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# EU Mobile Citizens: Challenges and successes. How small to medium-sized towns and businesses deal with EU Mobile Citizens

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## ABSTRACT

For many EU citizens, working across the border is the only way to make a living in the EU. The battle for cheap labour has now become a well-oiled machine, in which almost all Western European countries participate. Nevertheless, the employment situation of EU Mobile Citizens, workers of low-skilled and -paid jobs, is often substandard. Challenges are housing, health care and working conditions. In addition, due to the lack of registration in municipalities, it is impossible to have an overview of the numbers and to offer effective help. This is a problem in small to medium-sized cities, where many workers live to work in agriculture, transport, construction, meat industry and logistics. For this study, 32 interviews were conducted in eleven small to medium-sized towns (SMSTs) in Sweden, Germany,

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the Netherlands, Ireland, Poland, and Spain. The study uses three different perspectives: EU representatives of participating regions, municipalities, and employers. The outcomes show that most SMSTs deal with a shortage of housing, and a lack of grip on the registration process of EU citizens. Although there are some success stories, most SMSTs are not in touch with each other to share these. The paper concludes with proposals for further action-research and collaborations to impact local policies.

## Introduction

The European Union, with free movement of people, has created a unique context for mobility and migration. An important part of the economies has benefitted from labour flows in the EU. Internal EU migrant populations are not equally distributed over the member states: some member states compete to attract labour migrants; in sending countries there is the desire to avoid losing part of their working age population. A social and healthy interregional EU-labour migration requires a balance between the interests of ‘influx’ and ‘outflux’ regions; regions that attract a lot of non-domestic EU labour force and regions that see a lot of their labour force leave. At the same time, it requires attention for the specific need of a volatile group of EU-citizens engaging in low- to medium-skilled labour.

Local and regional authorities play a role in preventing issues that arise from the EU’s free movement of labour for citizens and in fellow regions. A better mutual understanding and use of policy instruments can help regions in offering a just, social, and economically viable practice of free movement of labour to ‘mobile’ citizens as well as their ‘domestic’ citizens. EU citizens (as migrant workers) are not always treated equally; and often they are unaware of their (labour) rights. One example arose from the COVID-crisis where issues of problematic access to healthcare for intra-EU labour mi-

grants were enlarged. ‘Vital profession’ workers in for example the food industry did not get vaccinated due to lack of knowledge, lack of access, and misinformation about vaccinations. Another example stems from housing and employment of temporary migrants. When labour migrants change jobs or become unemployed, they can end up on the street as housing and employment is often linked. *Some of the issues for regional authorities associated with low- to medium-skilled EU mobile citizens are* a) In ‘outflux’ regions: lack of official (legal) information in the right languages, depopulation, shortage of labour, brain drain, re-immigration. And b) In ‘influx’ regions: lack of official (legal) information in the right languages, housing, access to healthcare, access to labour rights, socio-political integration/representation in the community, re-migration.

In small to medium-sized towns where much of the vital workplaces of internal EU labour migrants are situated, such as transport, logistics, agriculture, the meat industry, and repositories, these issues are even more pressing. In rural areas the capacity to receive new inhabitants is limited. The pressure on the community and resources is larger than in bigger cities. Additionally, local resistance for newcomers is more present and populations are less diverse than in cities. Intra-EU migrants, as citizens of the European Union, can move and migrate within the borders of the EU without many restrictions. Mobility is only facilitated by the EU through opening borders and eliminating restrictions. There is little active support from EU institutions for intra-EU migrants. After they move, they are not entitled to extra support or information in the countries of destination. They are not part of integration policies of receiving societies, and they do not receive support from other institutions upon arrival. On the contrary, their arrival may not even be noticed as they do not need to apply for work permits or visas.

