they are somehow crammed into more isolated parts ... (...) I mean, the local level should work on some kind ... just providing information to people, come on, locals, just ...*

*Interviewer: And does it exist?*

*Informant: Honestly, I did not get the impression that it exists, if it exists then it is not something pronounced to be noticeable. (Focus group CSOs Presevo)*

In some of the local communities, such as Sid, it led even to animosity, discrimination and even xenophobia among local people, which were facing large influx of migrants and as a local community were completely uninformed and prepared for that.

The majority of informants indicated that engagement of the relevant local institutions in information sharing and cooperation with local community on the matters of migrant and refugee integration is widely missing. Still, some practice shows that although rare, the engagement of local institutions with the parents of local children have had positive effects for integration in education:

*I am even in meeting with parents, since we had one seminar, so they suggested that we prepare parents in parenting and tell them that we might have children from Afghanistan from the camp. Because we have to because our school belongs territorially and that's how they accept it. Since I have both Chinese and Roma, and a girl who is Romanian ... so they accepted it nicely, and then I praised the parents for accepting it nicely. Because it is a plus for children and parents. It's just a plus, it can't be a minus. They brought him a pencil case, so they gave him a pen ... Well, as far as that is concerned, I said that they passed the exam in humanity. (Local school interviewee)*

In addition, institutional approach to managing migrations locally is also a factor that influence local community's assimilation to the migrant and refugee presence:

*The problem is during the winter of 2013, 2014. 2013 in the winter, when it was a strong winter, it's just someone, he recalculated. The asylum centre can accommodate 230 people. 260, if they sleep in the same bed I don't know, maximum to be capacity. Someone counted, and put 300 people in there, 350, 500 people. And the rest went through the woods and mountains there. And then there was the intrusion into the weekend houses, which is quite normal. Why wouldn't he go into the weekend houses, when his child is freezing? I would do the same. You would do the same. The man has no water, enters the house and asks for water. So it's our fault. (Focus group institutions Lajkovac)*

On the positive side, the active role of local CSOs in networking domicile population with migrants and refugees bears significant results. The civil society organizations assist local institutions in approaching local community and bridging gaps between these two populations. Namely, the CSOs engagement in this field is to create meeting points, or networking nodes to gather both populations. This was mainly facilitated via organization of cultural, integration and sport manifestations, and by creating open spaces for spontaneous engagement between the two groups, as well as by engaging local volunteers to engage and to coordinate humanitarian aid to migrants, thus establishing links with migrant and refugee population. CSO engagement is largely recognized as supportive and positive by the local institutions participated in this research, as the organizations are

supporting local institutions to network with local community and in bridging the migrant and local community closer together.

*And now e.g. [we organize] cultural-creative workshops, then intercultural, with the local environment, then involvement in schools, then local mentors in local communities, we started in 2011 in local communities to organize local events, from exhibitions to theatre performances to fairs ( ...) For example. Football matches, we first organized in Bogovađa, when Bogovađa opened, 2011. We went to the municipality, met of course, so we started working with the municipality, and then all the political parties in that municipality, together with us, organized one football tournament. And now it was unbelievable, at the level that politicians would accept to participate in something like that, but it is not, when there is experience, some trust, some relationship, something that is interesting, something exotic for that communities that only deals with football. , nothing else in that breakup and that makes the first contacts. (APC interviewee)*

Moreover, further involvement with the local community with the aim of information sharing, facilitating different issues in this domain locally, and creating the levels of trust between different parts is enforced by direct contacts with the local community:

*Also through the relationship of informing, so our relationship was with people, we were able to knock on people's doors, in the local communities, for example, our employees, to get to know each other, to get to know what it is about, to meet at local meetings, communities, we initiate to talk to people, and they have gained the trust over time to call us when they have a problem. So, as NGOs, they viewed us as someone who could be a mediator between them, citizens, local self-government or even state institutions like KIRS, etc. (...) We knew that the most important thing was the neighbours' attitude towards refugees, how they understand the problem. (APC interviewee)*

Persistency in local CSOs' engagement is extremely important for the local communities characterised by the homogenous, strong inner-group bonding environment. Specifically, involvement with local schools and sharing information to local children effectively opens the doors for integration processes:

