MIGRATION IS NOT THE PROBLEM; OUR RESPONSE TO IT IS

Rachel Peric is the Executive Director of Welcoming America, which works to create communities where all residents – including immigrants and refugees – can thrive and belong. Previously, she served as Executive Director of the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL), as a regional director with the United Way of the National Capital Area and managing international development programs with, Management Systems International (MSI). Ms. Peric holds a BA from Johns Hopkins University and a Master's in Public Management from the University of Maryland.

At a time of growing global migration, tensions that arise from demographic change not only threaten the safety and well-being of migrants but create new threats to democracy as nativist populism takes root. Rather than take a laissez faire approach, communities can respond proactively in ways that make them more resilient to the impact of "people change" and better equipped to leverage the benefits of migration and withstand other challenges of the modern era. By putting communities in the driver's seat; focusing on the interests and needs of long-time residents; and looking beyond service provision to social cohesion, participation, and belonging – the more fundamental building blocks of democratic societies – we can respond more resiliently to migration.

En un momento de creciente migración global, las tensiones que surgen del cambio demográfico, no solo amenazan la seguridad y el bienestar de las personas migrantes, sino que crean nuevas amenazas a la democracia conforme el populismo nativista se arraiga. Más que asumir un enfoque tipo laissez faire, las comunidades pueden responder proactivamente, de modo que se hagan más resilientes al impacto del "cambio de la gente", y estén mejor equipados para aprovechar los beneficios de la migración y resistir los retos de la era moderna. Al colocar a las comunidades en un lugar de agencia, centrarlos en los intereses y necesidades de las personas residentes de tiempo atrás, y mirar más allá de la provisión de servicios, hacia la cohesión social, la participación, y la pertenencia – los cimientos fundamentales de las sociedades democráticas – podemos responder a la migración con mayor resiliencia.

À l'heure d'une migration mondiale croissante, les tensions résultant des changements démographiques menacent non seulement la sécurité et le bien-être des migrants mais créent de nouvelles menaces pour la démocratie à mesure que le populisme nativiste prend racine. Plutôt que d'adopter une approche de « laissez-faire », les communautés peuvent réagir de manière proactive pour les rendre plus résistantes à l'impact des « changements de personnes » et mieux équipées pour tirer parti des avantages de la migration et résister aux autres défis de l'ère moderne. Plutôt que d'adopter une approche de laissez-faire, les communautés peuvent réagir de manière proac-

tive pour les rendre plus résistantes à l'impact de « l'évolution des populations » et mieux équipées pour tirer parti des avantages de la migration et résister aux autres défis de l'ère moderne. En laissant les communautés tenir les rênes, en mettant l'accent sur les intérêts et les besoins des résidents de longue date, et au-delà de la prestation de services pour la cohésion sociale, la participation et l'appartenance (les éléments fondamentaux des sociétés démocratiques), nous pouvons mieux répondre aux migrations.

Since the beginning of time, one change has remained constant – people move. Driven both by opportunity and by desperate circumstances, the 258 million people on the move today represent an unprecedented era of migration (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2017). As more and more places become receiving destinations for immigrants and refugees, tensions that arise from demographic change have the potential to erupt into backlash that not only threatens the safety and well-being of migrants but create new threats to democracy. Alternatively, places that are able to respond to migration from a position of strength and capacity are demonstrating that there are significant benefits that accrue to both new and long-time residents. Cities like Nashville, Tennessee and Dayton, Ohio are examples of places that have seen their economies reinvigorated as a direct result of their efforts to better incorporate newcomer populations ("Dancing," "Rustbelt"). These payoffs are hardly unique to the United States; according to a recent study by McKinsey (2016), supporting migrant integration could increase the economic contribution of migrants globally by up to $1 trillion USD annually.

While every era brings a new population on the move, and stirs new emotions driven by our natural fear of change and biases about the "other," these reactions – and the fact that people will continue to be on the move – are things we can anticipate and plan for. Even when migration spikes in unpredictable ways (the dramatic increase in people fleeing to Europe, for instance), resilience thinking can better prepare communities to respond to these seismic changes. With greater capacity to respond to migration, communities also become more cohesive places that can better withstand the populist political forces that feed off of – and perpetuate – the resentments that migration naturally stokes.

The field of resilience has traditionally focused on issues like infrastructure and climate change – topics that are important but fail to take into account the sweeping demographic changes of our time. Fortunately, that is changing, as the field begins to look at how communities can better prepare for "people change."

How cities and towns become more resilient to migration – and more resilient places as a result – is increasingly a focus area being explored by initiatives like the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities initiative and the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience, which placed migration front and center in a report last year exploring successful policies and practices that cities can use to strengthen the fabric of their communities and reap the economic, security, and cultural benefits of successfully integrating new immigrant populations (Saliba 2016, Pope 2017).

