



Mobile EU citizens & the city: improving labour market conditions and strengthening social inclusion – meeting report

On 4-6 October 2022, WG Migration & Integration and WG Roma Inclusion came to Rotterdam for a mutual learning meeting to discuss the inclusion of mobile EU citizens. This meeting report gives an overview of the different discussions and issues raised during the meeting.

Background to the meeting & situation in Rotterdam

EU citizens have the right to move and reside freely anywhere in the EU.¹ The enjoyment of this right as well as the protection against discrimination or expulsion is the basis for the social inclusion of mobile EU citizens in their country of residence.² In addition, mobile EU citizens need access to services and adequate information on their rights as EU citizens. This is particularly important for stays longer than three months, after which mobile EU citizens face additional duties with respect to financial stability, insurance and sometimes registration of their stay.

Inclusion happens at the local level, and cities are key actors in the provision of services such as housing, education, employment, healthcare, and social support. Local authorities therefore play a crucial role in implementing policies and practices that enable mobile EU citizens to access these services and, ultimately, ensure their social inclusion.

The position of mobile EU citizens over the years has received a lot of social and political attention in the Netherlands and the EU, including through the national (Dutch) advisory report with fifty recommendations by Emile Roemer's incentive team for the protection of mobile EU citizens. The in January 2022 installed Dutch cabinet has now included this report in their coalition agreement, and a structural budget has been made available for this purpose.

At the local level, Rotterdam has witnessed an increase of homeless mobile EU citizens, mainly from Eastern Europe, for example when they become unemployed and end up sleeping in tents, cellars, or sheds. In this sense, the Netherlands is experiencing side effects of the free movement of persons within the Schengen Area. This is especially affecting the neighbourhoods in Rotterdam that are already struggling with high unemployment rates, poverty, and other social problems. The city of Rotterdam is committed to a better and more humane approach and treatment of these mobile EU

¹ Art. 21 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) EU Free Movement Directive (2004/38/EC)

² Carrera, S. et al. (2020), "Member State measures on the inclusion of EU mobile citizens – information and access to rights", available here: <https://bit.ly/3xvRUoL>

citizens and has therefore developed an action programme called “Working towards a dignified existence, EU mobile citizens 2021-2025” which focuses on protecting vulnerable mobile EU citizens.

Day 1: From the local to the national to the EU level

Tim Versnel, Vice Mayor for Work, Income, the National Programme for Rotterdam South and mobile EU citizens opened the meeting by quoting Erasmus of Rotterdam: “My homeland is wherever I feel at home”. Recalling the harrowing experience of one of his first working visits with the Rotterdam police force, Versnel cautioned that the reality of life for many migrant workers is far from ideal. According to the vice mayor, only one third of all EU migrant workers in the Netherlands are currently registered and therefore in a position to benefit from social rights and legal protection. The majority, however, is at risk of being treated as second-class citizens and often have to face unpaid work and labour exploitation. To tackle the situation, Versnel focused on four main points of Rotterdam’s approach:

1. Reaching out to people and providing support services to those in need, also by including foundations and civil society
2. Stricter enforcement of legislation regulating employment agencies and landlords
3. Holding employers accountable, especially in the case of malpractices and unequal working conditions
4. Regaining people’s trust through on the ground information points in three city districts

The chair of WG Migration & Integration, **Niels Tubbing** from Amsterdam, and the vice-chair of WG Roma Inclusion, **Maike Buyst** from Ghent, recalled the importance of collaboration between cities on welcoming and integrating migrants. They also underlined that there is no singular “mobile EU citizen”, and that, rather, this is a highly diverse group. The same holds true for Roma communities, some of whom are also mobile EU citizens, and at the same time present a plurality of religious and cultural beliefs and practices.