*We had Kanjiža there, an exceptional example of how we worked there. Kanjiza is a place where 100% are Hungarians ... 99%. And they are under strong isolation and pressure from the Hungarian media, which is spreading misinformation. They are quite closed by nature as one environment. They refused any ... They were the first to declare the discriminatory that children cannot go by the same transport as*

*this one, like her and so on. They refused any work with refugees. We went to their schools, called the local government and reached an agreement to organize exhibitions for refugee children to bring refugee children to meet local children. When we overcame that to get permission, the moment they entered the schools for civic education of children, really interesting other controversies opened up there. When the children saw the boys who use the Internet, they asked "how is it in your country", so they showed YouTube, then "what are you doing here" and "what are you doing", a real interaction started. And in the end, many children wanted to volunteer with us. Because they never had information, they never sat down with a child. It means the absence of communication. When they met the children, it was an opening for that environment. (APC interviewee)*

Moreover, as the evidence from the field suggests, creating permanent spaces that can serve as meeting centres for networking of both populations in the local community facilitated by the CSOs, represent a successful strategy for enabling social cohesion in the neighbourhood and developing active participation of local population, mostly in the form of volunteerism, participation in organized integration/interaction events and workshop activities.

*Our goal was to be a centre where we will simply see this factor of integration and to simply be a space where members of the local community, children of migrants and children from Serbia will be able to meet in one common place and attend various activities that we will be providing there. So that centre is, in essence, open as a centre of integration. We had some repulsion from the neighbours at the beginning, but later we had situations when grandparents asked if they could bring their grandchildren to play with us. (ADRA interviewee)*

Additionally, one of the best ways to enable social cohesion between locals and migrant population is via supporting practices of networking children and youth of both population:

*We had a very nice experience with, say, the school "Rade Drainac", where even a group of boys and girls from the classroom where the migrants were and expressed a desire to come to us, to play with them, so that some events that we organized in the centre they came too. We even organized for the school pedagogue to bring students, so that they could simply see where their fellow migrants were coming from and what the centre was that brought them together. We also had a case where boys and girls wanted to enter even the camp in Krnjača, to see where their peers live, where they sleep, and that was interesting to them. These are some stories that happen sporadically. It's not something that is a trend*

*and a practice, but it probably starts from that. We even had a girl who expressed a desire to volunteer with us at the centre and to help us during the summer, because she wants to be with her friends with whom she was at school. (ADRA interviewee)*

Yet, the volunteer engagement as a form of civic participation of local population (including youth) in the community facilitated by the CSOs or emerging spontaneously are still underdeveloped in Serbia. While only few get to be involved in volunteering practices, the significant majority of local population rarely shows interest to participate in the collection of humanitarian aid or to voluntarily assist CSOs and/or the institutions in their endeavours in local integration:

*I would like to point out the problem that I, in fact, all non-governmental organizations at the level of the whole of Serbia are facing, is how to attract anyone to volunteer or generally to attract to the debate, the tribune whatever. Then we decided within the project "Asylum seekers and migrants in our neighbourhood" to actually organize training within the Youth Office, because it is easiest for us to attract young people, Luka was one of the volunteers who applied but It was a devastating fact to me that, despite the fact that the Office is really a very open, liberal type, dealing with a wide variety of topics, very few young people have decided to volunteer. Maybe 3-4 of them. (Focus group CSOs Subotica)*