So how does a place become more resilient to migration? Welcoming America has worked over the last decade with communities across the United States, and increasingly, globally. The lessons learned offer insights for those looking to create more stable democracies and prosperous economies.

1. PUT COMMUNITIES IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Once newcomers arrive in a host country, their incorporation into local communities is critical. Localities not only play a crucial role in proactively identifying ways to weave migrants into the life of communities; in an era of harsh enforcement and rhetoric in the United States, and elsewhere, communities also play a key role in acting as a last line of defence for vulnerable populations, and as a strong counterpoint to narratives of exclusion.

Cities and towns are witnessing a growing sphere of influence on a host of policy matters. Until recently, however, many were not proactive in their efforts to incorporate migrants into civic, social and economic life, leaving this work to a handful of individual actors rather than making it the business of the community at large. In the United States, this is beginning to change, as the number of municipal offices supporting migrant inclusion and equitable policy has roughly quadrupled over the last five years. But the practice is far from widespread and a tipping point in this direction would have far-reaching positive benefits for migrants and society as a whole. That is not only because of the social, civic and economic benefits of focusing on migrant incorporation; in an era of sweeping demographic change, it is simply good governance to be continually designing policies and services that best serve a population with evolving interests, assets and needs.

An active role for localities is also crucial for another more fundamental reason: when change happens, it is all too easy for communities to lack a sense of agency. For instance, a growing refugee community in Boise, Idaho sparked a backlash some years ago that triggered local leaders to bring the community together to create a response. The community gained

a sense of agency and control by approaching that process with a key question in mind: how do we build our capacity to respond better and manage this change? The result was a new tone set for the city and a plan that put the community on a course to becoming one of the more welcoming in the nation (Neighbors United 2017). A unique feature of the plan was that it also addressed barriers experienced by other low-income populations, thus supporting the broader community as a whole (Institute for Local Government 2015). Many more communities – we estimate more than 40 in the U.S. over the last five years – have since created their own 'welcoming' plans, bringing multi-sector leaders to the table to identify and systematically reduce the barriers that migrants – and often long-time residents, as well – face to gain full participation, and to advance a culture of belonging and greater equity for all residents. By undergoing a planning process, the issue is elevated and examined comprehensively, while also providing an avenue for stakeholders to voice concerns and forge a path forward that incorporates multiple perspectives, including those of migrants themselves. Community-wide planning also puts communities in the driver's seat by working backward from a vision and set of goals that that are determined for and by the community.

A key feature of resilient policymaking is the notion of forethought – planning ahead to anticipate change even when the nature of those changes may be unknown. When it comes to migration, policymakers cannot only create their own plans, but do more to engage urban planners, economic development agencies, and others engaged in long range planning to ensure that those plans better account for changing demographics.

By helping local leaders shape their future, and designing solutions that speak to local values and shared priorities, we help communities regain a sense of agency that is often threatened by changes that can feel out of their control. Moreover, we more effectively muster the resources and political will to move communities from ambivalence to action. Federal/state governments still have a role to play in incorporating migrants – but one of the best roles they can play is to support localities with the resources and support to lead the way.

2. HOST COMMUNITIES BECOME MORE RESILIENT WHEN WE DIRECTLY ADDRESS THE FEARS AND CONCERNS THAT NATURALLY ARISE FROM A CHANGING COMMUNITY, AND ENSURE RECEIVING COMMUNITIES ALSO FEEL WELCOMED

Change is hard – both for newcomers adapting to a new community and its norms, and also for long-time residents. Particularly in destinations that are new to demographic change and are experiencing a rapid shift, barriers like language, culture and spatial segregation can make it difficult to form the "bridging capital" that links neighbours across lines of difference and diminishes stereotypes and misperceptions. Unless addressed head on, well-orchestrated efforts by nativist groups and political opportunists will fill this gap in understanding with misinformation and scapegoating. A receptive community is also an essential precondition for successful inclusion efforts – the "fertile soil" that makes it possible for policy changes to occur, and for all people to truly belong and thrive. Leaders can respond differently by investing in three key strategies – Welcoming America's "Receiving Community Approach," which research and experience have demonstrated to be effective.

The first strategy is to organize and support diverse, trusted local leaders who are credible in reaching beyond the typical choir of supporters to engage those who are uncertain about change. These may be faith leaders, chambers of commerce, or simply concerned residents. Their task is to engage the ambivalent or fearful using the other two key strategies of the Receiving Communities Approach.