Municipalities are bearing direct responsibility for issues such as registration, housing, and social inclusion, whereas the employer is responsible for healthcare and employment conditions (City of Amsterdam 2016). Problematically, it is still unclear what bottlenecks

small to medium-sized cities and employers experience when it comes to EU regulation for EU Mobile Citizens. Due to the pandemic, employment conditions of workers in agriculture, logistics and food industries have peeked above the radar (Kremer 2020). The protection of EU Mobile citizens has become top on the list of several taskforces. These sectors are ‘vital’ and must become more ‘Covid-proof’, for example by introducing a ‘better work’ strategy (Kremer 2020, EU2020 2020). At a local level, this means that, for instance, the Polish construction workers, Romanian potato planters, and Latvian fruit pickers do not have a stable position. Their problems are legion, e.g., housing, working conditions, or health care. There are different challenges in each field. This paper is about housing and registration of EU Mobile Citizens in small to medium-sized cities (SMSTs).

In January 2023, about 250 students of the European Studies programme at The Hague University of Applied Sciences and the research team have conducted a study about the local situation in eleven towns across Europe. The towns are all SMSTs and located in Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain. Later, the research team conducted interviews in Poland.<sup>2</sup> The students interviewed three partners in each town: a local policymaker, a business working with EU Mobile Citizens, and the representative of the region in Brussels (only the first two in Poland). The specifics of the questions were about housing and registration.

## Theoretical perspectives

With the Urban Agenda for the EU, an initiative that started during the Dutch European Union Presidency in 2016, the cities’

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2 The participating towns are in Spain - Murcia (Murcia), Guissona (Catalunya), La Palma de Condado (Andalucia) - Sindelfingen (Region Stuttgart, Germany), Varberg (Halland, Sweden), Cork (being a bit bigger than a SMST) (Munster, Ireland), Kielce (Poland), and municipalities in the Netherlands: Westland (South-Holland), Waalwijk and Moerdijk (Noord-Brabant), Peel en Maas (Limburg), Hollands Kroon (North-Holland).

participation had started at the European level. In the field of city diplomacy, where cities lobby to make changes in European public policies, the role of the small to medium-sized city is often neglected. Especially cities or towns that are not represented in Brussels often do not have a voice in the shaping of EU policies (Demirtas 2023). Local governments that design policies concerning underrepresented groups are often even further removed from the EU level, for two main reasons. Firstly, there are less resources in smaller towns in rural areas. Secondly, the problems with underrepresented groups such as mobile EU citizens are very local. Although one could argue that this is a transnational and European problem, the housing, care, registration, and working conditions of workers takes place at distribution centres, big companies, in horticulture stations, and other places.

This paper focuses on three different conceptual angles: the European frame, the local regional policy frame towards EU Mobile Citizens, and the business or (temporary) employers' frame. These three conceptual frames have contrasting viewpoints and focus on different aspects of the treatment of EU Mobile Citizens. The first frame, the European frame, highlights literature and policy documents on how the EU Mobile Citizens should be treated according to EU rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights. The European Commission has started the European Works Councils Directive, derived from the European Pillar of Social Rights. That EU citizenship and mobility is a difficult combination is evident (Siklodi 2020). This highlights the importance of social dialogue and the involvement of workers. The second frame, the local economic development frame, looks at how policymakers deal with EU Mobile Citizens 'on the ground'. What are the local policies to improve their situation, and what challenges are still evidently present? The third frame focuses on the business level. Businesses are often dependent on EU Mobile Citizens and for temporary employment agencies, these workers are paramount. How they are treated, housed, and cared for, however, is often not their top priority.

## Methodology

In January 2023, ten classes of first-year students at the European Studies programme of The Hague University of Applied Sciences conducted semi-structured interviews in ten different towns in Europe. As mentioned, the classes were divided into three groups, focusing on three different interviewees: a European representative in Brussels of their region, a local policymaker, and a temporary working agency or business in the town. The students were trained to do an online interview and reported back to the research team with strict guidelines, informing the team about the town, the number of EU Mobile Citizens the policies in place, and the challenges and successes the interviewee dealt with when dealing with EU Mobile Citizens. Before the students started their study, many different actors were interviewed and invited to lecture in front of the students. Organizations that collaborated on this were the NGO Fairwork, the Polish interest group Barka, Tilburg University (in tandem with *Kenniscentrum Arbeidsmigranten*), the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), VNG Europe (the Brussels department of that Association), the temporary employment agency *Combivliet*, and two young European Union Mobile Citizens from Spain and Poland. Also, the cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam were consulted, as well as the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. The 32 respondents in the towns and in Brussels were consulted as well, so they were ready for the student interviews.

