



**Atlantic Council**

ADRIENNE ARSHT  
CENTER FOR RESILIENCE

# **BUILDING MORE Resilient Communities**

## **RESPONDING TO IRREGULAR MIGRATION FLOWS**



**BY AMY POPE**



**Atlantic Council**

ADRIENNE ARSHT  
CENTER FOR RESILIENCE

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**BY AMY POPE**

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# FOREWORD

**ERIC GARCETTI**  
MAYOR  
CITY OF LOS ANGELES

**M**ore than 100 years ago, my great-grandmother carried my infant grandfather in her arms over the U.S.-Mexico border. An unexpected event — the death of her husband during the Mexican Revolution — led to an unexpected decision. My grandfather, Salvador, earned his U.S. citizenship by volunteering to fight in World War II. He learned a trade as a barber and built a future for his family in Los Angeles. Today, turbulent times are driving the same sort of unexpected decisions all around the world.

Migration is on the rise today as refugees flee their home countries in numbers not seen since World War II. In recent years, waves of migrants have brought economic, political, and social challenges to cities around the world, from Barcelona to Berlin, and Toronto to Los Angeles. While significant numbers of unanticipated migrants can put a strain on a city's resources, schools, housing, and infrastructure, cities also create unparalleled opportunities for immigrants to thrive by serving as diverse hubs for innovation and economic success. As cities work to integrate newly arrived populations, it is important to consider how to mitigate that stress, so that newcomers and host communities alike can flourish.

In this paper, the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience explores successful policies and practices that cities can use to strengthen the fabric of their communities and reap the economic, security, and cultural benefits of successfully integrating new immigrant populations through a collaborative approach

among government, business, and civic leaders.

In Los Angeles, more than a third of our residents are foreign-born, and nearly two-thirds are either immigrants or the children of immigrants. The contributions of immigrants span cultural, economic and social dimensions. In economic terms, immigrants contribute \$232 billion to the County's GDP, or more than 36 percent. Immigrant entrepreneurs generate \$3.5 billion annually and employ hundreds of thousands of people in Los Angeles County. From the owners of the local grocery store to some of Hollywood's biggest stars, immigrants define and shape Los Angeles, and the United States.

The recent spike in migration around the globe has led to difficult but important discussions at the local, national, and international levels. What is the best way to integrate immigrants into a new city? What is best for the new arrivals, and what is best for the host community? How can we make the answers to these questions work in harmony?

Leadership in our cities requires thoughtful, humane, and effective answers to these critical questions—solutions we are attempting to achieve in Los Angeles, and ideas that this paper puts forth.

If embraced, this paper's recommendations can help chart a successful course across the globe, allowing future unexpected acts — much like my bisabuela's bold decision to migrate north a century ago — to yield brighter futures for families and stronger, more stable communities everywhere.



# INTRODUCTION

**I**mmigration, refugees, displaced persons: These issues are capturing headlines and shaping politics around the world. Recent waves of “irregular” migration—the movement of people that occurs outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit, and receiving countries—have brought economic, political, and social challenges the world over, contributing to highly publicized upheavals across much of Europe and North America, as well as in other regions of the world.<sup>1</sup> While the movement of people is as old as human history, irregular migration today is unprecedented. The number of refugees and internally displaced persons has reached a level not witnessed since World War II. At the end of 2015, more than 65 million people were displaced worldwide, more than half of them children<sup>2</sup>—a number that does not include the many millions more who moved for purely economic or other reasons.

Irregular migration—particularly when there are large movements of people—can be highly disruptive, especially at the local level. Schools, hospitals, and social services are strained. Native residents may clash with the foreign-born over culture, religion, or access to jobs, breeding resentment and in some cases, leading to violent confrontations.

Unquestionably, a negative reaction to immigration influenced the British decision to leave

the European Union, and continues to threaten the long-term stability of the European Union. It was a foundational component of Donald Trump’s surprise victory in the U.S. presidential election, Marine Le Pen’s success in the French primary elections, and the support for nationalist candidates in places like the Netherlands. But behind the very public stresses caused by immigration, many communities ultimately flourish in the long run because of the skills, cultural diversity, and demographics introduced by the newcomers.

Understanding how to maximize the benefits of migrants to a community while rebounding from the disruption caused by the migration is at the heart of the work of the Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience initiative on migration.<sup>3</sup> This report examines how communities—cities and regions—and entire societies can better prepare for irregular migration through strategies rooted in resilience—meaning the ability to meet disruption, restore stability, and emerge stronger.<sup>4</sup> This report goes beyond the near-term challenge of integrating migrants into a community, and considers how migrants can help local communities face twenty-first-century problems, such as aging populations, a dwindling tax base, insufficient diversity in the labor market, and concerns about public safety.

