RAND EUROPE

Building links to Brussels to influence national and European migration policy

Showcasing Approaches –
Case Study No. 3

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Key messages

- **Collaborating with networks of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and powerful actors may increase the chances of successful advocacy strategies at the European Union (EU) level.** For example, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) developed links with international organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to increase its influence on the negotiations around the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

- **Providing easily accessible and robust evidence that is trusted by EU policymakers can help organisations distinguish themselves in a crowded field.** The Migration Policy Group (MPG) and ECRE have sought to distinguish themselves as a trusted voice among EU policymakers. For example, MPG built a reputation as a reliable source of information as a result of conducting the research for the Migrant Integration Policy Index in a methodical and transparent manner.

- **Offering a two-way link between EU institutions and organisations based in EU member states is a valuable role for NGOs to play.** MPG and ECRE acted as a hub for national actors that want to participate in EU-level meetings and fora, building stronger capacity of those organisations and ensuring that policymaking was informed by national voices.

- **Having a location in close proximity to key EU institutions and stakeholders in Brussels is essential for making advocacy work more effective.** Both ECRE and MPG have offices in Brussels that allow rapid access to actors in order to build up relevant links and connections over time, ensuring visibility in the European policy field.

Background

Legal and policy developments at the European Union (EU) level increasingly affect the lives of migrants and asylum-seekers. For example, rights to free movement and labour mobility of European citizens are protected within the European legal framework. In addition, EU member states agreed to develop a common immigration policy for management of legal migration for the EU. The Common European Asylum System includes EU rules that affect the way asylum-seekers can access EU countries and increases coordination between national asylum systems as well.

What Atlantic Funded

In order to influence the migration policy environment in Ireland, The Atlantic Philanthropies believed that it was essential to support organisations at both the European and national levels. Of the 18 organisations Atlantic funded, six operated at the EU level. This case study sets out factors that organisations supported by Atlantic perceived to have contributed to affecting policy change at the EU level in order to improve the lives of migrants in EU member states and beyond.

Lessons Learned

Collaborating with NGOs and powerful actors may increase the chances of successful advocacy at the EU level

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (**ECRE)** is a pan-European network of 85 refugee-assisting NGOs. ECRE seeks to promote the protection and integration of refugees. Over a four-year period, ECRE undertook advocacy to influence the development of the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), a new EU fund with a budget of €3.1 billion (2014-20). ECRE aimed to ensure that AMIF targeted the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers and addressed challenges faced by NGOs receiving EU funding for asylum and migration activities. To secure influence, ECRE reported that they made direct contacts with a variety of negotiators. The organisation found that parliamentary negotiators rely on external expertise for technical issues, which provided an opportunity for groups like ECRE to have influence. ECRE also built partnerships with powerful actors that had influence on AMIF, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

ECRE's advocacy resulted in changes to the design of AIMF (see below for details).

Influencing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

The timeline and key activities included in ECRE's campaign to influence AMIF were:

2010   Conducted a survey on key challenges in the use of EU funding

2011   Produced a paper for the European Commission's consultation on future EU funding in the area of migration and asylum, highlighting ECRE's position

2012   Prepared detailed briefings to the European Parliament rapporteur that positioned ECRE as an expert interlocutor

Set up a civil society–UNHCR working group to exchange knowledge and coordinate action

Provided detailed comments on the European Commission's proposal and shared ECRE's position with negotiators

2013   Suggested alternative amendments to selected negotiators

2014   Issued joint statements on key issues

ECRE reported that their work contributed to the following features of the AMIF:

- Raising EU co-financing to 75 per cent under the AMIF, compared to 50 per cent under the previous European Refugee Fund and European Integration Fund (which was replaced by the AMIF)

- Expanding the target group for integration activities to include migrants and refugees

- Including a mandatory "Partnership Principle" that requires member states to involve international organisations, nongovernmental organisations and social partners when preparing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the AMIF national programmes[2]

- Securing a minimum guarantee of funding for asylum (20 per cent) and integration (20 per cent). ECRE felt this was 'an important safeguard that should reduce the risk of national programmes predominantly financing actions relating to return and readmission to the detriment of improving the quality and capacity of asylum systems'[3]

- Including a specific reference to the possibility to finance alternatives to detention for asylum-seekers, migrants and refugees – which was not in the original text

Providing easily accessible and robust evidence that is trusted by EU policymakers can help organisations distinguish themselves in a crowded field

A second way in which organisations secured influence in European policy circles was through providing data that allowed the immigration practices of different countries to be easily compared. The work of MPG provides an example of this. The Migration Policy Group (MPG) is an independent nonprofit organisation based in Brussels working on migration and mobility, diversity and integration and anti-discrimination and equality issues. MPG strives to ensure that its outputs are topical and relevant by grounding its work in detailed knowledge of what is on the policy agenda of the various EU bodies and the European Commission.