The questionnaire was divided into six parts, where students needed to ask general information about the interview and the interviewee, about EU Mobile Citizens, the registration, housing, challenges, and successes. For the businesses and temporary working agencies, there was an extra section about the interaction with the municipality.

In their reports, the students needed to discuss the interview, and report on their desk research. First, the local situation needed to be described, as well as the professional profile of their respondent.

Afterwards, the number and field of work of the EU Mobile Citizens was important, as well as the main challenges and successes of the local government and employer. For the Brussels regional representative, the relation between the town and European policies was more important. They needed to describe how the challenges of the local governments came to the fore, in the multi-level interest representation of the small to medium-sized towns (SMSTs). The interview data in excel formats and the student reports were used in this paper as material to make an overview of the ten towns and their struggles with EU Mobile Citizens. After their project, the research team conducted two additional interviews with the town of Kielce in Poland and the temporary working agency Randstad in Warsaw.

In total, 32 in-depth and semi-structured were conducted. These interviews were coded and analysed inductively. This means that all the gathered data was taken together, and then coded accordingly, with first open coding, then axial coding, and finally with a final code. This way, the material was used as a basis for the qualitative data analysis. The interview data was used in combination with document analysis of policy documents, websites, research reports, government reports, and requested insights into policymaking documents.

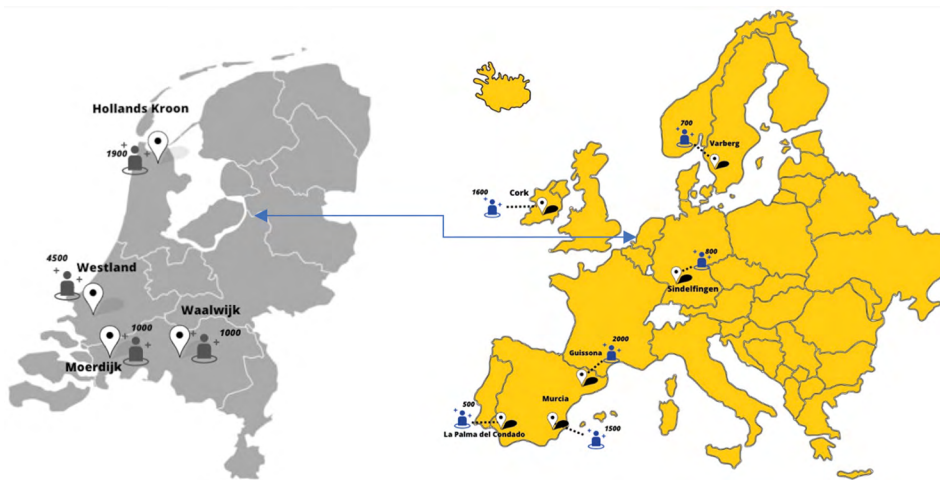
The cases in Western Europe were selected as follows. The first criterion was that the towns were small to medium-sized (5,000-500,000 inhabitants) (Campbell 2000). The second criterion was that the towns were familiar with the term and the group of EU mobile citizens. In collaboration with Eurotowns, the umbrella organisation for small to medium-sized towns in Europe, the three towns of Cork (Ireland), Varberg (Sweden), and Sindelfingen (Germany) were selected. Afterwards, the towns in Spain were selected after a visit at the Representation of Catalunya in Brussels. Finally, in consultation with the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) four small to medium-sized towns were selected in the Netherlands. They were already working on improving the situation of EUMCs, so these were appropriate towns.