Following these opening remarks, Professor **Godfried Engbersen** from Erasmus University Rotterdam set out the Dutch context on EU labour mobility, migration and settlement patterns and suggestions for a new policy agenda on the topic. International migration to the Netherlands has increased overall both in terms of numbers and diversity. In contrast to previous moments in time, however, it now is of a more temporary nature, meaning many migrants do not settle and stay in the country for prolonged or even indefinite periods of time. This raises an important question: How can institutions adapt to cope with a growing number of people who are “passing through” and therefore may not always register with the local administration? Following on from this, Engbersen turned to Rotterdam



as a “strategic euro city” that is experiencing more ethnic diversity and variations between neighbourhoods, leading to policy challenges related to social cohesion at the local level.

Building on this, the focus of the discussion turned to Rotterdam, in form of a presentation by **Karin Wolters**, Programme Manager Mobile EU Citizens, on the city's action programme. Entitled "Working towards a dignified existence, EU mobile citizens 2021-2025"³ the programme's main focus lies in protecting vulnerable mobile EU citizens. Wolters outlined the three main goals:

- Data gathering: gain better insights into the number and whereabouts of mobile EU citizens living in Rotterdam
- Social inclusion: strengthen the position of mobile EU citizens for a decent living
- Urban cohesion: make neighbourhoods pleasant to live in for both mobile EU citizens and other residents.

To implement the action programme, Rotterdam relies heavily on a multi-stakeholder approach, involving different levels of governance as well as non-governmental and private partners. In the Dutch national context, this is an ambitious and pioneering plan, which is ahead of policy and legislation on the national level. Six action lines form the basis of the implementation of the action programme.

1. Increase the visibility of the government, with an information point on mobile EU citizens in four prioritised, vulnerable neighbourhoods, as well as building inspections, education in rights, duties and Dutch language, legal aid and multilingual assistance, and sounding board groups for feedback on city measures.
2. Tackle crime and exploitation, such as labour exploitation, by implementing unannounced workplace inspections with police and the Dutch Labour Inspection and signal recognition training for inspectors and supervisors.
3. Increase registration in the local Basic Register of Persons (BRP), including through intensified checks on overcrowding in accommodation during which information about registration can be provided to inhabitants or through group registrations with employers.
4. Improve the conditions of the private housing stock by tightening legislation, rules and guidelines and monitoring them. This also relates to the Dutch national programme "A home for everybody", in which mobile EU citizens are listed as a target audience.
5. Increase social support, with the goal of increasing self-reliance and participation in society, by improving the guidance and access to local services and language facilities and implementing, among other things, multilingual welfare work in prioritised suburbs.
6. Better assistance with sustainable returns to the country of origin to reduce the number of homeless EU citizens. This is done through a coordinated, person-based approach that includes assistance also in the country of origin.

Wolters stressed that these six action lines, combined with a proactive role from the city of Rotterdam, and more intensive cooperation with other municipalities, the province, the national government, and other partners form the basis for a complete, long-term, and structural approach. As a new development, the city added a seventh key action on "good employment practice" which aims to launch a cooperation with the private sector, employers and employment agencies, trade associations and housing agencies and may also potentially revise the municipality's own procurement policy.

Naturally, these developments do not happen in a vacuum, but are rather very much set within the context of EU legislation and policies on the freedom of movement of workers. As MEP **Agnes Jongerius** highlighted, this free movement of people can only be defended if all stakeholders step up

³ City of Rotterdam (2021), "Action Programme, Working towards a dignified existence, EU mobile citizens 2021-2025", Dutch version available here: <https://bit.ly/3mTvMQc>.

the fight against labour and housing exploitation. This clearly includes municipalities as governance level closest to the people and as stakeholders in influencing European policy making. Another, rather new, stakeholder in this context is the European Labour Authority (ELA) whose mission is to ensure that EU rules on labour mobility and social security coordination are enforced in a fair, simple, and effective way. **Caroline Meumann**, Head of Sector for Information at the ELA, introduced the agency's work on providing information to national authorities in this respect and reported from their current main thematic focus areas: posting of workers, seasonal work and road transport. Both Jongerius and Meumann noted the need for input from cities and an openness to explore avenues for cooperation in the future.

