

## Strengthening the governance of migration: Lessons learnt from the island of Chios

*Name(s) of presenter(s):* Eleni Gaki, Danai Toursoglou, Jenny Sykala, Asimina Christoforou (RDI/Municipality of Chios)

In this paper, we discuss the study of the Chios Lab of the Futuresilience project, which focused on the migration influx of 2015 in Chios. The Chios Lab was led by the Municipality of Chios and the Regional Development Institute (RDI) of Panteion University. The aim of the study was to strengthen the governance of migration and build capacities for local resilience to deal with such phenomena in the future. For this purpose, the lab investigated the main factors affecting migration and developed scenarios and policies for dealing with such events in the future by adopting an innovative participatory methodological approach, and by exploring synergies in a multi-level, multi-actor environment.

Migration constitutes one of the main societal challenges in Europe and worldwide. Since the turn of the new century, migration crises have imposed considerable challenges on the lives of local communities worldwide. In Europe, immigration continues to be one of the most prominent political issues. In 2023, of the 448.8 million inhabitants in the European Union (EU), 27.3 million are non-EU citizens (6% of the total population of the EU). In 2022, 5.1 million people from non-EU countries migrated to an EU Member State (Eurostat, 2024). One of the main reasons for this study is the huge impact of the migration influx of 2015 in Chios, which took place in the heart of the Greek economic crisis, and thus strained resources and created tensions within the local community, including concerns about integration, long-term housing, health, employment, economic impact, and social cohesion. According to the EU, from January 2015 till August 2016, more than one million people seeking international protection, predominantly from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, had entered Greece through Turkey.

The CHIOS Lab's work was structured into three phases: diagnosing and framing the problem (identifying key stakeholders and understanding the multidimensional crisis); developing scenarios to understand evolving conditions; and testing policy solutions for robustness against future crises. The Lab conducted workshops, focus groups, and interviews with multiple stakeholders, representing health, education, governance, the local labour and entrepreneurial institutions. Its study of migration first and foremost revealed that identifying challenges and building local resilience to migration require participatory and multi-stakeholder approaches, which give voice to all interested parties, activate local knowledge and dialogue, and enhance collaboration with regional, national and international actors in the private, public and social spheres. In this manner, we achieve more informed, effective, and just strategies and policies for resilience capacity building. The co-creation activities with local stakeholders brought to the fore the main factors related to the migration crisis, and led to policy actions recommended to strengthen resilience at the local level, which can ensure decent work and living conditions for all community members, both locals and migrants, and enhance social integration and mutual respect among diverse cultures.

The CHIOS Lab hosted participatory workshops in December 2023, June 2024, December 2024, and February 2025. These workshops engaged stakeholders in identifying an extended set of resilience factors that were later grouped into six critical

areas, which briefly included the global situation; spatial planning; the role of the media; climate crisis and infrastructure; education; and multiculturalism and connectivity.

These critical influencing factors were used to develop three scenarios, namely Peaceful Adjustment, Regional Differentiation and Cumulative Crises. Peaceful adjustment represents a relatively optimistic outlook where Chios, while still under pressure from climate change and migration, adapts steadily and pragmatically. Migration flows continue at a manageable scale, enabling coordinated responses by local authorities and volunteer networks. Regional differentiation imagines a fragmented future with uneven development, both across regions of Chios and between institutional actors. National and EU support is inconsistent, leading to “patchwork” solutions and rising inequality. Finally, accumulated crises is the most pessimistic scenario, shaped by the convergence of multiple disruptive developments. Migration surges grow unmanageable, climate disasters increase, and national/EU coordination breaks down. Stakeholders then participated in a windtunneling exercise, testing various policy measures, which were extracted from existing knowledge bases and stakeholder recommendations, against the three aforementioned scenarios. Policies characterized by robustness across scenarios included vocational training, multicultural education, and water management. Policies related to specific scenarios included regional planning, migrant housing, and communication strategies. Policies dependent on heavy coordination and stable international support were pertinent to scenarios of severe disruption, but at the same time were rendered most vulnerable given the instability and uncertainty of local and global conditions.

Overall, these participatory and co-creation processes led to concrete policy solutions recommended to strengthen social integration for resilient communities, targeting both locals and migrants. Policy solutions span across five thematic areas: migration management and social integration; resilience to climate crisis and infrastructure; strengthening education and skills; improving spatial planning and development; and role of media and social cohesion.

First, migration management and the social integration of migrants includes specific actions and strategies to improve the living conditions of migrants, their integration into society and the economy, as well as the use of modern technologies for their integration. Strengthening accommodation infrastructure, integrating migrants into the labour market, utilizing ICT for their integration, and aligning with European and international policies make up a programme that not only addresses the immediate need for accommodation but promotes sustainable and fair integration.

Second, enhancing resilience to the climate crisis and improving infrastructure prompts to strategies for natural resource management, the transition to renewable energy sources, and the development of infrastructures that withstand extreme weather events.

Third, strengthening education and skills can improve the social integration of migrants and enhance their social and economic participation. By strengthening multicultural education, supporting volunteer initiatives for language learning, and developing vocational training programs, this policy aims to ensure that migrants are not only accepted, but are also active participants in the local society and economy.

Fourth, improving spatial planning and the development of areas, especially in mountainous and remote regions, can achieve the goal of revitalization and quality of life. The aim is to balance development between urban and rural areas, by supporting

strategies for agricultural production, enhancing remote work, and applying sustainable construction.

Finally, proposals regarding the media and social cohesion recognizes the crucial role of the media, local journalism, the quality of information, cultural interaction, and citizen participation. They also include promoting cultural activities and creating participatory forums for strengthening intercultural relations and developing joint solutions at the local level.

Therefore, the CHIOS Lab does not focus solely on conducting research; it is designed to directly impact how decisions are made on the island regarding critical aspects of migration providing local policymakers with data and analysis of the vulnerabilities and strengths of Chios's economy; by demonstrating the benefits of participation and co-creation processes and institutionalizing the implementation of participatory methods; and by identifying areas with high migrant populations to distribute resources like healthcare and education more effectively and meet the needs of the entire community in a more efficient and fair manner. Working with policymakers is critical in voicing needs, designing policies and strategies, and implementing practical solutions. Early engagement and collaboration are important, with a focus on developing targeted policy proposals, as well as flexible, community-driven, and resilient policy solutions across diverse possible futures.