The recommendations in this paper focus primarily on advanced and emerging



*Tensions arising from immigration have fed nationalist sentiment and impacted the political debate, including the historic Brexit vote in May 2016.*

countries—those with relatively stable economies and functioning government institutions.<sup>5</sup> While recognizing that a resilient response should be comprehensive and include preventive measures that can be taken before a migration crisis even begins, these recommendations focus on the impact of migration on the host communities. They look for ways to connect national and international policies to local communities, where the impact will be most felt—and look at best practices to improve resilience at the local level, between local and federal officials, with the private sector, and with the international community.<sup>6</sup> They are informed by a roundtable discussion that included a broad cross-section of participants representing local, state, and federal governments, law enforcement, the private sector, academia, and think-tanks.

### CONSEQUENCES OF A FAILURE TO ACT

**W**hy should communities and governments take action to build a resilient immigration system—particularly when they are not in the middle of a migration crisis? Certainly, without the urgency of a migration crisis, public officials are often reluctant to take on such a highly politicized and potentially divisive issue. But, as past examples have demonstrated repeatedly, migration—when handled poorly or ignored until it’s a crisis—can seriously undermine long-term community resilience and crowd out space for thoughtful decision-making, leaving officials to make wholly political, rather than sensible choices. The failure to take any measures in advance, to identify and address community concerns, or to enhance coordination among the various stakeholders can undermine trust in governments, strain



*With ongoing violence in Syria, countries in the Middle East, Europe, the United States, and Canada have all seen an increase in refugees from the country.*

infrastructure, and foment civil unrest—breeding resentment between communities, ultimately fueling nationalist politics and extremist sentiment and actions—even when migrants are not entering in unprecedented numbers.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, relatively small numbers of migrants—who would otherwise be distributed and absorbed across a country with minimal or even beneficial impact—can overwhelm local capacity when their arrival is concentrated in just a handful of communities. The pressures on schools, hospitals, shelters, and other public amenities can be cumulative and the long-term consequences—particularly the popular perception that migration is a “problem”—can be difficult to reverse. The influx of Syrian refugees in Europe underscored how vital the cooperation of the entire European Union was

to managing the significant influx of migrants.<sup>8</sup> But adopting sensible policies to evenly distribute the burdens and opportunities offered by resettlement can be a difficult political sell. Without having the time needed to build consensus around migration, communities can become hostile and lash out at political parties that are making deals on behalf of migrants. Bureaucratic processes can also be too cumbersome to respond creatively and agilely to a situation that is rapidly deteriorating.

As a consequence, anti-immigrant rhetoric builds on itself, significantly increasing the political pressures on policy-makers to make hasty, and often poor, decisions for the long-term, frustrating native-born residents, and isolating and alienating migrants. Anecdotally, increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric here in



the United States, for example, has led migrant communities to close in on themselves, making them less likely to engage in and integrate into a community and less likely to trust government officials, including law enforcement. The impact can be to make communities less safe, less economically stable, and ultimately less resilient.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, it can rob communities of the opportunities to benefit from migration. Groups under siege are less likely to contribute meaningfully to the future development of the community as a whole. The result is that everyone loses.

## DEFINING A RESILIENT RESPONSE TO MIGRATION

With well-managed, resilient migration, the value added by the newcomers strengthens the long-term economic, cultural, and social prospects of the communities they join. There are many examples of cities plagued by urban blight, an aging population, or insufficient native labor skills that have been revitalized by immigration. New York City, for example, saw significant population decline in the 1970s, leading to problems such as abandoned buildings, rising crime rates, and a decline in small businesses.<sup>10</sup> New York City's rebound was due in large part to the growth in the immigrant population. The population that left was ultimately replaced largely by foreign-born residents. This trend has played out across the United States—documented in seventeen of the fifty U.S. cities with the largest populations in 1950, including San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Boston, Seattle, Kansas City, and Atlanta, as well as Philadelphia and Minneapolis–St. Paul.<sup>11</sup>

Whether it is the Vietnamese “boat people” fleeing to North America

and Australia,<sup>12</sup> refugees fleeing persecution in World War II, or Mexican-Americans looking for better opportunities in the United States, immigrant impact on cities has led to positive net benefits over the long term.<sup>13</sup> In fact, no U.S. community has rebounded from a population decline without an increase in migration. Economic analysis attributes some of the revitalization to the fact that migrants are more likely to start up main street businesses—grocery stores, restaurants, clothing stores, and other enterprises that are key to neighborhood growth and vitality.<sup>14</sup> In fact, 28 percent of main street businesses are begun by immigrants, earning \$13 billion in 2013 alone.<sup>15</sup> These small, independent shops stimulate the economy, improve neighborhood safety, and attract residents and visitors. Additionally, immigrants fill important labor replacement needs, particularly as the native-born population ages and Baby Boomers retire or out-migration outpaces the needs of the originating community.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the economic benefits offered by immigrants, the nationalist trends sweeping Europe and the United States suggest that these benefits have little impact on the anxiety and fears of native-born communities concerned about the threats to their own livelihood, cultures, and way of life. To create a truly resilient response to migration, there is a need to identify the best ways to improve the experience of

communities hosting new migrants so that cities can reap the economic and other benefits in the long term, while minimizing the hostility and anxiety posed by the changing community in the short term. Ultimately, the resilient response is one where all people can take part in economic, civic, and social life.<sup>17</sup>

