



Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe  
Réseau des Associations de Pouvoirs Locaux de l'Europe du Sud-Est

# NALAS Position Paper

## to promote Social Inclusion and Migration Governance at the Local Level

15 April 2025, Varaždin, Republic of Croatia

This document aims to articulate NALAS and its member associations' policy positions on **mainstreaming social inclusion** into local governance and to build **just, smart, and resilient societies** in South-East Europe.

It seeks to ensure that principles of good governance, human rights, participation and gender-transformative approaches are at the core of social evidence-based policymaking and service delivery. The focus is on integrating social inclusion as a fundamental element of local government policies and competencies across key domains, including education, social protection, employment, healthcare, housing, and migration.

**We, the mayors and elected representatives of local and regional governments in South-East Europe meeting together in Varaždin, the Republic of Croatia, on the occasion of the XX NALAS General Assembly, have agreed upon the following Policy Positions**

- **Emphasizing** the importance of continuing social protection reforms in the SEE region. Despite significant progress in policy development, disparities in preparations of our economies in social protection, employment, and social inclusion remain. These gaps hinder progress across domains of social inclusion—education, social protection, employment, healthcare, housing, and migration—where practical implementation still faces challenges.
- **Noting** that the insufficiently defined distribution of tasks, responsibilities, and competencies among key stakeholders at both central and local levels leads to challenges in multilevel governance, coordination, and progress monitoring, particularly due to the horizontal and cross-sectoral nature of social inclusion efforts.
- **Understanding** the importance of human rights, including the social, cultural, and economic rights of all citizens, including migrants, as a foundation for creating inclusive and thriving communities where everyone can participate and benefit from local development.
- **Recognizing** our responsibility to uphold the Leave No One Behind principle of Agenda 2030 by ensuring that all citizens, especially the most disadvantaged and left behind persons are included in our policies and services, fostering equitable and inclusive local communities.
- **Being aware** that achieving gender balance in decision- and policymaking can only be realized through implementing effective strategies to achieve balanced participation of women and men in all their diversity in our societies. Girls and women must have a voice at all societal levels and be able to participate in decision-making processes that impact their lives locally.
- **Being aware** of the consequences of current migration trends, which are leading to the depopulation of our cities, towns, and especially rural areas and disadvantaged neighborhoods. This is driven by the migration of highly educated young people and students, labor migration to Western European economies, as well as the challenges posed by transit migrants from Ukraine, the Middle East, and other source countries.
- **Recognizing** that economic empowerment of the disadvantaged and left behind individuals and groups plays a crucial role in ensuring sustainable social inclusion at the local level.
- **Recognize** that the EU integration process and the European Pillar of Social Rights are the key drivers for our governments and municipalities in implementing social protection and social inclusion reforms, guiding us towards a strong, fair, and Inclusive Social Europe with opportunities for all.
- **Expressing our gratitude** to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of Germany for their generous financial support of the project, implemented in partnership with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), which helped NALAS establish the Regional Working Group on Social Inclusion and Migration in SEE and supported member associations in their advocacy efforts and piloting of community-based services for those in need at the local level.

## **We, Mayors and elected representatives of the local governments of South-East Europe, encourage local elected officials and local governments to:**

- Develop evidence-based local social inclusion, migration and gender equality policies and strategic documents, based on the Leave No One Behind principle and Agenda 2030.
- Ensure data collection and improve analytical systems for identification of needs of the left behind groups by using the NALAS LNOB Social Mapping methodology, designed for evidence-based policymaking.
- Allocate dedicated financial resources within local budgets to sustain social and migration-related programs and infrastructure, based on human rights approach.
- Invest in capacitation of human resources within the municipal administration and key local stakeholders, including the civil sector and media, to better facilitate social inclusion and migration, and ensure gender equality.
- Promote and support equal access to integrated community-based services to achieve the socio-economic well-being of disadvantaged and left behind individuals and groups.
- Provide gender-responsive and transformative services tailored to gender-disaggregated data, supported by gender-responsive budgets, with a specific focus on addressing the specific needs of girls and women from disadvantaged groups.
- Promote multi-stakeholder cooperation and coordination, partnership and trust among key stakeholders at local level, service providers, private sector, and the left behind and disadvantaged groups.
- Work with relevant stakeholders and final beneficiaries to establish formal coordination platforms dedicated to migration governance, which are crucial for effective communication, joint planning, and resource allocation. These platforms should include representatives from local administrations, public institutions, academia, media, civil society organizations, international partners, and, most importantly, people on the move in the communities.
- Promote the integration of people on the move in host communities by fostering social inclusion and cohesion and leveraging the economic potential of migration. Integration initiatives should focus on providing language training, facilitating access to the labor market, and promoting cultural exchange programs and community events for better cohesion between people on the move and residents.
- Promote social mentoring within the local employment policies as a tool for professional rehabilitation services and at-work integration of disadvantaged groups, enabling them to access the labor market. Also, foster dialogue and partnerships with the private sector to sensitize them to co-design inclusive employment pathways.
- Empower disadvantaged and left behind groups, individuals and local organizations for active participation in decision-making processes regarding social inclusion, migration, and gender equality.

