Collaborative Emergency Management at the local level: case of 2022 refugee crisis in Poland

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Abstract: The 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis was a huge new challenge for Polish local governments. Over 4 million people crossed the border within 4 first months after the war outbreak. The need for multilateral, collaborative and cross sector cooperation emerged. Poland, in practice, had scarce experience in migration policy, which translated directly into the lack of institutional foundations and developed collaboration practices in managing the crisis.

Collaborative emergency management denotes the general phenomenon of bringing different actors together, guiding the cooperation, and ensuring achieving common goals in crisis (Gray and Purdy, 2018; Stadtler and Karakulak, 2020). Handling with emergency requires very prompt and accurate responses, making the routine strategies of "regular" collaboration formation and management inadequate and/or impractical. Furthermore, successful collaboration may involve many leaders, both formally and informally, so the leading role of local authorities cannot be taken for granted (Bradford,1998; Lasker et al., 2001).

RQ (1) What was the role of local leaders (heads of communes and municipalities) in managing collaborative actions during the 2022 refugee crisis in Poland?

Analyzing collaborative emergency management, several aspects such as leadership, decision making, trust building, the development of commitment and shared understanding, intergovernmental and interorganizational relations, technology applications and flexibility should be investigated with special attention (see Patton, 2007; Kapucu, 2006; Kapucu, Arslan and Demiroz, 2010).

RQ (2) Which types and activities of collaborative emergency management were applied by local leaders?

Administrative actors are usually limited by the institutional rigidity and bureaucracy as reflected by the hierarchical command system, relatively stricter accountability requirements, or formalized way in establishing cooperation. This may result in less flexible and less autonomous collaboration with different actors to manage crises (Comfort, 2007). Moreover, regular collaborations formed prior to the emergency and led by local governments may be insufficient, and some new collaborations aiming to handle with crises are needed.

RQ (3) To what extend the pre-existing networks of collaboration were used comparing to ad-hoc established ones? What was the degree of formal versus informal contacts used by local leaders in collaborative crisis management?

A qualitative methodology was employed. Between June and August 2022, 20 face-to-face and telephone semi-structured interviews with Lubelskie region local authorities' representatives (mayors and employees of the crisis management department) were conducted.

The relevance of the research for the working group is at least threefold. First, it focuses on a brand-new challenge that local communities from CEE countries, located close to Ukrainian border had to face after the war breakout. Second, the research method introduced enables to identify in qualitative, comprehensive, and in-depth way capacities and practices of local government's leaders in managing collaborative actions in emergency situations. Third, the study answers the question about practice of the use of pre-existing and of forming new networks of actors and stakeholders to deal the crises more effectively. This information may be useful to local leaders to rethink networks of cooperation they can create to solve other problems, also in "no-crisis" situations within collaborative practice.