Day 2: Walking the talk on difficult issues

After setting the scene in terms of Rotterdam's measures and strategies for the inclusion of mobile EU citizens, the second day of the meeting started with an exploration of how these translate into reality on the ground. The group was taken on a neighbourhood walk through Carnisse and Tarwewijk, an area in the southwest of the city. Walking through the neighbourhood, participants got an impression of daily life for the different migrant communities that are living there, including the corner shops



Participants during the neighbourhood walk | © Rhalda Jansen

selling foods and goods from their home countries. In line with the focus of the mutual learning, participants made three stops on their walk: an information point for mobile EU citizens, a discussion with a building inspector from the municipality about abuses in the private housing sector, and an employment agency engaging EU migrant workers.

The neighbourhood walk gave participants an impression of the challenges mobile EU citizens encounter when coming to Rotterdam, and how

the city works with different organisations on the ground to mitigate these. These discussions were extended into the afternoon session, where two workshops focused on city measures for information provision to mobile EU citizens and tackling housing and labour exploitation.

Workshop A: Information provision to mobile EU citizens

In the first workshop, **Lina Vosyliute**, Research Fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), gave an overview of her research on promising practices at the local level on the inclusion of mobile EU citizens, and how these relate to freedom of movement as established through EU legislation. Vosyliute also clarified that a "successful integration" of mobile EU citizens cannot actually be a condition for them to exercise their freedom of movement and that, rather, local authorities should provide them with inclusion measures on a voluntary basis. She underlined that inclusion and integration practices should have a strong gender dimension that are based on the "do no harm" principle, are based on evidence and provide mobile EU citizens and migrant representatives with opportunities to cooperate with local authorities in an empowering way.

Diving deeper into practical channels and approaches to providing mobile EU citizens with information, **Martin Slaats**, Senior Policy Advisor at the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, presented the Work in NL website. The platform is supposed to act as a digital one-stop-shop for information about working and living in the Netherlands, with the idea to provide mobile workers with an easy access to necessary information in their mother tongue. Slaats also expanded on the process of building and testing the website together with their key target audiences, and the challenges they encountered in the process. This includes making sure that mobile workers, local authorities and other stakeholders actually know of the existence of the website, keeping the information up to date and accurate across different translations, and ensuring that it is a relevant tool also for the future.

Providing mobile EU citizens with reliable and targeted access to information is just as much a key task for local authorities. **Paul van der Weijden**, Communication Advisor for Rotterdam, expanded on the city's approach in using different channels, means and outreach activities. Rotterdam's website formed the digital basis for this, as a way to access solid, easy to understand, and up to date information in a complementary way to that already provided by the national level. However, van der Weijden underlined that a website was not enough, and that Rotterdam was continuously looking for new ways to contact and stay connected to mobile EU citizens. The city does so by reaching out in native languages, train city workers on issues related to cultural differences, engage community leaders and organise dedicated meetings. Importantly, Rotterdam also relies on their EU information officers: individuals from the respective communities that are responsible for providing mobile EU citizens with information about services, rights and obligations, and daily life in Rotterdam. To do so, the city has established two information points to increase visibility in the neighbourhood and works closely together with other organisations to benefit from different communication channels.

Workshop B: Tackling the labour and housing exploitation of mobile EU citizens

The second workshop focused on the fight against the exploitation of mobile EU citizens. In the Netherlands, labour and housing exploitation are often closely linked. The legislation encourages employers who recruit in the EU to also provide a housing arrangement. This however is not considered a traditional form of renting and therefore the general legislation providing protection against sudden evictions and other abuses does not apply. As a result, when a mobile EU citizen loses their job, they often also become homeless, and both without any form of notice, **Elsmarieke Mensink** and **Davey Vervest** from the city of Rotterdam explained.

To protect mobile EU citizens from this abuse, Rotterdam has created several services including a group of inspectors, a rental team that can be mobilised by any individual who considers their rent to be overpriced, as well as a local law targeting abusive landlords. For this purpose, the city collaborates with tax services which have the ability to fine abusive landlords and employers as well as the Dutch labour authority.