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**Adopting sensible policies to evenly distribute the burdens and opportunities offered by resettlement can be a difficult political sell.**



# BUILDING A MORE RESILIENT IMMIGRATION RESPONSE

**T**he primary challenge to building any response to migration is bridging the tension between global trends and local impact; to connect large-scale migration to the cities and communities where migrants will resettle. The forces displacing people globally—that lead to a refugee fleeing Somalia, for example—are divorced from the ultimate impact on the host community—that refugee resettling in St. Cloud, Minnesota. The most resilient responses to immigration are those that link national and even international migration policy to the factors on the local level that will most likely maximize opportunities for all.<sup>18</sup>

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## **Start at the Local Level— Identify Need and Build Trust**

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**T**he evidence suggests that the best examples of community resilience to immigration emerge when a community has a clear need and demonstrated interest in increasing their population. At the same time, migrants can struggle to integrate into the community, whether due to a language barrier, existing skills that do not translate in the adopted country, or strained public services. These challenges can also foster local resentment toward the new arrivals, increasing alienation and making successful integration

more elusive. Rather than just letting migrants and communities fend for themselves, resilient governments recognize and address the host of challenges associated with migration—from providing opportunities to learn the host country language and customs, to translating skills for the local labor market, to creating centers where newly arrived migrants can seek help in navigating their new communities.<sup>19</sup>

Successful examples of local governments doing so are found worldwide. Detroit, Michigan, has created an office focused on attracting and retaining migrants to that city,<sup>20</sup> providing them with keys to success such as financial literacy, English language skills, and job training. Likewise, St. Louis, Missouri’s Mosaic Project seeks to make its community more welcoming to migrants, to reverse its own population decline and revitalize its neighborhoods. Many American cities, recognizing the value migrants bring, have identified themselves as “welcoming communities,” implementing policies to attract and retain new arrivals.

In Europe, Germany implemented a law requiring new migrants to learn the language and take courses on integrating themselves into German communities, and the University of Potsdam, just outside Berlin, is holding courses to help refugees who are trained teachers make the transition to teaching in German schools.<sup>21</sup>



*Canada's commitment to accepting higher numbers of refugees, partnered with successful integration programs throughout the country, have made the nation a leader in immigration policy.*

Barcelona, Spain, is leading a group of Cities of Refuge that pledge an openness to refugees and have established information exchanges between cities to facilitate these policies.<sup>22</sup>

Attracting migrants does not come without potential social cost. Local organizations and native residents can become resentful of the cultural differences, which may be exacerbated by programs benefiting migrants but not native-born residents. But a resilient and successful community response to migration depends on the community welcoming the new residents.

Welcoming America, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that supports communities and partners who are leading efforts to make their communities more open to all people, provides a blueprint for communities that choose to attract new migrants.<sup>23</sup> Key to the success of this approach is building a broad coalition focused on the common community goal of economic

development, rather than migration specifically. The best initiatives incorporate leaders from a cross-section of society—business leaders, faith leaders and their congregants, professional networks, educators, law enforcement, and others—and build solutions focused on the very particular and unique needs of a community.<sup>24</sup> The importance of creating buy-in for the influx of new migrants cannot be overstated. For a community to best adjust, local leaders and individuals must embrace the opportunities that migration will bring for the community as a whole.

There is perhaps no better example of this concept in action than the Canadian private refugee sponsorship program. While it had been in development years earlier, its value was quickly proven in response to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's call to resettle 25,000 Syrians—more than double the number of refugees resettled in

## CASE STUDY Detroit

BY TAYLOR NELSON  
EXECUTIVE PROGRAMS COORDINATOR  
OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS  
CITY OF DETROIT



**THE CITY OF DETROIT'S OFFICE** of Immigrant Affairs, founded in October 2015, is committed to ensuring Detroit is a welcoming and inclusive city for all its residents. The office was initially created to establish a resettlement strategy to support refugee integration into Detroit, following the Syrian refugee crisis. The Office of Immigrant Affairs collaborated with many partners to form a resettlement working group, which included various city departments, local resettlement agencies, community organizations, social service providers, the state of Michigan, and the U.S. Department of State. The office continues to partner with key organizations and stakeholders in the Detroit community to create robust programming for our city's residents, both native and foreign-born.

