
International conference in Skopje on the management of the migration crisis in the Western Balkans and in Central Europe

On the occasion of World Refugee day, on 20 and 21 June 2016, ALDA Skopje (European Association for Local Democracy) organised an International conference entitled “WELCOMING” in Skopje. This international event gathered 70 participants and it was a fruitful opportunity to share best practices and know-how with a special emphasis on local level, in the Western Balkans and in Central Europe. Representatives of national and local authorities, CSOs, and experts exchanged and debated on key areas, such as emergency reception at local level, local policies for integration, the role of citizens and how to create partnerships for inclusive communities.

Concerning the emergency aid, participants highlighted the importance of coordination between CSOs on the field, their registration, and the creation of a code of conduct in reception centres. Moreover, the necessity was stressed to improve professionalization of aid workers, the protection of vulnerable groups among refugees, individualisation of processes, and the quality of practical information delivery. On the area of integration, it is crucial to foster cooperation between CSOs and public authorities on local and national levels, to advocate for improving legislation on local and national levels, to develop refugees’ skills, and to implement local awareness raising campaigns.

The issue of intercultural dialogue and local population perceptions was addressed, and participants stated that the capacity to reach people not sensitized by this question is a key element, and that local scale was the relevant space to counterbalance the narratives focused on fear. In this way, the working groups proposed to develop direct contacts between refugees and local populations through local activities involving schools and local media, and to fight against problematic collective labelling with solutions journalism bringing positive perspectives on migration. These conclusions give relevant leads on how to implement refugees’ human rights on the field, and how to shift from emergency management to integration policies, developing the networking capacities of the national level bodies, local authorities and CSOs.

The International Seminar is developed in the framework of the project “WELCOMING – Wanting Europe as Leverage for Co-operation on the Migratory Insertion Governance” co-financed by the Central European Initiative (CEI), the financial assistance of EU, the Cooperation Normandy – Macedonia and the International Institute for human rights and peace in Caen.

ALDA Skopje is a branch of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), European non-governmental organization dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA focuses on activities that facilitate cooperation between local authorities and civil society and it is through this perspective that it approaches the topic of migration management. ALDA launched in November 2015 its “[Migrants Initiative](#)”, a set of



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actions developed by local authorities and civil society organisations aimed at providing relief and integration opportunities for the newcomers in the framework of the project [LADDER](#) which acts on advocacy and awareness raising activities on migration and its link with development, among public, private actors, and citizens. The outputs of this action are the General Assembly of ALDA's [Recommendations on the role of Local Authorities in the refugee crisis](#), the joint consortium statement calling for humane treatment of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection, as well as combating smuggling and the root causes of migrations.

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