But Rotterdam's advocacy against labour and housing exploitation goes beyond the local situation and has indeed led to the successful adoption of two laws at the national level. A first law will separate the provision of housing and an employment contract. Another law which should be enforced as of 2025 foresees that employment agencies (of which there are currently 3,000 in Rotterdam) will have to be certified based on a lack of



Elsmarieke Mensink and Davey Vervest's presentation | © Rhalda Jansen

criminal ties, bank guarantees (to avoid bankruptcy claims) and the provision of certified housing.

The fight against exploitation remains a constant dilemma for public authorities as the enforcement of protective law can sometimes come at the expense of the victims who are being fined by abusive landlords for having informed the police, and have no alternative housing or employment solutions.

Day 3: Digging deeper – challenges across cities

The third and final day of the mutual learning meeting in Rotterdam opened up the discussion to consider challenges and ideas that other cities were facing. Drawing on Eurocities' mutual learning methodology, two so-called "Transfer Cities" were identified through an open call to present their own local context and measures: Berlin and Gothenburg.

Berlin: Tackling precarity in the arrival phase

Berlin is a city home to many migrants from other EU countries and from all over the world. **Diana Botescu**, Policy Officer at the Berlin Senate Office for Integration, Labour and Social Affairs, expanded on what the situation looks like on the ground for mobile EU citizens.

The city estimates that around 300.000 mobile EU citizens currently reside in Berlin. Of those, the largest communities are made up of Polish (56.000), Italians (32.000), Bulgarians (31.800) and Romanians (26.000). Most of them come to Berlin in search of better employment or educational opportunities. During the first phase of arriving in Berlin, they face a lack of employment opportunities or are at risk of precarious employment or work exploitation. Moreover, they have a difficult access to regular housing, putting them at further risk of homelessness and destitution. Access to health care is equally difficult and, lastly, prejudice plays a significant role in making these services harder to reach.

Botescu reported that the underlying causes of these challenges can be linked back to:

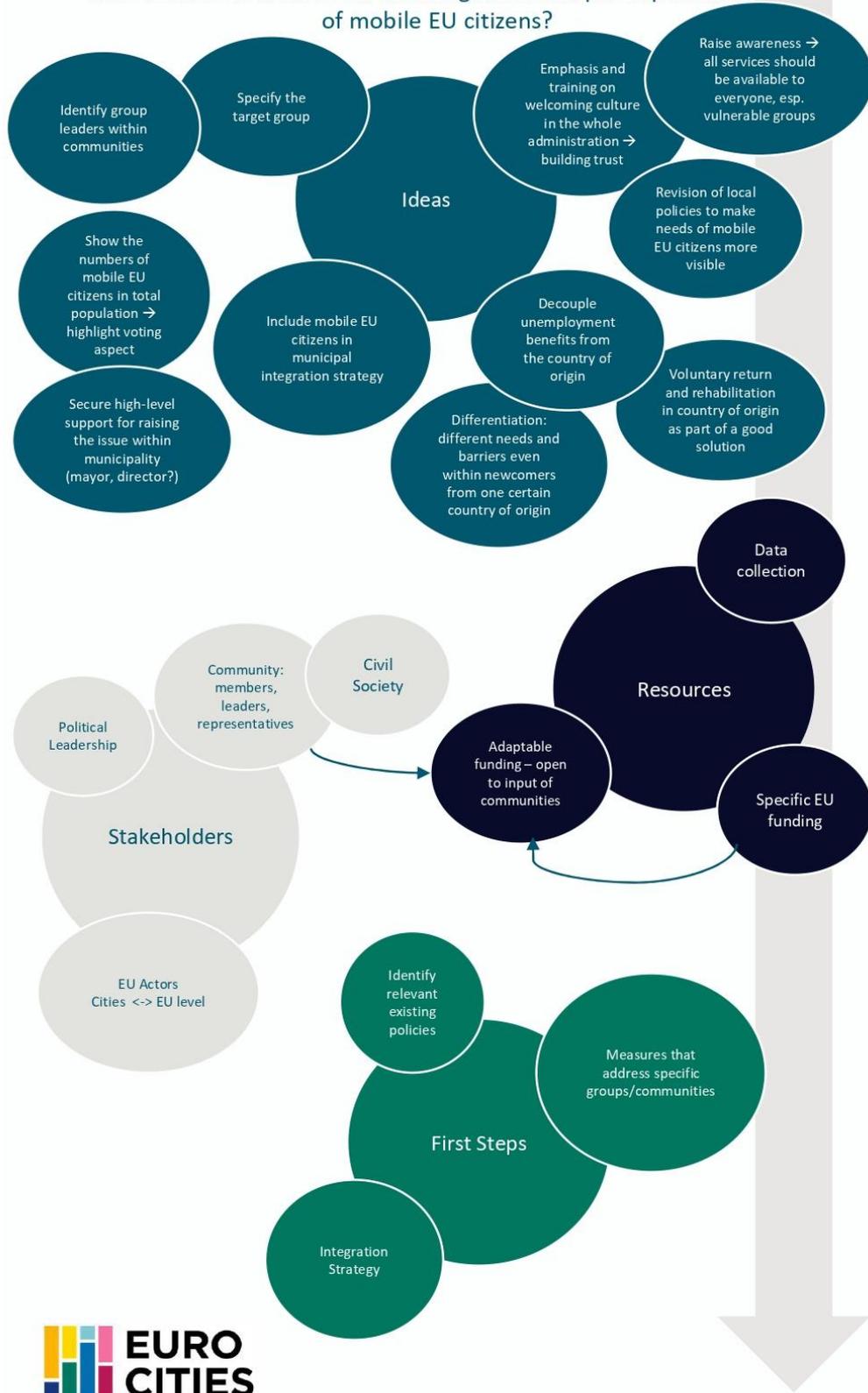
- Language barriers and lack of legal entitlement to financial support for attending official German courses.
- Insufficient information on: EU citizen's rights, existing counselling structures, existing regional, national and EU complaint mechanisms.
- Institutional barriers: restrictive interpretation of applicable EU Law, difficult access to social security, lengthy procedures on the recognition of professional qualifications.
- Negative media depiction especially of mobile EU citizens from Bulgaria and Romania and persistent societal Anti-Roma prejudice
- Lack of social networks.

Against this background of complex and overlapping challenges faced by mobile EU citizens, especially during their arrival phase, Botescu specified the focus of the discussion to this central question: How can the city raise awareness on the integration and participation needs of mobile EU citizens, both within their own administration and in relation to collaboration with external stakeholders?

Following Berlin's initial presentation, the discussion with participants focused on concrete measures the city could take to tackle this challenge, divided into "Initial ideas", "Stakeholders to be involved", "Resources needed", and "First concrete steps to be implemented". An overview of the discussion:

Results of the discussion on Berlin's challenge

Berlin's challenge: Tackling precarity among mobile EU citizens –
How to raise awareness on the integration and participation needs
of mobile EU citizens?