Detroit has worked with

Welcoming America, a nonprofit dedicated to successfully integrating immigrants into new communities, to host an annual Welcome Week, a series of events where communities bring together immigrants and U.S.-born residents. During 2016's Welcome Week, our office hosted a screening of *Salam Neighbor*, a documentary about a Syrian refugee camp, followed by a panel discussion on ways to support immigrant communities

in Detroit.

The office has also worked to integrate refugee residents through our partnership with the University of Michigan (UM). Our office, along with the resettlement agency Samaritas, recently partnered with the UM student group Michigan Refugee Assistance Program (MRAP) to create a Detroit-based refugee volunteer initiative known as the Welcoming Liaison Program. In this program, MRAP students make biweekly home visits to refugee families living in Detroit and help them access a variety of public resources. Given the success of this program in supporting these families, our office has decided to continue this program at UM and launch this effort at additional universities in the Metro-Detroit area.

Cultural, practical, and legal training have been key efforts

in Detroit. The Detroit Police Department, Michigan Immigrant Rights Center, and the Islamic Center of Detroit host "Know Your Rights" training sessions in which immigrant residents are welcomed to their new community and also empowered by learning about their rights.

Working with native residents has been equally important in producing successful programming. Our office has collaborated with local community groups to inform them about the office's priorities—specifically, the refugee resettlement strategy. During these conversations, we have engaged in dialogue with community members, discussing the scope of our strategy and also answering relevant questions. In having these discussions, our goal has been to help integrate our new residents—some of whom attended these meetings—and also learn more about current residents and their perspective. Making our refugee resettlement effort a collaboration among all community members has ensured that all parties are coming together to make decisions for their community.

Moving forward, the City of Detroit's Office of Immigrant Affairs will continue to leverage our relationships to build partnerships with community organizations, institutions, and key stakeholders to ensure that Detroit is a welcoming city, able to support all our residents regardless of national origin.

the past. Its success is particularly remarkable given the heated political rhetoric at the time in the United States, where an increasing number of state governors declared their intention to fight refugee resettlement in their communities. The success of the program relied in no small part on the willingness of Canadian citizens and community groups to privately sponsor refugee families—agreeing to help support them financially and otherwise for the first year of their lives in Canada. While private sponsorship for refugee resettlement accounted for well less than a third of the total refugees resettled in Canada, the enthusiasm generated by the over 300 communities across Canada engaged and committed to its success cemented support for refugee resettlement, even as the United States was struggling to maintain its own commitment to increase refugee resettlement.<sup>25</sup>

It's not always possible to build the consensus needed to smoothly integrate new populations. Canada benefitted from its geographic distance from the Syrian refugee crisis and had the luxury of building the program, as well as internal support for that program, well before any refugees were resettled there. In Germany, for example, where the government was faced with the daunting task of immediately resettling over a million residents in a short time, there were well-documented instances of anti-refugee violence and widespread apprehension about the crime or disruption the refugees might bring with them.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the most successful examples of resilience were those communities where local residents volunteered to become part of the resettlement process, some out of good will, others recognizing the long-term benefits of new migrants.<sup>27</sup> Despite some level of ongoing criticism and apprehension, two years later, there are many success stories of communities bouncing back from the initial disruption.<sup>28</sup>

While circumstances may prevent a seamless introduction of migrants, the more governments can create a system for managing migration

that imposes a sense of orderliness, encourages the private sector to give new arrivals job opportunities and an economic stake in their local community, and engages its citizens as it develops programs, the more likely it is to create a resilient and sustainable solution.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt the Welcoming Communities (part of the Welcoming America program) blueprint to seek input on plans for attracting and integrating migrants into communities at all levels.
- Involve native-born populations in meeting and welcoming newcomers through host programs, mentorship opportunities, food drives, and through policies that encourage community organizations (places of worship, Lions, Elks, business organizations, etc.) to participate and contribute to the process.
- As communities build support for immigrants, ensure parity in opportunities for the native-born population. Programs focused on providing access to financial literacy or to funding, for example, should include the existing population as well. Run these programs through community centers—such as public libraries—while also widening access through online seminars, etc.

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## ▶ Link the Local and the National—Horizontally and Vertically

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**B**ecause immigration policy is ultimately set at the national level, it is not enough to simply create welcoming communities and hope migrants will show up. Those communities that actively want to attract new populations can buttress their efforts if they are well-linked to the federal authorities who are setting and implementing immigration policies.