## Results

The selected towns were very different in size and experience with EU Mobile Citizens. The following figure shows the localities and the number of EUMCs detected in the towns.

**Figure 1. Selected cases and the number of EU Mobile Citizens (EUMCs) in Western Europe.**



*Source: Own calculations from qualitative data*

## The European perspective

Of the five policy objectives of the European Union (a smarter Europe, a greener Europe, a more social Europe, a more connected Europe, and a Europe closer to Citizens), this study fits most into the ‘more social Europe’ pillar. Within that pillar, the research team has focused on the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour market, access to quality employment, and social economy. Within this policy objective, many European programmes have been designed, such

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as ‘Rights at work’, ‘Moving & working in Europe’, ‘Social protection & social inclusion’, and ‘Skills and qualifications’. The last part even resulted in the European Year of Skills 2023. This means that many funding programmes focus on the enhancements of skills needed for the Green Deal, the Digital transition and, in general, the improvement of people’s aspirations and skills sets with opportunities on the job market (European Commission 2023).

The data from the interviews shows that the EU representatives in Brussels of the selected municipalities were often not aware of the problems of EU Mobile Citizens in their regions. The most pressing problems they did mention, were the availability of affordable and decent housing, and the significantly lower number of new workers and illegal renting (Hollands Kroon). Registration at a local level was also mentioned as an important issue in Cork City (Power 2022, Biatek 2023). In Sindelfingen, Germany, the city had commissioned the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies at the University of Osnabrück (IMIS) to further develop its integration work. In North Brabant, the European representative mentioned the need of three measures. Firstly, at least 75.000 homes to be added annually in the Netherlands. Secondly, there needs to be a better division of affordable rental properties. Thirdly, the Dutch government needs to preserve affordable renting properties by maximizing property value (Van Unnik 2019). According to the Brussels representative of the Association of Dutch Municipalities (Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten, VNG), Labour Inspection should have a bigger role in blacklisting the temporary working agencies that are exploiting migrant workers. Also, the European Labour Authority (ELA) urged since 2021 for the awareness-raising campaign ‘Rights for all seasons’, calling attention to the need to promote fair and safe working conditions for seasonal workers employed across EU countries (European Labour Authority 2021).

According to the Spanish representative from Catalunya, it is not the regions, but the member states that should communicate with the European Commission. This is interesting, as the countries

show a great variety in how they approach regional issues at a European level. From Spain, for example, there are 17 representatives in Brussels as the regions greatly differ as well in Spain. As this country is very decentralized, some laws will be differently interpreted from one region to another. For example, in Huelva, the *Ley de extranjería*, a law that allowed seasonal workers to have a one-year contract that is renewable and apply for a residence permit, was denied. Between 2000 and 2010, most people registering to work temporarily in Spain were going to Huelva in the strawberry sector, being almost exclusively females between 25 and 45 years old, coming from Romania and Poland. The agency started registering workers by discriminating criteria, choosing women that are divorced, with young children, and coming from very poor places, factors that in their view increase the rate of return (Indacochea and Bovia 2019: 1-14).

First and foremost, the problem of housing and better regulation and labour inspection was mentioned. In addition, the language barrier has been mentioned, especially in the Spanish departments in Brussels. Navigating the bureaucracy in registry for residence for example, has been mentioned as though. To register for a certificate as an EU citizen, which is needed after a three-month contract, the NIE (Foreign Identity Number), is difficult if you do not speak the language.