Disinterest of the local community for local integration issues, the lack of social connections between domicile population and the migrants, lack of information coupled with diverse local problems, all play a role in a reduced local engagement, especially youth. Although active role of CSOs is evident in this area it still does not allow for the culture of volunteerism to be established locally except in sporadic cases.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we have seen, the challenges and barriers to policy implementation in the field of integration of migrants and refugees are many. In the first instance, the foundation domain of integration reflected in the rights to integration in Serbia is undermined by the undefined political and strategic approach to integration notably reflected in the approach to the unregulated legal statuses of relevant groups of migrants and refugees residing at the territory of Serbia. As Ager and Strang (2008) have suggested, articulating migrants and refugees rights defines the roots of integration policy to which governments are accountable. Legal and citizenship statuses of refugees and migrants (e.g. regular vs. irregular migrants) grant further rights that enable integration in the structural manner (employment, housing, education and health). In the case of Serbia as evidence have suggested, the politics of migrants' and refugees' access to rights is floating under a hidden agenda and thus is not clear and comprehensible to a majority of local and national actors tasked for policy implementation which as a consequence is often based on an *ad hoc* approach. Additionally, the nature of access to rights and integration process is justified with a so called 'transit' character of migration by policy officials, indicating on the one hand the lack of commitment to enabling access to rights and integration to migrants, while on the other hand pointing to a lack of preparedness for policy interventions including the lack of understanding of the migration context and its relation to social and economic settings in Serbia and in general. These instances are particularly reflected in the practices that concern regulation of legal statuses of migrants and refugees in Serbia. The issue of irregular migrants in Serbia, as evidence show, continues to confirm the lack of commitment to exercise the set of rights that enable regulation of statuses on the one hand, while on the other confirms commitment in facilitating irregular statuses by supporting 'transit' character of migration flows in Serbia. Instead of activating existing legal solutions such as for example the measure of temporary protection, the officials stayed on course of ignoring the law and riding on the *ad hoc* and 'humanitarian' approach agenda.

The key barrier for opportunity structure and policy interventions at the local level as evidence suggests, refers to missing and/or inadequate policy solutions that emerge in efforts to enable the access to rights and integration of migrants and refugees locally. As a consequence, institutional officials in health, employment and education domains respond to processes of integration via set of improvised, *ad hoc* interventions to resolve the specific issues that migrants and refugees meet in the processes of access to rights and integration.

The lack of capacities of institutions at both national and local level directly affects the level and the quality of policy implementation in the domain of access to rights and integration processes of migrants' and refugees' in Serbia. While the majority local (and national) institutions, mandated to implement integration policies, lack

capacities, the worrying fact is that CRM as the main institution responsible to manage the processes of integration and contribute to access to rights for migrants and refugees, is actually seriously decapacitated. As a consequence, the management of the asylum, migration and integration processes led by the CRM shows inadequate, ineffective, and rather unprofessional features.

The strategy for covering the gaps in the capacities during the past period was mainly one-dimensional. Namely, the system is rather passive in providing incentives and finding the ways to increase self-sustainability in the long run. Instead, it relies almost completely on the external assistance, amongst which the widest pool of assistance is provided by the international organizations whose programmes cover the area of asylum, migration and integration at large. This, as it was highlighted, leads to significant system ruptures notably in terms of long-term system's development and sustainability, planning and achieving independence from the agendas of international organizations.

The most pressing issue concerns a number of gaps in human capacities within relevant institutions. While the issue of quantity of staff engaged in the processes of integration, notably locally, is persisting, the matter of quality of staff engaged at different levels of operation and across the integration sectors requires specific attention. This is particularly apparent within the CRM, local schools, and centres for social work. The set of lacking skills, expertise and knowledge within the pool of staff engaged within abovementioned institutions point to the language barrier that is the most obvious obstacle to communication and integration throughout these sectors. Along with a lack of understanding of the migratory context and background of migrants and refugees as a heterogeneous group with different cultural and religious backgrounds, expertise in the processes of inclusion and integration, and generally the lack of expertise in asylum, migration and integration management locally (and nationally).

The material and physical capacities although necessary for policy implementation and system's vitality, are not considered as important as human capacity in the current context of migration and integration in Serbia. However, the lack of planned strategies for budget allocations in a number of sectors in the field opens up the questions of institutional and policy strategic approaches and planning endeavours in the domain of access to rights and integration processes in a sustainable manner.

Lastly, the overall capacities of the system to effectively translate integration policies into the integration processes depend, amongst others, on the ability of the institutional and non-institutional actors to establish multiple networks of cooperation and coordination including responsible information sharing practices. As we

have seen, these practices are on the crossroad of formal and informal networks characterised by both weak and strong social connections that can support the system in its endeavours to integrate migrant and refugee population.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### INTEGRATION IN HEALTH

Enabling access to health care indicates interaction with the key state services and a full set of rights for migrants and refugees. As suggested in the literature, integration in this sphere is a key for physical and mental well-being including community's well-being at large. In addition to enabling migrant community access to its right to health, well being and protection, integration into health signifies a level of interaction, care and communication.