*Several NGOs facilitate welcoming events for new immigrants and members of the host community to meet and mingle, helping to build trust and community.*

In many countries, a process for connecting communities to federal governments is not well established. In the United States, formal immigration channels, employers, or families, not communities, are the primary sponsors of immigrants. Refugee resettlement is managed by refugee resettlement organizations, often based on available services and established communities versus economic opportunities. While some communities have actively reached out to federal officials at the Departments of State and Homeland Security on an ad hoc basis, offering their communities for resettlement, there are no formal processes to maximize these connections.

Likewise in Europe, mayors in cities have complained of the disconnect between immigration policies and local needs and impact. Based on information collected from thirty-four cities in seventeen European Union member states and Norway, EURO CITIES, a network of major European cities, published a series of recommendations to improve this connectivity—including a recommendation to find an increased role for cities to play in national and regional decisions to place migrants.<sup>29</sup>

There are models that suggest a possible way forward. Canada's Provincial Nominee Program, by which a foreign worker is nominated by a

province for a work permit based on criteria set by the province itself, links local needs to national immigration policy.<sup>30</sup> This program aims to address labor or skills shortages in individual provinces. If expanded beyond traditional economic migrants and if fluid enough to respond to migration surges more broadly, this program could prove to be a model for better alignment of needs both at the level of the community and at the level of the migrant.

Similarly, in Germany in 2015, the national government created a policy to distribute refugees across the country based proportionally on tax revenue and population. States decided how many refugees to send to each district, and each district determined which towns or cities would house the refugees.<sup>31</sup> While the plan was formulated in response to the surge of migrants in 2015, the structure, modified to increase consultation with cities, could be used to build in considerations of economic need and opportunities for future migration.<sup>32</sup>

### RECOMMENDATION

→ To maximize the potential for building resilient communities through migration, establish formal channels for local communities to communicate their interest and need in resettling migrants to federal/national authorities.

### ▶ Don't Neglect the Nongovernmental and Private Sectors

When linking nongovernmental organizations, including the private sector, to government officials, the link tends to be tenuous—both horizontally across communities, and vertically from the community level to the national level. For example, organizations that focus on urban and rural revitalization are not necessarily well aligned with the refugee

## A COMMON EFFORT

# Migration and Integration in Germany

BY BORIS RUGE

GERMAN DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION, WASHINGTON, DC

**“A RENDEZVOUS WITH GLOBALIZATION”**—THIS IS what German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble called the refugee crisis in 2015. Europe had not seen so many people on the move since World War II, and Germany in particular accepted nearly a million refugees in 2015 alone. Since then, we have witnessed unprecedented support and engagement by the German people, with at least 60,000 volunteers involved in the effort. Students, retirees, and businesspeople teach German, cook food, and hand out clothing to the newly arrived.

But the refugee crisis has never been a German challenge alone—it is as much a European as a global one. Better coordination between the United States and Europe is key, as is addressing root causes of forced migration. Finding resolutions to the conflicts in the Middle East—in particular, Syria—will be instrumental in stemming the flow of refugees and stabilizing communities. Sadly, despite international efforts, there is little hope for a quick resolution to these conflicts.

Global conflict, climate change, and the facilitation of the movement of people through an increasingly digitized world all demand we make sure that migration, its causes, and its management are addressed in concert. This includes coordinated efforts in crisis management, humanitarian assistance, and development aid. It also includes working against climate change as a key driver of migration. And it means burden-sharing when it comes to providing refuge to those in need.

As global migration increases, integration must be a central objective in host communities. Germany has welcomed migrants from southern

Europe, Turkey, and many other regions since the 1950s. We have come a long way with our integration efforts, but we are still far from the ideal. This is why Germany—the German government, businesses, and private initiatives—is dedicating significant efforts and resources to integration programs now.

Three aims are particularly important in this effort: First, language skills are key. This year alone, 550,000 refugees will receive language training by 32,000 teachers specifically hired for that purpose. Second, access to the labor market is crucial. Germany is trying to move refugees into the labor market as quickly as possible, often in combination with vocational training. Third, we need to bridge the cultural gap. The government offers integration courses that explain and teach refugees the principles of our constitutional order and our values. This is an area where governmental programs can only be successful if supported by civil society initiatives. From cultural assimilation programs to making online university courses more universally accessible to working with companies looking to increase their work force, the German government sees the value in reaching across sectors to strengthen integration efforts. This is also a field where we can learn a great deal from the US.