## **The local policy perspective**

From a local perspective, there are some interesting differences between all studied municipalities. The smallest number of inhabitants was 7,435 (Guissona, Spain), and the largest was 222,333 (Cork, Ireland). Interestingly, the second largest number of EU Mobile Citizens was found in Guissona (3,027) as well, as opposed to 1,600 in Cork. The largest number of EU mobile citizens was found in Westland (4,500). In the following table, all the details are summarized:

**Table 1. Demographic and political details about the small to medium-sized towns.**

<b>Municipality (country)</b>	<b>No. of inhabitants</b>	<b>Political representation</b>	<b>No. of EU Mobile Citizens</b>	<b>Represented in Brussel by</b>
1. Sindelfingen (Germany)	64,151	Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU)	800	Baden-Württemberg
2. Hollands Kroon (the Netherlands)	48,583	Labour Party (PvdA)	1,900	North Holland
3. Waalwijk (the Netherlands)	48,815	Independent	1,000	North Brabant
4. Moerdijk (the Netherlands)	37,185	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	1,000	North Brabant
5. Westland (the Netherlands)	111,382	Labour Party (PvdA)	4,500	South Holland
6. Cork (Ireland)	222,333	Liberal Conservative and Christian Democratic party of Ireland (Fine Gael)	1,600	Ireland
7. Guissona (Spain)	7,435	Independent	3,027	Catalunya
8. La Palma de Condado (Spain)	9,925	Independent	500	Andalusia
9. Murcia (Spain)	460,349	Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE)	1,500	Region of Murcia
10. Varberg (Sweden)	66,658	Independent	700	Southwest Sweden
11. Kielce (Poland)	197,724	Independent	110	Lesser Poland and Świętokrzyskie

*Source: Own calculation from qualitative data*

In the towns, the main problems the study focused on was housing and registration. This overview will start with housing, continue with registration issues, and then turn to the business and temporary agencies' perspectives.

## Housing

In Germany, it is a pressing issue to find housing. Other stakeholders than the municipality can help to find housing, but it is mentioned as the most difficult as the competition in the real estate market is so high. The responsible stakeholders for housing, the town hall, and private and public stakeholders, have not found solutions yet.

In the four towns in the Netherlands, Hollands Kroon, Waalwijk, Moerdijk, and Westland, affordable and decent housing were the most pressing issues as well, even increasingly so. Especially in Westland, where the number of EU mobile citizens is the highest. In the Netherlands, the housing is more expensive than the EU mobile citizens can afford. The association for flexible living, *Stichting Normering Flexwonen* (SNF) is an association that made norms for housing, and employers take these rules seriously in Moerdijk.

In Ireland, Cork, there is a housing limitation due to the increasing building costs (Power 2022). Cork has around 210.000 citizens including the EU Mobile Citizens, but only 10.000 social housing units provided by the City Council. Unfortunately, this is not a lot and not enough since there are already around 4000 people on the waiting list to get a social housing unit.

In Spain, the three participating towns, Guissona, Murcia, and La Palma de Condado, different problems than housing were pressing. A big movement started in Andalusia, where 2000 women marched in the streets of Huelva to protest the constant abuse of female workers in the strawberry industry. In Guissona, there is a problem regarding to housing. The company that employs the most EU Mobile Citizens, Grupo Guissona, owns 350 units of housing for workers who just arrived, but there are as many as 4,000 jobs in the company. In Murcia, the increased competition for rental properties makes it difficult for EU citizens to secure a suitable home, too.

In Varberg, Sweden, there is a fluctuating number of EU Mobile Citizens, the workers are allocated to hospitality, tourism, agricultural sectors, and some work in the care industry. Due to the housing crisis, less and less people work and live in Varberg.

Kielce in Poland has some areas where people are hiring flats and houses. It is the market for that. It is not very problematic, but it needs money and some income.

In conclusion, the function, location, and quality of accommodation of EU Mobile Citizens form a problem much greater than foreseen. Spatial policies even tend to set a stage for potential conflict between foreign workers and residents (Ulceluse, Bock and Haartsen 2022).

## **Registration**

The EU Mobile Citizens are, as they are citizens of the EU, not obliged to register in a new location. Nevertheless, in most EU countries, it is the case that temporary contracts end, people need to get registered in their new municipality after three or four months of work. In Sindelfingen, Germany, there is a sufficient system to register, and EU Mobile Citizens also get language and integration support.