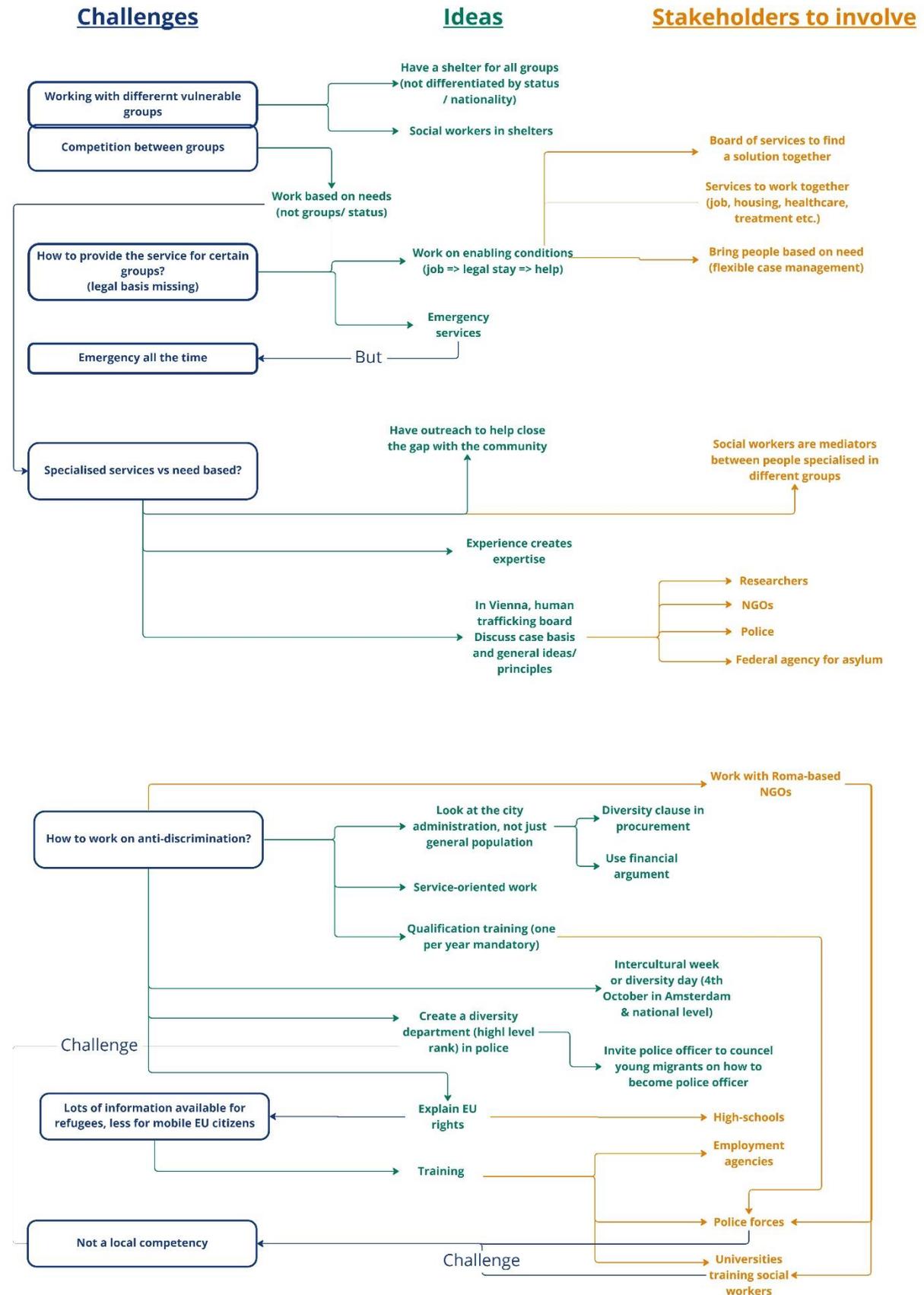
Gothenburg: continuing inclusion measures in times of competing priorities

This session was conducted jointly by **Ragnild Ekelund** from the city and Gothenburg and **Eva Sjørberg** from the Rescue mission. Indeed, the Swedish NGO and the city have been working in close cooperation for the last 10 years as the legal competencies of the city are very limited when it comes to mobile EU citizens. In Sweden, cities are not allowed to provide support to mobile EU citizens that have been in the country for over 3 months and cannot cover their own basic needs. Yet when confronted with the situation of these people, and especially members of the Roma communities, the city decided to fund the work of NGOs to provide said services. This includes shelters, social support or projects that focus on the prevention of labour exploitation. The strong cooperation between the city and the NGO allows to create links with other services including healthcare providers, schools, employment agencies etc.

From these years of cooperation, Ekelund and Sjørberg have noted the importance of political support. This is increasingly a challenge after the latest national elections but also in times of competing priorities with increased attention being put on Ukrainian refugees, sometimes at the expenses of mobile EU citizens due to limited resources.

With this initial reflection, participants of the workshop shared ideas and experiences on how to continue inclusion measures for mobile EU citizens in an increasingly challenging context.

Results of the discussion on Gothenburg's challenge





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