Lack of respecting certain procedures and understanding the particular policies from the part of institutions prevents effective integration in the health system. As it was discussed earlier, the health system in Serbia shows rather inclusive character towards migrants and refugees reflected in their committed practices in service provision to migrants and refugees irrelevant of their legal statuses in Serbia. While the principle of inclusiveness is exercised in the provision of primary health care, the provision of secondary and tertiary health care is rather weak. It is needed to empower and strengthen understanding and respecting relevant policies that will enable inclusion and integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in health care system. Since the scope of rights for health care tightly depends on legal status of a person, it is of greatest importance to regulate this aspect in order to clarify the confusion that is currently leading to denial of health services for those who are entitled to it. Also it is needed to design and implement solutions for those who are residing outside of the CRM centres, in makeshift camps, woods and squats in border and urban areas, and who are as results imply left without any health care except when their life is in danger.

Moreover, recent practices of healthcare provision in the asylum/transit/reception centres, through general practitioners ambulances funded by international organizations, leads to outsourcing and creating parallel system of health protection instead of strengthening capacities of already existing, making it sustainable and able to provide services to all, including migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. It also leads to isolation of migrants from this domain and possibilities for establishing connections and integration in health care and as a consequence in local community. It is time to abandon these kind of solutions that are short-term, segregating, and usually emergency-focused. Instead, it is needed to put efforts in building sustainable system by

strengthening already existing one, and support integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in this field.

## INTEGRATION IN LABOUR MARKET

While in the literature the most prominence was given to employment as a mean and marker of integration, in the case of Serbia integration in the labour market is in a very naissance phase manifesting a number of malfunctioning when it comes to policy implementation. The integration into the labour market of asylum seekers after 9 months in the procedure, is impacted by the lack of awareness of the local institutions of this measure for integration. Moreover, as evidence suggested there is a general lack of the interventions and initiatives to cultivate the positive environment for migrants' inclusion at the labour market. Since employment is one of the greatest facilitators of integration in local community and Serbian society it is important to ease access to labour market for asylum seekers and refugees. First of all, there is a long waiting period for getting right to work (9 months since submitting asylum application), and the procedure of issuing working permit is complicated, and impossible without support and help of legal representative. Speeding up and simplifying procedure of issuing working permit would be very helpful for asylum seekers and refugees to begin normalizing their lives. Secondly, developing and implementing activation measures, such as subventions for employers for example, would empower them to hire asylum seekers and refugees. By this they would be provided with greater chances for employment and integration.

## INTEGRATION IN EDUCATION

Primary and secondary schools are central to integration of migrant and refugee children. It is so in various aspects but notably in terms of learning the language, gaining knowledge and qualifications, sharing culture, making social connections, being structurally included into the society and connected with the local community. However, the institutions in charge of education often fail to enable the environment responsive to integration in education of this group of children in Serbia. The key barriers to meaningful integration into the local schools, as we have seen, concern teaching mechanisms developed for this group of children, language learning and recognition of the former education levels. Moreover, evidence suggest that unregulated position of the government towards the practices of informal but also formal education significantly hinders provision of quality education for migrant children. Finally, the role of parents in integration processes is neglected in a great majority of cases by the local institutional representatives in the education domain. Developing and implementing detailed policies and procedures for integration of children in educational system is highly

needed. Not only in aspect of formal enrolment but also in practical organization of classes, teaching Serbian language, supervision and evaluation of progress, transition from primary to secondary school and ensuring continuity in education of migrant, asylum seeking and refugee children. In this field it is important to “work on three fronts” – with schools’ personnel, children but also their parents. There is high demand on continuous training and education of teachers about specific cultural, traditional, religious characteristic of migrant pupils, their previous experience, both in countries of origins and education, but also in migration, risks and challenges they are facing with. Further, development of skills in adjusting teaching strategies and techniques, individualization of support plans, evaluation of knowledge is of great importance. Additional support in adaptation and integration in education is needed for children themselves, in order to ease overcoming new challenges. Finally, empowering parents, ensuring more active role in their children’s education will make them able to support their children, but also will directly have impact on their integration into local community and Serbian society.