> " As an organisation sitting in Brussels you must know the agenda, what is on the table in the European Commission working parties.
>
> *Interview with Migration Policy Group staff, 2014*

MPG established and continues to operate an online tool and quick-reference guide called the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). MIPEX compares and assesses integration policies in 31 countries in Europe and in North America. It was created to address a number of challenges for policy actors and the public including:

- The difficulty of comparing one country's integration policies to those of other countries

- Incorrect information about policies in other countries being used to justify national policy inaction or changes to law or policy

- Lack of awareness of best practices in integration policies and procedures

MPG has a network of partners in more than 35 countries that have worked in the field of anti-discrimination for the past 20 years. These partners, which are experts in the field and independent from government, collect national level data in a standard questionnaire which is retuned to MPG. By forming long-term relationships with its partners, MPG was able to ensure consistency and quality of data. To establish and maintain relationships, MIPEX held regular conferences and networking events.

MPG took a deliberate approach to developing MIPEX, starting with a small number of countries and expanding its index slowly. This allowed MPG to learn along the way and improve the index. MPG ensured that MIPEX was relevant to EU and national policymakers. Taking such steps, MPG built and maintained a reputation as an accurate and reliable source of information.

Migration Policy Group's development of MIPEX informed changes to policy that could result in improvements to the lives of migrants

A wide variety of stakeholders used MIPEX including NGOs, governments and quasi-governmental organisations such as the Portuguese High Commissioner for Migration Issues with whom MPG has ongoing contact. To encourage use of MIPEX, MPG worked with advocacy groups to make them aware of the usefulness of evidence for policy change and implementation.[4]

MPG also highlighted the uses of MIPEX by activists. For instance, a Greek partner used MIPEX to advocate for citizenship reforms. Providing international examples to Greek policymakers helped them see that their citizenship policies were not in alignment with EU standards.[5]

MIPEX has developed into a widely recognised measure of country performance in the integration and migration arenas. Examples included a recent report by the Council of Europe that extensively referenced MIPEX,[6] as well as MIPEX being referenced by Eurostat in their migrant integration statistics.[7] Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union. Its task is to provide the European Union with statistics at European level.

Reports generated from MIPEX monitoring the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation were used by EU member states to improve their legislation at the national level, and by the European Commission to initiate court proceedings for noncompliance by member states.

**Providing easily accessible and robust evidence that is trusted
by EU policymakers can help organisations distinguish themselves
in a crowded field**

In addition to directly influencing European policymaking, Atlantic Philanthropies' EU-level grantees aimed to provide a two-way link between EU institutions and organisations based in EU member states. Atlantic also linked national Irish grantees with its EU-level grantees such as ECRE and MPG. This helped the national grantees to develop knowledge about EU policy issues as well as to build up a portfolio of EU-level contacts and EU-funded project work. EU-level grantees developed technical guidance on EU law, which could be used by national Atlantic grantees, as well as other network partners and organisations affiliated with the EU-level grantees.

MPG and ECRE also acted as a hub for national actors that wanted to participate in EU-level meetings and forums which built stronger capacity of those organisations and ensured that policymaking was informed by national voices. For example, MPG facilitated links to national actors by including them in MPG's expert groups and networks. MPG reported that this improved the reputation of national actors while giving them access to high-quality information about European issues and policy.[8]

> " Policies can only change when concerns at the ground level are brought to the national level and then the European level. There is a dynamic interplay between various levels of governance.
>
> *Information provided to the evaluation team by MPG*

Having presence and visibility in Brussels and with key EU institutions is essential for making advocacy work effective

The last element of building links at the European level was that EU-level organisations supported by Atlantic had a physical presence in Brussels and took advantage of this to regularly attend key meetings and events. For example, ECRE was a regular participant in the Consultative Forum and in other expert groups on specific issues at the European Asylum Support Office and participated in the Consultative Forum of Frontex — the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union.