We are convinced that only a joint effort by the government and its agencies, the private sector, and civil society will enable us to manage the influx of refugees and the challenge of integration. And only in a joint international effort will we be able to cope with migration, so we can make the “rendezvous with globalization” a positive one.

resettlement and immigration communities.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the needs of the private sector are not always considered as a part of a government response, despite commitments from businesses that want to hire immigrants, either as part of a social responsibility push (in the case of refugees), because of the specific skills they bring to the table, or because of a lack of native-born labor within the community (the agricultural sector, for example).<sup>34</sup> Affirmatively working with and across the private sector to identify potential employment opportunities is key.<sup>35</sup>

At the local level, the Halifax, Nova Scotia, Connector Program provides a scalable model for linking immigrants with local employers, professionals, and other “connectors.”<sup>36</sup> The program has won multiple awards and has been replicated in ten other Canadian cities and by the province of New Brunswick. The program relies on volunteers to provide advice and contacts for new immigrants to the city. The city benefits by adding workers to its labor market, which is otherwise facing declining numbers of youth.<sup>37</sup>

At the regional level, there is an extremely promising effort to link these disparate communities working to absorb new immigrant populations. Officially launched in 2013, the Welcoming Economies (WE) Global Network, made up of more than twenty regional economic development initiatives from across the Midwest United States, taps into the economic development opportunities created by immigrants.<sup>38</sup> The Network identifies best practices, offers peer-to-peer learning exchanges, provides access to technical capacity, and helps publicize the work of individual local initiatives across the region. By connecting the private sector, economic revitalization efforts, and the immigrant support community, the Network is poised to close the gaps between community organizations and the private sector, which is necessary to maximize the economic benefits brought by immigrant communities.

## RECOMMENDATION

→ Identify economic opportunities and needs within a community, particularly drawing on the expertise of local employers, and link immigrant populations to these organizations and opportunities.

## ▶ Enhance National Interagency Coordination

The same silos between refugee and migrant resettlement and economic and community revitalization efforts are exacerbated at the federal government level. Different organizations and different people have responsibility for immigration and economic revitalization and may never have reason to interact. For example, in the United States, the federal government’s response to migration surges is primarily vested in the Department of Homeland Security. The Department of State plays the leading role in the resettlement of refugees in the United States, and the Department of Health and Human Services provides financial support to resettled refugees and certain other vulnerable populations. But these organizations have little information about macro or micro economic trends across the United States or where communities might most welcome or need new members.

Creating a unified policy response that includes the housing, economic development, and fiscal policy agencies would lead to more resilient results. In the United States, the Department of Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, and the National Economic Council—agencies and organizations that are better suited to identify communities across the country with the capacity, desire, and need for migration—should play a meaningful role in conversations about migration resettlement





*The need for international coordination is apparent in refugee camps around the world. Cooperation can help ease the burden on individual nations.*

and response. In other countries, the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Foreign Ministry should regularly exchange information on communities best able to receive migrants.

Unless the picture and analysis is comprehensive, and designed to identify opportunities and connect dots between entities, the response will be a Band-Aid to cover the symptoms, instead of promoting growth and the ability to bounce back.

### RECOMMENDATION

→ Establish an interagency working group with representatives from key government agencies, including the domestic economic development agencies, to proactively identify best opportunities for resettling new migrants, including refugees, based on economic opportunities, local infrastructure, political will, etc.

## ► Create and Enhance Regional and Multilateral Coordination to Address Migration

Multilateral organizations have an important role to play in forecasting future migration waves, identifying opportunities for resettlement, and pressuring governments to step up to resettle migrants when the numbers are overwhelming certain communities. The movement of large numbers of refugees and migrants cannot be managed by one state alone, and without a plan, border or transit countries, which are often already stretched, shoulder a disproportionate burden. To avoid crippling the capacity of any one state to respond, a global or multistate solution is needed.

The European Union's experience in the face of the most recent migration surge into Europe vividly illustrated the need for a multistate solution. The impact of Syrian refugee flows,

## CASE STUDY

# Anchorage, Alaska

BY MARA KIMMEL, PhD  
FIRST LADY OF ANCHORAGE, ALASKA  
RESILIENCE TEAM LEAD



ANCHORAGE, ALASKA, IS HOME TO some of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods and schools in the United States. The municipality's 300,000 residents live on the traditional lands of the Dena'ina people, and speak more than 100 languages. Anchorage is one of the nation's most rapidly diversifying urban areas, and boasts the country's highest urban percentage of indigenous people. America's northernmost city has a character that is distinctly global and uniquely northern.

These demographics bring opportunity—opportunity to show that neighbors of different cultures and different histories can forge a safe, thriving community that embraces and embodies tolerance, respect, connection, and equity. Achieving those goals—particularly in the face of rapid economic and environmental change and uncertainty—necessitates understanding and dismantling barriers to our city's civic and economic

life. To achieve these goals, we work closely with Welcoming America, a nonprofit dedicated to helping cities integrate immigrants in a manner that is beneficial to all residents. Equity lies at the heart of this framework. Activating the diverse communities living within the city requires building pathways to inclusivity.