Furthermore, a significant barrier for the processes of integration represent the practices in allocation of classes and organized transport in schools that, as it may be concluded, support strategies for separating these children from the local school environment and from the local community. Abandoning this strategy, enrolling children in closest schools to their accommodation locations, will facilitate their integration (and their parents integration) in a broader scope than now.

Lastly, the debates about enabling access to formal vs. informal integration into education, yield the conclusion that certain number of local institutional actors and some non-institutional actors are not committed to support formal policy solutions and the right to integration in the formal educational system. They rather advocate informal solutions in teaching children via engagement of teachers on the projects of international organizations in the very asylum/transit/reception centres. While informal education approach may contribute to facilitating learning processes and gaining additional knowledge, it cannot be used as replacement for formal education and it must not prevent integration in local schools and thus local community. It is absolutely, uncompromisingly, needed to integrate all migrant, asylum seeking and refugee children of school age in formal education.

## INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES

As the results have shown the totality of the institutional capacities to implement policy is weak, unstable and based on the short-term planning practices. Especially worrying is the strategy of outsourcing and relying on

financial and other support of external actors, such as international organizations, in overcoming these issues. Creation of parallel system of support and protection is leading to short-term, emergency-focused solutions, which deepen segregation, discrimination and intolerance, prevents integration and finally support transit character of migration in Serbia. Instead, it is of great importance to empower and strengthen capacities of already existing institutions in national and local level, creating sustainable system of protection and support. First step in this aspect is establishing stable sources and means of financing that will allow raising technical capacities as well employing more professionals in relevant institutions (Commissariat for refugees and migration, police, social protection system, etc.). Together with that, since there is a significant capacity gap in the quality of human capital (knowledge, skills, expertise), there is growing need in developing and implementing mechanism for supervision, monitoring and continuous education and training of staff employed in the named institutions, as well direct exchange of expertise and practices between local institutions and civil society organizations. Only in this way there is a possibility to build sustainable system of protection and support that will be able to trigger, facilitate and foster integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Serbian society.

## MULTILEVEL COOPERATION, COORDINATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

Intra-sectoral as well inter-sectoral cooperation, coordination and information sharing according to research evidence show different traits and levels among different integration sectors. Among them, CRM is recognized as a relevant actor that can contribute to system's capacities by the establishment of reliable and relevant coordination mechanisms through which information flow should be effectively enabled. However the level of cooperation and information sharing with CRM is usually low and it needs to be significantly improved. In some cases CRM is even generating unsustainable practices and disrupting local capacities for better sustaining the operations within the sector. Another important segment for increasing the system's capacities in the field of integration refer to the dynamics of networks established **between national and local institutions and the CSOs**. These networks, as it has been shown, have increased institutional capacities through CSOs engagement in the domain of know-how and good practices shared at the bilateral levels. The nature of exchange between institutions and CSOs shows traits of both formal and informal connectivity practices usually activated in an *ad hoc* manner. Likewise, the networking practices between CSOs represent an additional mechanism of cooperation and coordination and are active in this domain. Yet the dynamics of interrelations and connectivity practices locally is weak. As a result, coordination in relevant activities covering the same fields is lacking, which leads to ineffective allocation of resources provided by CSOs and institutions in the field of integration. Clear

and transparent mechanisms of cooperation, coordination and information sharing on national and local level need to be established, in order to build network of all relevant actors in the field of integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. It cannot be left on institutions themselves and their usually informal connections, like it is now, which proved to be able to bring only *ad hoc* solutions in the field. It further has impact on local communities' negative attitude towards migrant and refugee population as the direct result of the lack of networks and information sharing practices established between the domicile population and the relevant institutions. The role of CSOs in bridging the gap between the domicile and migrant population showed to be central. While these practices successfully create links and challenge existing attitudes towards migrant and refugee population, they still need further support in the domain of volunteer engagement in the local community particularly of youth who can contribute to enlarging the scope of contacts between these two populations and contribute to expanding active local youth engagement in this field. Finally, although efforts of CSOs are great, they cannot and shouldn't replace responsibilities of national and local institutions in this matter. In order to manage and foster integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in local communities and Serbian society and preventing segregation, discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia, their greater involvement in this matter is required.

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