Challenges to Building Links to Brussels to Influence National and European Migration Policy … and How These Challenges Might Be Overcome

While this case study highlighted impacts associated with building links to Brussels to influence national and European migration policy, the evaluation of The Atlantic Philanthropies Migration Programme also identified a number of challenges that organisations face in carrying out this work.

Convening European and national-level partners to build and reinforce collaboration

It is time- and resource-intensive to build these bridges. From a funder's perspective, it might be insufficient to provide resources so that grantees can obtain information from the national and EU-level to advance their advocacy work. Funding might be needed to ensure the links between the levels and grantees are actively maintained through common fora and other regular exchanges. Atlantic brought grantees (national and EU-level) together regularly during the Migration Programme.

Formalising partnerships to facilitate rapid response to emerging issues and information requests

Grantees on the national level need to be incentivised to not only seek information from EU grantees on an ad hoc basis but to develop partnerships so that contacts are embedded into the regular working processes of the grantees. This kind of relationship is more likely to result in the ability to respond quickly to issues that arise through the existence of established and trusted points of contact. For example, MPG formed long-term institutional relationships in each country for MIPEX and through their ongoing work on anti-discrimination.

Ensuring partners have the necessary technical knowledge to make the best use of information shared between European and national partners

Information exchange was central to partnerships between Atlantic grantees operating at the national and European level. It was sometimes necessary for grantees to have technical expertise in order to react to such information. For example, responding to proposed changes in EU law might require a solid understanding of the current legal situation in a member state, the ability to assess (often rapidly) the impact that proposed changes of EU law would have on national law and expertise in European law and law making processes in order to design an effective response to the proposals.

Links between national and EU-level organisations

Ideally, these links would be underpinned by a shared outcome framework. This can help to guide the development of the cooperation between levels, and provides common objectives that grantees can work towards collectively.

Conclusion

This case study looked at how civil society organisations can have an impact on EU policy in the fields of migration and asylum.

A common strategy among Atlantic's grantees was developing key points of contact within European institutions and agencies that were influential in the policy process and/or sympathetic to the organisation's aims and objectives. Given the technical complexities of EU law, grantees were able to provide input to the EU policymaking process through providing information or expertise.

Similarly, EU policymakers need information about the impact of policy or proposed reforms at the member state level, and here collaborations between European and national organisations were fruitful. One form of collaboration is the use of a network of experts at the national level to provide accurate information about the situation in their country to contribute to pan-European and international data collection and benchmarking. Using this approach, organisations can earn a reputation as a robust and trusted provider of comparative data to inform policymaking at the EU and national levels.

Endnotes

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About this case study and the evaluation of The Atlantic Philanthropies Migration Programme

Atlantic Philanthropies Migration Programme

Over 35 years, Atlantic has made grants totaling $8 billion to advance opportunity, equity and human rights. A limited-life foundation, Atlantic completed its grantmaking in 2016, and will cease operations by 2020.

The Atlantic Philanthropies Migration Programme is a central delivery mechanism for their Reconciliation and Human Rights strategy in the Republic of Ireland. At the heart of the strategy is the fundamental objective of improving access to justice and services for migrants. Atlantic has provided 46 grants to 18 organisations (or initiatives) working domestically in the Republic of Ireland and at the European Union level since 2004.

RAND Europe's evaluation

Atlantic commissioned RAND Europe to undertake a summative evaluation of their Migration Programme. The overarching aims of the evaluation are to:

- Undertake a programme-level review of the work supported by Atlantic up to the end of 2012
- Monitor ongoing progress, developments and impacts up to the end of 2014
- Identify any emerging issues, challenges or opportunities that may be on the horizon for the programme

Full details of the methodology for the research can be found in the final evaluation report available at www.rand.org/t/rr484.

About this case study

As part of the evaluation of the Migration Programme, a series of case studies have been developed to highlight innovative practice, showcase promising practices, and identify lessons relevant to other organisations and grantmakers working in the migration field. The information presented in this case study is based on a review of documentation produced by Atlantic's grantees, and interviews with grantees and stakeholders conducted as part of the evaluation. More information underpinning the key messages included in this case study can be obtained in the final evaluation report.

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