We are building a resilience framework in key neighborhoods and work with stakeholders across sectors and services, such as workforce development, English language training, and emergency services, as well as physical spaces such as housing, community gathering areas, and agricultural and farmers market sites, to create tools to address economic stability, equity, and inclusion. The goal is to develop the skills, institutions, and infrastructure necessary to overcome chronic stresses (unemployment, homelessness, economic inequities), acute shocks (floods, earthquakes, and fires), and systemic environmental challenges

(climate change and energy use). The municipality is deliberately linking its immigrant integration initiatives into this community-wide resilience work.

Anchorage is a city familiar with the need to adapt. The harsh and often unpredictable conditions we endure in the north have required inhabitants to be innovative, responsive, and take care of one another for thousands of years. Resilience in the face of challenge is part of the character of our city, and allows us to see obstacles as opportunities. Embedding equity as the core of resilience is vital to ensuring a healthy future where residents can successfully navigate and thrive through uncertain economic and environmental change. Although the challenges of living in the largest northern urban center may be unique, the lessons learned in this incredibly diverse community—that resilience requires being ready, being connected, and being inclusive—are globally relevant.

particularly into the neighboring countries of Turkey and Jordan, significantly strained their local capacity, fueling tensions in those countries, and ultimately spilled into Europe. The European Union was pushed into a reactive mode, where, given its structural challenges, it struggled to create flexible policies. While the member states ultimately agreed to distribute refugee resettlement across Europe, it was a partial solution at best—with numbers well below the total number of migrants who entered Europe, some countries refusing outright to participate, and no clear mechanism for enforcing the plan. There remain unanswered questions as to how to manage the remaining migrant populations, and whether and how the European Union will enforce its proposed policy prescriptions. Its failure to articulate an implementable policy in advance cost it political capital and seriously undermined its legitimacy.

Fueled in part by that experience, in September 2016, as part of the UN General Assembly, the UN member states acknowledged “a shared responsibility to manage large movements of refugees and migrants in a humane, sensitive, compassionate, and people-centered manner.”<sup>39</sup> They agreed to develop a Global Compact on Migration by 2018 to enhance coordination on international migration; present a framework for comprehensive international cooperation on migrants and human mobility; and set out a range of actionable commitments, means of implementation, and a framework for follow-up and review among member states regarding international migration.<sup>40</sup>

Importantly, the members recognized the need for widespread consultation and the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector,



*International institutions, such as the United Nations, play a pivotal role in forecasting migration flows and anticipating impact on host countries.*



*Immigrants can provide much-needed labor in communities lacking a robust workforce.*

academic institutions, parliaments, diaspora communities, and migrant organizations.<sup>41</sup>

There will be several challenges and opportunities in this process. First, the UN should seriously consider how to link this multinational bureaucratic process to the communities that would be affected by its decisions, perhaps by soliciting the input and participation of mayors.<sup>42</sup> Doing so will require working beyond the individual member states. Second, the UN should use its convening power to further drive up the commitment of the private sector to providing opportunities for migrants and linking these opportunities to the organizations serving migrants. Third, it must find a way to drive compliance with its recommendations, even as the respect for multilateral solutions is decreasing—perhaps by empowering and engaging those states that are most feeling the pressure of the latest migration waves.

While nothing is quite as motivating as a

crisis, building these mechanisms outside of a crisis allows for a more comprehensive approach to the problem. Whether it takes the form of foreign assistance, austerity measures, or tax incentives, building a resilient migration policy as part of a more comprehensive regional policy allows for greater creativity and flexibility.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Multinational organizations should come together to provide global solutions to migration surges, starting with the ongoing process to create a Global Compact on Migration.
- Any global solution should incorporate information on economic need and opportunities at the local level and seek the participation of local officials.
- A global solution, once agreed upon, should identify ways to incentivize or compel compliance by its members.

## ▶ Anticipate and Prepare for the Future—It Won't Play Out Exactly the Same Way as in the Past

One of the key findings from the 2015-16 migration surge in Europe was the bottlenecks within the system that slowed the ability of communities to respond quickly.<sup>43</sup> National and international response officials, community groups, and municipal governments were not always well aligned or even sharing the same set of facts. National budgets, which were formulated well in advance, were often inadequate to respond to the major migration surge, and without additional support, municipalities rarely had the resources to respond to overwhelming, unanticipated pressures. These frustrations, compounded by the increasingly fraught political and logistical complexities, became major problems for European Union, national, and municipal leaders across Europe, ultimately narrowing the options for decision-making.