The four towns in the Netherlands will have different registration rules. In Moerdijk, for example, the local company DSV makes an appointment with the government for each EU Mobile Citizen they employ. The duration time of the process differs per region in the Netherlands. In the south and east, it can take weeks or months before the government approves. In the north and west, it is usually day-to-day or a couple of days.

In Cork, it is easy to process the registration, the new citizens need to apply for a Personal Public Service (PPS) number. Then, workers can make use of medical care and other services. In Spain, All EU Mobile Citizens need to register with the local authorities of

the responsible municipality of the Region of Murcia if they intend to live in the region for more than three months. To register for housing and apply for a TIE (Tarjeta de Identificación Extranjera). To become a citizen in La Palma del Condado is relatively easy. Immigrant workers do not need to fill in a great variety of documents when registering. However, there is an incentive to revise the registration process since it's too simple.

The obstacles in Kielce, Poland, are that people need to know the Polish language to register, and that understanding the documents also needs to be done with the help of locals.

In Varberg, the employer is obliged to help register a new employee if they need help. According to Swedish immigration laws, registration can easily be done by filling in an application form, either in English or in Swedish. To then have it brought to a service office. All applicants must be present with a valid ID or passport.

## **The business and temporary working agency perspective**

From a business or temporary working agency perspective, the challenges with EU Mobile Citizens look different. On several dimensions the circular movement of EU citizens has economic and spatial effects: there are inequalities between sending and receiving areas, which cover economic dimensions (income, access to services), but also immaterial dimensions (culture, environment, political system) (M. Ulceluse, et al. 2020). For most studied regions, the workers are essential; some regions cannot economically survive without them. At the same time, the employment histories of Central and Eastern European labour migrants show that a third of these labour migrants engage in settlement migration, being retained by the new local municipalities successfully. Only a very small proportion can be considered as circular migrants, thus going back and forth from the sending to receiving countries (Strockmeijer, De Beer and Dagevos 2019).

In all the participating towns, the temporary working agencies had a major role in keeping contact with the local government. At agricultural companies such as Combivliet (in Westland and Hollands Kroon), the temporary working agency the company worked with is NL Jobs, and there always needs to be a close relationship between NL Jobs and the registrations as the municipality registration, health insurance, bank account, employment contract, and working procedures. In Waalwijk, North Brabant, the temporary working agency is called Covebo. In 2019, an initiative of T&S Flexwerk started: Work-inWaalwijk, a building that would be able to house all the workers. With the municipality, agency Covebo also set up the application My-infoNL, where all the information on the importance of registration as a migrant worker is available. Another big employer in Moerdijk, DSV Solutions, a global transport and logistics company, is sticking to the SNF (Stichting Normering Flexwonen) rules. Local governments in the neighbourhood have plans to expand the housing and care facilities for workers, but simultaneously bound to solutions for refugees and starters in the housing market. As the municipality of Moerdijk keeps moving its plan to build three new housing locations for 300 people in the Netherlands as well as Belgium, the contact between the employer and the municipality has deteriorated. Nevertheless, the company makes sure that not more than 25% of the workers' income is spent on housing, that not more than two labour migrants are living in one bedroom, and that 55% is the tax rate if the mobile workers do not register in the Netherlands.

In Spain, the rules are different. Workers pay 30-50% of their income on housing, and there is less monitoring on the rules for employers. Besides, the registration at a local level is less encouraged by the companies where the EU Mobile Citizens work. In Andalusia, as well as Catalunya and Murcia, the problems of human rights violations and discriminatory aspects have been worse than in the other areas (European Coordination Via Campesina 2019). The instability of EU Mobile Citizens' residences and permits also creates issues of legal entrapment. In EU law, this issue of not having any social security scheme is called *negative conflict of law*, as opposed to being



subject to social security insurance in two or more Member States, *positive conflict of law*. (Van Ooij 2022).