The second strategy, and a key tool in the toolbox of resiliency, is strategic communications. Like all change management, communication is key, and when it comes to demographic change, combatting misinformation and othering narratives requires sustained efforts to elevate common values through a positive and affirmative narrative. This can be achieved in any number of ways – starting with focus groups that identify shared values and tactically through engagement of the media, billboard campaigns, and common talking points among groups working on the issue.

Equally important is the last strategy: facilitated contact building, which are efforts to establish deeper and sustained relationships of trust and mutual cooperation across lines of difference. This work may begin over a dinner table, a soccer pitch, or in a community garden, and can continue through a community board or resident association in ways that strengthen social cohesion and civic fabric.

3. CITIES AND TOWNS SHOULD LOOK TO BUILD EQUITY AND BELONGING – NOT JUST DELIVER SERVICES

If all we did was help people access services, it would not be enough. We need to make sure people feel connected as neighbours, and engaged as active citizens in our democracy. Resiliency experts have already identified the importance of relationships in creating communities that withstand other threats, like climate change or natural disasters. In demographically changing communities, it becomes all the more important to invest in social cohesion, so that all residents – new and long-time – truly feel welcomed, and build the ties needed to work together as neighbours. Likewise, resilient

communities also focus on civic participation, making it easier for all residents to join local boards, become voters, and run for public office.

Resilient communities are also places where inequality – especially on the basis of race and country of origin – is being systematically addressed. To do this, we have to look not only at individual biases but at institutional policies and practices that disadvantage racial or ethnic minority groups. Toward this end, Welcoming America (2017) created its Welcoming Standard[1] as a roadmap for communities looking to foster migrant inclusion while also addressing the divides that contribute to inequality and polarization.

As the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals point out, creating global prosperity cannot be achieved without addressing inequality. One's life expectancy, whether we succeed in school, or our ability to open or grow a business should not be predestined by our postal code, race, gender, or country of origin. We need to hold ourselves accountable to progress in closing gaps and to do that, we need to use data, and listen to and involve affected communities. There is also a strong business case for following this formula, particularly when it comes to addressing racial inequality in the United States: according to the Kellogg Foundation, by 2050, the U.S. stands to realize an $8 trillion USD gain in GDP by closing the U.S. racial equity gap (Turner 2018).

By putting communities in the driver's seat; focusing on the interests and needs of long-time residents; and looking beyond service provision to belonging and to more fundamental elements of democratic societies, we can respond more resiliently to migration. Even more than that, we establish the building blocks for a society that is better equipped to withstand other challenges of the modern era.

In many ways, we face a crossroads moment – the rise in dehumanizing language and policy directed toward migrants in the United States creates a destabilizing environment that threatens democracy, but also undermines sustained, long term investments, as policymakers and actors lurch from crisis to crisis. Until we address the fundamental narratives and conditions of exclusion for migrants, people of color, and other populations that have been marginalized, we will remain trapped in this dangerous downward spiral.

In contrast, by investing in long-range strategies that build resiliency, we can shape a positive, virtuous cycle – one in which communities recognize and invest in the opportunities and benefits of building inclusive communities for all. This is not wishful thinking; in more than 500 communities across the United States, and many more globally, such efforts are already taking place. Now is the time to scale such efforts – for the sake of democracy and our shared prosperity.

REFERENCES

"Dancing to a new tune." *Welcoming America*. www.welcomingamerica.org/stories/nashville.

Institute for Local Government. 2015. *Boise, ID Plan for Refugee Resettlement Identifies Systemic Gaps for all Low-Income Populations*. www.ca-ilg.org/case-story/boise-id-plan-refugee-resettlement-identifies-systemic-gaps-all-low-income-populations.

McKinsey Global Institute. 2016. *People on the Move: Global Migration's Impact and Opportunity*.

Neighbors United. 2017. "Refugee Strategic Community Plan." www.neighborsunitedboise.org.

Pope, Amy. 2017. "Building More Resilient Communities: Responding to Irregular Immigration Flows." *Adirenne Arsht Center for Resilience, Atlantic Council*. http://publications.atlanticcouncil.org/resilient-communities/.

"Rustbelt revitalized." Welcoming America. www.welcomingamerica.org/stories/dayton.

Saliba, Samer. 2016. "Migration: Cities at the Forefront." *100 Resilient Cities*. www.100resilientcities.org/the-migration-crisis-strategies-for-cities/.

Turner, Ani. 2018. "The Business Case for Racial Equity." *WK Kellogg Foundation, Altarum Institute*.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2017. *International Migration Report 2017*.

Welcoming America. 2017. *Welcoming Standard*. www.welcomingamerica.org/sites/default/files/Welcoming Standard%2BCertifiedWelcoming.pdf.