While the major migration pressures in Europe have abated for now, the evidence suggests that 2015 will not be the last time that communities there or elsewhere will face dramatic and fast-moving migration pressure that undermines existing infrastructure and processes. In the spring of 2017, migrants fleeing South Sudan's famine for Uganda were overwhelming officials there. More than 30 million people across South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen continue to be at risk of famine.<sup>44</sup> And unless the Middle East—particularly Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan—is stabilized, flows of fleeing migrants could very well return to

previous high levels. While it's impossible to fully prepare in advance for an unanticipated major migration surge, there are steps that communities can take now to build a more resilient response the next time it does happen—drawing lessons from past responses to migration surges, natural disasters, and other crises while the experiences are still fresh.

The key lesson from responses to traditional disasters is that to build resilience, we must have in place the structures to enhance coordination, provide funding, and identify and fill gaps in services well in advance of the crisis. Actors do best when they are already familiar with each other's capabilities and competencies and can quickly turn to how to apply these competencies to the situation at hand. A better managed response could alleviate some of the pressures on individual states and communities and would offer a prudent response to the risk of a future surge.

In the United States, the National Response Framework (NRF), administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), provides a playbook that guides the federal government's response to natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and other catastrophic events.<sup>45</sup> It identifies and assigns responsibility for various sectors—such as housing, transportation, and public health—to specific government agencies,

and anticipates a role for nongovernmental organizations, which form coalitions to work together to respond to a disaster and more effectively deliver services to affected communities. There are clearly identified triggers or thresholds of damage that, once reached, spur agencies to activate the NRF. Once triggered,

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**To build resilience, we must have in place the structures to enhance coordination, provide funding, and identify and fill gaps in services well in advance of the crisis.**



*National response mechanisms must be nimble and reactive to be most effective.*

agencies take ownership of the problem and are accountable for getting the job done. This framework is replicated in each state. Perhaps most critical, the Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act provides emergency funding for states suffering from the impacts of a disaster. This funding is set aside annually and funds temporary housing, food, water, and other emergency needs.

This model could be extended to anticipate a migration response. From communications to housing to resettlement of migrants, states—working alone and together—could create a playbook that would provide clear lines of responsibility and authority in the face of the next migration wave. More importantly, they should identify funding that could be used in response to an extraordinary event. Making these decisions now, outside the heat of a crisis, will lead to a more durable and thoughtful response in the future, giving citizens greater confidence in their officials' ability to manage a more orderly process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Nations should use the relative lull in migration pressure to either create their own National Response Framework or identify a mechanism like it that can be applied to critical migration surges.
- Nations should create a contingency funding stream, such as the Stafford Act, that can quickly be tapped to aid state and local governments when they are overwhelmed.
- Regional organizations, including the European Union, should not only create a regional response plan, but a regional funding mechanism.
- In addition to coordinating with NGOs, nations should include the private sector in the development of a National Response Framework to play a role in providing housing, job training, language lessons, and other support to migrants.

# CONCLUSION

**T**here is no magic formula to managing waves of unanticipated migration. But the evidence suggests that communities can often thrive nonetheless. The trick is to figure out how to maximize the benefits of migrants in the long term, while mitigating the short-term strains.

Evidence suggests the need to significantly scale up the networked response to the disruption—whether it’s at the national or local level and within or out of government—to best connect opportunities with people. As this

networking is happening across communities, it is essential to incorporate the communities themselves into the solution so they have a sense of autonomy and ownership in the process.

There are excellent real-world examples that should be studied and scaled up. Ultimately, building these processes now will improve the response to future migration, not only giving communities the tools needed to bounce back more quickly, but also to become stronger, and therefore more resilient, in the future.



*Language, economic literacy, and cultural classes have been key components of successful integration programs.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**AMY POPE** is a nonresident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience. She most recently served as the deputy assistant to the president and deputy homeland security advisor on the National Security Council staff of the White House. Ms. Pope led teams of senior United States government officials to develop and negotiate solutions for some of the most challenging issues facing the country—from countering terrorism and violent extremism to promoting travel and regular migration to managing President Barack Obama's comprehensive effort to combat Zika, Ebola, and other public health threats. Prior to this position, Ms. Pope led the Transborder Security Directorate.

Before joining the National Security Council staff, Ms. Pope worked in several positions at the US Department of Justice, including as deputy chief of staff and counselor to the assistant attorney general of the Criminal Division, as counsel in the Criminal Division's Office of Policy and Legislation, and as a federal prosecutor in the Civil Rights Division, where she investigated and prosecuted multiple large criminal cases.

Ms. Pope has served twice as Senate staff: first, as counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Homeland Security; and later, detailed as counsel to the office of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, where she worked with the Senate Judiciary Committee to pass legislation relating to immigration and border policy, national security, and the Affordable Care Act.

She clerked for the Honorable Kim McLane Wardlaw of the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. She currently serves as a member of the President's National Infrastructure Advisory Council.



## ENDNOTES

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*List as of June 16, 2016*