In Ireland, Germany, and Sweden, the results were similar. On average spending on housing is 30% to sometimes a 100% for a bigger three-bedroom apartment (Biatek 2023). The City Council, in many cases, avoided dealing with the topic of housing and social services for highly mobile workers, and the Covid-19 crisis made the situation worse (Cork City Council 2022). Due to the pandemic, employment conditions of workers in agriculture, logistics and food industries have peeked above the radar (Kremer 2020). Furthermore, due to the current war in Ukraine, more EU Mobile Citizens are expected to be divided on the European continent. Indeed, available housing and well-functioning registration rules across the EU, and thereby also the correct treatment of EU Mobile Citizens, are often a challenge.

## Conclusion and discussion

The stories of the municipalities and businesses interviewed reveal different obstacles and aspects of the registration process. As there is no EU policy for registration in a new locality upon arrival, the system is created by individual countries or by municipalities themselves. In Spain, the registration system is national, in the Netherlands, it is up to the municipality. In Spain, the municipality is responsible for the registration of newcomers but within municipalities, the way the municipality assists, varies. This is more elaborate in Guissona where municipal workers assist in multiple languages than in La Palma del Condado. In the Netherlands, each municipality searches for ways to register temporary workers. In Varberg, Sweden and in Sindelfingen, Germany national rules are implemented by different actors.

In Varberg, Sweden, registration is a responsibility of the employer, while in Sindelfingen, Germany it is up to the municipality. In

the Spanish system, the municipalities are responsible, not employers. In the Dutch towns there is no clear responsibility. Each municipality creates its own system, where there can be collaboration between employers and municipal workers. This is not systematic or linked to formal policies. Obstacles for registration are linked to lack of information: information about the registration process; information about the benefits of registration; and lack of information in the own language. Another issue is the time it takes to register: as flexible workers may change jobs and location often, municipalities may not have the bureaucratic capacity to keep up with the changes.

Different stakeholders try to improve the information flows, but these attempts are all-in an initial stage. In Guissona, language issues are partially solved by employing civil servants who speak multiple languages. In Germany, the municipality is working on improving access to the registration process by providing forms in different languages – at the time of the interviews these were not available yet. In the Netherlands, some of the municipalities are working on translating the registration procedure. Moerdijk already has forms in different languages. They are experimenting with ‘local connectors’ to improve information flows. Two of the municipalities are working on the creation of an information application, in multiple languages with information on different aspects of living in the Netherlands.

In Guissona, the link between registration and housing illustrates the connectedness of these topics: one cannot register without housing. The municipality has invented a creative solution by allowing people to use the address of town hall for registration. In other municipalities, housing and registration is also connected. General shortages on the housing market are an issue in all municipalities that we spoke to. Only in La Palma de Condado, housing was not the most pressing issue.

Dependency on employers in housing is only a partial solution. One suggestion, from Sindelfingen, Germany, was on collaboration between the public and private sector: public land could be used for

private housing. The public-private housing collaboration in Waalwijk has just started – long term results will have to be evaluated. In Moerdijk, these partnerships are difficult to establish because of national and regional laws and regulations. Similarly, in HollandsKroon, health regulations block housing solutions created by municipal-private partnerships.

Indications of public-private partnerships suggest that an innovative approach is needed – the workers cannot be dependent on their employers for housing but with municipal oversight this option may be fruitful. National and regional collaboration is required. Ideally, EUMCs and other residents are actively involved in these approaches.

The municipalities of this study all struggle with similar issues around registration and housing. Research as ours sheds light on these common problems and on possible solutions. We did not only look at the municipal side, but included interviews with employers in the regions. As such, we could verify if businesses shared the views of the civil servants. A next step is to include EUMCs in the study. The quadruple Helix approach – with involvement of public and private sectors, knowledge institutes, and citizens – for social innovation is recommended. Comparative research and innovative approaches may help solve struggles of registration and housing for municipalities across the European Union. The position of EUMCs needs to improve: a just and fair Europe calls for equal treatment of all EU citizens, on national levels and on an EU level.

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