## **We, Mayors and elected representatives of the local authorities, commit that our Local Government Associations will:**

- Advocate for the enhancement of social inclusion, migration governance and gender equality at the local level in a structured and systematic manner. Therefore, development of LGAs' advocacy and fundraising strategies through the implementation of Advocacy Roadmaps is essential.
- Strengthen awareness among local government authorities about the need for a vertical comprehensive treatment of social inclusion and migration and seek solutions for technical assistance to ensure the socio-economic well-being and dignity of the disadvantaged and left behind groups.
- Advocate for advanced functional and fiscal decentralization of the main domains of social inclusion.
- Furthermore, advocate for the transfer of competencies to local governments to enable a more direct response to migration challenges and allocation of financial resources for local governments to sustain migration-related programs and infrastructure.
- Foster multilevel governance and partnership between central government authorities and regional and local authorities, involvement of service providers, private sector and left behind/disadvantaged groups and their associations in designing, implementing and monitoring social inclusion and migration policies, programmes, measures, activities and services.
- Promote the deinstitutionalization process and development of integrated community-based services based on the identified LNOB disadvantaged groups' needs.
- Adapt and promote the NALAS LNOB Social Mapping methodology as a unified tool for collecting data about needs of the LNOB disadvantaged groups and evidence-based policymaking for social inclusion at the local level.
- Promote process of digitalization and digital transformation of services from all domains of social inclusion by developing strategic frameworks that guide the integration of digital technologies. This should involve seeking solutions for investing in accessible, user-friendly technologies, data protection, enhancing digital literacy among citizens and service providers, and ensuring the inclusion of marginalized groups.
- Support the development or strengthening of existing expert/professional bodies within LGAs (committees) to envision processes for social inclusion, migration and gender equality at local level. Moreover, create leadership structures and systems within the LGAs that can anticipate and react quickly to movements in a crisis, deliver policy messages with a consistent voice, and assist member LGs to deliver migration-related services according to international standards.



#### **Invite Central Governments of South-East European economies to:**

- Develop policies and create preconditions for further implementation of the decentralization of social inclusion domains through investment in human, technical and financial resources within the local government authorities, local level stakeholders and service providers.
- Enhance the legal and financial enabling environment in close consultation with local government associations, considering the experiences and needs of the local governments.
- Encourage and maintain multisectoral and multilevel governance by respecting the principle of subsidiarity, which guarantees that social and migration policies are considered and applied at the local level.
- Support the application of vertical treatment of social inclusion at the central and local level through the development of sectoral policies, measures, activities, and services. Additionally, ensure necessary financial resources, strengthen institutional and organizational capacities of local governments in social inclusion, gender equality, and migration governance, and support digital transformation.
- Provide information about EU and other donors' funding opportunities, build the capacities of local governments and their associations for increased absorption of EU and other funds (project proposal development and application) and support prefinancing and co-financing of local initiatives on social inclusion, social protection, migration, and gender equality.

#### **Invite NALAS to continue its support to the network and to:**

- Facilitate regional platforms for exchange of good practices and initiation of policy level initiatives for social inclusion, migration, and gender equality, such as the Working Group on SI&M and the Forum of Women Mayors in SEE.
- Develop NALAS Regional Pool of Social Inclusion, Migration and Gender Equality Experts.
- Develop a Capacity Building Programme aimed at designing and implementing advocacy activities for social inclusion and enrich the NALAS e-Academy by introducing e-learning courses for Social Inclusion and Migration Governance. Additionally, enhance regional peer-to-peer exchange and learning opportunities for local practitioners through initiatives like Learning Clusters.
- Provide hands-on support to Local Government Associations to develop and implement advocacy actions for social inclusion, gender equality and migration governance at local and national level.
- Support its member associations in building their capacities for utilization of EU funding and other donor community opportunities.



#### Appeal to donors and international partners to support:

- Local governments through the provision of financial and technical assistance to ensure long-term, impactful social inclusion and migration initiatives. This includes multi-year funding to allow for more in-depth implementation and adaptation of programs addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups.
- Innovative approaches to social inclusion, migration governance and gender equality at the local level by funding pilot projects, scaling-up successful models, and encouraging the use of digital technologies to enhance service delivery and inclusion.
- Capacity-building programs of the LGAs' training systems to strengthen the skills and knowledge of local governments and service providers, equipping them with skills and knowledge to effectively manage social inclusion and migration challenges.
- Local Government Associations in advocacy efforts to strengthen legal frameworks and advance fiscal decentralization, ensuring local governments have the autonomy, resources, and legal authority to address social inclusion, migration, and gender-transformative policies effectively.
- NALAS as a regional network in facilitating decentralized cooperation and the provision of services to its members related to social inclusion and migration. By strengthening NALAS's capacity, including the regional Working Group on SI&M, donors can enable it to serve as a key regional platform for sharing best practices, evidence-based policy-making and regional initiatives development and fostering collaboration among LGAs across the region.



This Position Paper and policy recommendations are the outcome of the NALAS Regional Working Group on Social Inclusion and Migration, developed in the frame of the project "Regional Cooperation for Better Social Inclusion at Local Level" implemented by NALAS in cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).