

# GLIMER of hope

Professor Nasar Meer of Edinburgh University outlines a new collaborative GLIMER project to help policymakers develop solutions to the integration of displaced migrants and refugees

The Governance of Local Integration of Migrants and Europe's Refugees (GLIMER) project marks a collaboration between researchers in southern and northern Europe. Supported by the JPI Urban Europe Horizon 2020 ERA-NET Cofund scheme, in partnership between the Universities of Calabria, Italy, Edinburgh and Glasgow, both UK, Malmö, Sweden, and the Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (MIGS), Cyprus, its purpose is to generate theoretically informed but empirically grounded data that is able, through best practice sharing and reporting, to support policymakers in finding durable solutions to the governance and local integration of displaced migrants and refugees.

Recently characterised as the 'new normal' by the European Commission (2016), according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) over 1.6 million migrants and refugees entered Europe in 2015 (IOM 2015). This 'refugee crisis' is felt both by frontline and final destination states. Despite the principle of sharing numbers of people according to relative economic strength and country size, as outlined in the EU Task Force for the Mediterranean and wider EU Strategic Guidelines, countries in both southern and northern Europe are being forced to find innovative solutions at local and city levels to manage the arrival, flow and settlement of people.

## Striking features

One of the overlooked outcomes of this development is that new modes of governance are observable and which are characterised by two striking features. The first is that local and city level migrant and refugee reception are sometimes diverging significantly from national level policy and rhetoric. Possibly an illustration of 'decoupling' across geographies of policy delivery (Pope and Meyer 2016: 290), this variation is patterned by ground-level politics, local strategic incentives, and pre-existing economic resources in a manner that invites further scientific investigation through live cases. The second is that local and city level approaches to reception are leading to patterns of successful early integration. These include those cultivated by associations from the third sector which have assumed a key role in what Elia (2013: 36) has termed 'bottom up welfare'. In this respect a number of towns in the southern Italian region of Calabria have led pioneering schemes to welcome migrants, incorporating them into the local labour market (Bruckner 2016), while further examples in educational and housing settings can also be found in Glasgow, Malmö and Nicosia.

The methods and structure of GLIMER are informed by the following project goals:

- To combine qualitative research with action research, bringing academics together with end-users to provide innovative solutions to displaced migrant and refugee integration;
- To convey the research results in operational ways through the elaboration of site-specific strategies able to generate an immediate impact within the research project's development;
- To disseminate the results as widely as possible, in the EU and worldwide, devising strategies to involve relevant communities, stakeholders, practitioners, policymakers, housing and educational institutions;
- To involve local stakeholders and populations in the strategies of co-production, especially through the use of Urban Living Labs (ULLs) within the research to support the creation of inclusive and vibrant communities; and
- To offer coherent and sustainable policy recommendations to urban governance institutions to support diversity and the development of vibrant urban communities.

## Governance

Theoretically, GLIMER is informed by two established conceptual approaches that are insufficiently brought together to grasp current challenges. The first understands migration and refugee reception as reflecting the ways in which modern societies have grown so complex, dynamic and differentiated that no single system can exercise hierarchical and bureaucratic control over the movement and reception of people. This means that we need to understand migrant integration as an *issue of governance* which entails dispersed networks based on partnerships, and the blurring of boundaries between state and civil society (Elia and Fantozzi 2013).

As such, GLIMER moves away from seeing the arrival of displaced migrants and refugees as purely a matter of *central government* which is more top-down, centralised, bureaucratic and state-centric. This is crucial where the governance of migration relies on a 'mixed economy' of welfare provision that involves working in partnership with 'third sector' (e.g., voluntary and community) organisations and NGOs at various levels through service delivery, consultation and partnerships, and which are especially evident in the reception and integration of new arrivals (McDaniel, 2016).

This broad tendency is accentuated in austere economic times, where the diffusion of state responsibility outwards to civil society may also be understood as the acceptable face of spending cuts. However, most previous research into the governance of displaced migrants and refugees emphasises either the bottom-up participation of grassroots or the top-down influence of the state. Both of these perspectives are limited because civil society is composed of mediating institutions that blur distinctions between bottom and top (O'Toole and Meer 2016).

Interestingly, as the initial findings from the Prospects for International Migration Governance (MIGPROSP) project (funded by the European

Research Council) have shown, in national level migration policy 'not only is change seen as difficult to deliver, but change itself is viewed as problematic because of the possibility of unforeseen consequences in an unstable and highly politicised policy field' (Geddes 2016). Local innovation is therefore a profoundly important activity and GLIMER will offer an analysis of the relationship between civil society and governance in our respective cases both in support of migrant and refugee integration as well as by migrants and refugees themselves.

### Integration

The second conceptual frame, integration, is as established as it is contested and has been described as 'a concept both dazzling and treacherous' (Saggar and Sommerville 2012: 6). While integration is often a primary policy objective, its relationship to governance is unclear. A theoretical concern with integration is as old as the earliest social scientific accounts of modernity, insofar as the ways social scientists have conceptualised the division of labour and the kinds of social relations that characterise modern societies.

Latterly, and especially as it was translated through the work in US ethnic and racial studies (Meer, 2014), the concept has come to describe post-migration relations. Castles *et al.* (2002: 17-18) offer a useful delineation for what a concept of integration can resemble, especially as it relates to migration. Usage 1: The process through which migrants and refugees become part of the receiving society in a one-way process of adaptation by newcomers. Usage 2: A two-way adaptive process involving changes in values, norms and behaviour for both newcomers and members of the existing society. Understanding the link between integration and governance is crucial yet obscured however by a prevailing national level focus on policy and practice which overlooks how, while contemporary migration is happening in tandem with wider economic and political forces (that can draw or push movement), group networks and local and city level authorities can respond in distinctive ways that are having demonstrable outcomes (Gebhardt, 2014).

### GLIMER

In this respect, the GLIMER project will examine emergent systems of co-responsibility between local and national agencies in their responses to managing the integration of displaced migrants and refugees. Of central importance here will be the utilising of what have become known as Urban Living Labs (ULLs) across each of the cases. ULLs are emerging as a means through which to gauge local governance at a time when 80% of the population of Europe are expected to reside in urban settings by 2020 (European Commission 2014).

Briefly, ULLs are diverse and can (i) take the form of partnerships that span public, private and voluntary sectors; (ii) serve as tools for industry to pilot commercial technologies in specified areas; or (iii) name other kinds of partnerships that fall around participation, collaboration, experimentation and learning in the governance of urban spaces (Voytenko *et al.*, 2016). GLIMER will develop an approach to ULLs based on this third kind as elaborated by Schliwa (2013), seeing ULLs as collaborative ventures between citizens, companies, local governments and researchers.

These will be guided by the following key research questions – taken up across each thematically specific work-package – to ascertain:

1) To what extent – and why – are cities adopting approaches to the governance of migration and refugees that diverge from national level positions?;

- 2) How and in what ways are cities and localities cultivating innovative approaches in the reception and integration of migrants and refugees?; and
- 3) Which approaches are proving successful and how can we model this for other contexts to learn from?

These three core research questions will be empirically pursued across the substantive work packages dedicated to data collection on Regeneration and Urban Exclusion (WP3), Education and Linguistic Competences (WP4), Labour Market and Skills Training (WP5) and Gender Dynamics across Reception and Integration (WP6).

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